



Kitchener House
285-299 Ryrie Street

History

Fund raising for Kitchener House contrived from the mid-1920s well past when tenders were called in late 1929, marking the success of the fetes, appeals and Gala Days which had preceded.¹ Fifteen contractors tendered for the complex, showing the effects of the World Depression. Geelong Hospital Committee President, G B Humble, called a special meeting of the committee to assess the prices with an architect, J A Laird (Laird & Buchan, in association with A & K Henderson, who were presumably the designers) in attendance.²

Geelong builder, B Murphy's tender of £28,984/10/- was accepted and a completion time of 59 weeks set with a special provision for adequate footing work for the annual Gala Day (1st November) when the foundation stone would be laid.³ On a vacant site opposite the hospital, the new nurses' home was to rise in face-brick with cement dressings, terra-cotta roofing tiles and an arcaded veran-

dah facing the street. Enclosed balconies at the other end (north) would overlook Corio Bay and double as sleepouts when needed.⁴ It was planned on axis with the new hospital and, like the hospital, was symmetrical in plan.

Sixty bedrooms would allow one per nurse, each with a built-in wardrobe and dressing table. Communal rooms included large sitting and study areas facing north and the bay, also the house sister would have a self-contained suite, complete with office.⁵

Bathrooms, pantries, cloakrooms, drying rooms and laundries on each floor, made the complex that much more modern. Central hot water and heating were planned.

'When the home is completed, it will be probably the finest in connection with any institution in Australia and thus in keeping with the new hospital which has been practically rebuilt on the most modern lines during the last few years,' (only the operating theatre remained to be built).⁶

Of the £130,000 spent on the whole complex the people of Geelong had given £90,000, making it truly a public project.

1 GA 2/11/1929, p.1
2 G.A. 11/9/29, p.1; 27/8/1929, p.7
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
5 ibid.
6 ibid.

The Premier (E J Hogan) opened Kitchener House March 1931 in front of a large gathering, with guests including Atlee Hunt (Charities Board chairman) and Dr. J C Thompson (president, Country Hospitals Association).¹ The nurses would at last move from their dormitories to new quarters, after many years waiting.²

'The Hospital has an excellent matron and splendid sisters and nurses, and, the committee felt it could not do too much for them.'

Part of Kitchener House had been furnished, but the committee was confident that the people of Geelong and district would pay for a complete fitting-out in due course. Another future prospect was construction of a subway under Ryrie Street.³

Description

Planned on axis with the Kitchener Memorial Hospital opposite, Kitchener House was planned on an E-shape to achieve maximum natural light penetration. Two-storeys and faced in patterned brickwork, the main architectural treatment focuses on the arcaded entry porch and trabeated balcony above, all carried out in the Georgian revival style, then particularly favoured for large government projects, (see E Evan Smith's, Victorian Police Depot, St. Kilda Road, 1927). The hipped roof form, a Georgian fanlight, six-pane double-hung window sashes and chaste application of wrought-iron, combined with a symmetrical garden layout, accentuate this Georgian character. The Ryrie Street fence and entry are intact and notable, for the era.

External Integrity

The building and its setting are unusually intact for a hospital structure, except for minor additions such as the pedestrian ramp, signs and light fittings.

Streetscape

The size and set-back of the complex differs markedly from its residential neighbours and hence its urban character is linked with what remains of the Kitchener Memorial Hospital it was designed to complement.

Significance

Architecturally, this large complex is one of the early modern approaches to nursing homes, is near externally intact and is a good example of the Neo-Georgian or Georgian revival so popular in the late 1920s, as executed by the renowned and prolific Melbourne architects, A & K Henderson (firm's designer: John Freeman). It also retains an axial relationship with the administrative section of the remaining contemporary section of the hospital complex opposite.

Historically, (like the original Kitchener Memorial Hospital) Kitchener House was the focus of numerous fundraising projects including the annual Geelong Gala Day in the late 1920s. As such its construction achieved a high public profile and much of its construction cost was met by the people of Geelong. Today it remains, externally, close to when it was built and is a lasting reminder of the

sacrifices of the Geelong community during the World Depression. When completed it was heralded by the *Geelong Advertiser* as among the best of its kind in country and remained a symbol of local pride.

1 G.A. 13/3/1931, p.1
2 ibid.
3 G.A. 27/8/29