

NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)RESEARCH INTO THE CENTREWAY, CHAPEL STREET, PRAHRAN

F.N. 589

The former Prahran Arcade at 282 - 284 Chapel Street between Princes and Walker Streets (now known as the Centreway) was designed in 1889 by the Prahran architect, George W. McMullen, and opened on the 31 July 1890 with a grand banquet organised by the Arcade's first owner, Mrs. Elizabeth Delaney, attended by the Mayor, M.L.As. E.J. Dixon and Dr. L.L. Smith and a number of local councillors and businessmen.⁽¹⁾ The contractor was James McMullen.⁽²⁾

From the 1890s the Arcade with its Italianate facade, balconies and fine towers has formed a notable part of the Chapel Streetscape and is a well-known Prahran landmark. Its occupiers have played a significant role in the history of the locality.

The Prahran Arcade originally comprised the Arcade Club Hotel, restaurant and cafe, billiard rooms and Turkish Baths. The 29 shops which lined the interior of the Arcade were let to various tenants. Beneath these buildings there were capacious cellars and a bakehouse.⁽³⁾

During the early 1890s George G. Woods, late of Mac's Hotel, Portland, managed the Arcade Club Hotel, restaurant and cafe, as well as the billiard rooms and Turkish Baths. Other occupiers included Delany and Co., estate agents, the Prahran School of Art, W. Price's oyster saloon and James Wignall's ham shop.

By the turn of the century, E.J. Dixon and Sons, auctioneers and estate agents, occupied many room in the Arcade. Other tenants included J.N. Cumming, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and Inchley Brothers' music warehouse.

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- (1) Prahran Chronicle 2 Aug. 1890(9)
 (2) BEMJ 31 Aug. 1889 (175-176)
 (3) Prahran Chronicle 2 Aug. 1890(9) See MMBW 1896 plan

Useage changed during the First World War when occupiers included the Theosophical Society (Ibis Lodge) and union bodies such as the Independent Workers Union and the Melbourne and Suburban Fuel Men's Association.

From the 1920s the Arcade became known as the Centreway and housed businesses such as Medway and Co., Cash Orders and, in the 1950s, Centreway Disposals Co., Eterna Shirt Co. and Blue Jay Manufacturing Co. More recently it has been associated with Dan Murphy's Cellars.⁽⁴⁾

HISTORY OF THE BUILDINGS, 1880s - 1980s

The earliest tender notice for the Prahran Arcade appeared in the Building, Engineering and Mining Journal of 30 March 1889, calling for tenders for an arcade of 40 shops in Prahran (Vic)⁽⁵⁾ The letting of these tenders was announced in the Australasian Builders and Contractors News of 6 April 1889.⁽⁶⁾

A description of the proposed buildings was given in an article in the BEMJ of 31 August 1889. The writer told of the "thoroughfare" through the Arcade with seventeen shops on either side and a basement in the front portion of the building lighted with Hayward's Prismatic Pavement Lights. The description continued:

"On the first floor, with entrance inside the areade, are hot and cold baths, and Turkish baths fitted with all the latest appliances. The remainder of the upper portion of the building consisting of drawing, dining and billiard rooms, bar, and about 30 bedrooms is to be utilised for a hotel, the entrances on either side of the front leading up to the same. The roof over the Arcade will be covered with Rundle's Patent Acme Glazing, supported on curved wrought iron trusses, the spandrils filled in with ornamental cast iron. The shop fronts in the interior of the Arcade will be built of brick and cement, following the front design. Front will be in brick and cement and bluestone, with balconies eight feet wide paved with tiles."

(4) Directories

(5) BEMJ 30 March 1889 (sup. p 6)

(6) ABCN 6 April 1889 (337)

It was estimated that the building would cost £15,000. As we have seen, the architect was George McMullen and the contractor, James McMullen.

It was announced that "the excavations are already taken out and brickwork started, and it is expected that the building will be finished in nine months."⁽⁷⁾

Unfortunately, the illustration which accompanied this article is missing.

THE ARCHITECT

The Architects Index held in the La Trobe Library contains 23 cards for George W. McMullen, for designs for commercial work and houses in Melbourne carried out between 1887 and 1890. Among his designs were a number of villas and rows of cottages in Prahran(1887), a Masonic Club and shops in Greville and Grattan Streets (1888), the Windsor Coffee Palace (1888), a large skating rink in Prahran (1888 - 1889), an R.C. Church in Malvern (1889) and a Toorak residence (1890). However, in November 1890, a few months after the triumphal opening of the splendid Prahran Arcade, McMullen's career came to an abrupt end. In that month he was named insolvent.⁽⁸⁾ The following month he was involved in a High Court dispute through being the architect of works which damaged an adjoining building.⁽⁹⁾ This is the last entry for George McMullen in the Architects Index.

COMPLETION OF THE PRAHRAN ARCADE, 1890

In January 1890 an advertisement appeared in the Prahran Chronicle for tenders for leases of three to five years of "magnificent Restaurant, Billiard Room, and Baths, as a whole or separately" in the Prahran Arcade.

The advertisement^{ment} continued:

"The situation is the most central in Chapel Street, close to Town Hall and Greville Street Station, and offers a splendid investment for any enterprising speculator."

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- (7) BEMJ 31 Aug. 1889(175-176)
(8) BEMJ 1 Nov. 1890 (
(9) ABCN 27 Dec. 1890 (496)

"A need sadly in want of in Melbourne's premier suburb."

It was pointed out that "one half premenade shops already let."⁽¹⁰⁾

CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING

A long account of the opening on 31 July 1890 of the new structure was given in the same journal in August, 1890, in which the Arcade was described as "one of the most important buildings in our city," which would "meet the demands of the period" and "at the same time improve our street architecture".

An architectural description was given :

"The facade is in the Italian style, and the columns are beautifully ornamented throughout. It consists of three storeys, with a frontage of 60 feet by a depth of 244 feet. Either side is finished off with towers, and the entrance to the arcade is capacious, and on each side there are shops, numbering in all twenty-nine, nearly all of which are already let. Beneath these shops there are capacious cellars, bake-houses.....In the arcade there are also extensive hot and cold water baths and Turkish baths, which have been fitted up on the latest and most approved plans,....."

Next to the shop at No. 282 on the south side occupied by Lipman, a tailor,⁽¹¹⁾ "and entrance leads by means of a capacious staircase to the Arcade Hotel, which is being conducted by Mr. Wood, who hails from Portland,..... Mr. Wood's new premises are being richly furnished, and he has sufficient accommodation here to cater for a large number of patrons. The dining-room is on the first floor, and is capable of seating comfortably about 250 guests. The bar is very handsomely fitted up....."

The description continued :

"From the front balcony there is a splendid view of the city westwards, and on ascending the tower the panoramic view to be obtained of Prahran and its surroundings cannot fail to interest visitors..... An extensive lobby leads to suites of sitting and bedrooms, and these are large, airy, and well ventilated, and are furnished in a manner that must give

(10) Prahran Chronicle 4 Jan 1890(4)

(11) See 1896 MMBW plan

satisfaction to even the most fastidious....."

"The promenade in the arcade is splendidly lit-up at night.....The architect for the arcade is Mr. McMullen, and the very satisfactory manner in which he has carried out his work reflects the highest credit on his skill and business-like qualities. The proprietress of the arcade is Mrs. De Laney, and we may say that her enterprise in erecting such a capacious structure deserves its due recompense....."

"The arcade is a credit as well as an ornament to Prahran,....."(12)

To celebrate the event, the owner, Mrs. Delany entertained 250 guests at a banquet in the new Arcade Club Hotel. (13)

THE FIRST OWNER

It has been impossible so far to locate any biographical details about the first owner, Mrs. Elizabeth Delany. It seems likely that, as with the Arcade's architect, she may have become bankrupt. By 1891 the Arcade was recorded as owned first by the Caledonian and Australian Finance Agency Co. and then by Standard Banks. (14)

During the early 1890s many of the shops in the Arcade remained vacant. (15)

LATER HISTORY OF THE ARCADE

As we have seen, from the late 1890s until recently the Prahran Arcade had an interesting assortment of occupiers. By the 1920s it was known as the Centreway and is currently associated with Dan Murphy's Cellars. (16)

An inspection is needed to discover the degree of intactness of these boom period buildings.

(12) Prahran Chronicle 2 Aug. 1890(9)

(13) Ibid.

(14) See Peter Atley's research on file

(15) See directories

(16) See above

LIST OF SOURCES

ABCN 6 April 1889(337), 27 Dec. 1890(496)

BEMJ 30 March 1889 (sup, p 6), 31 Aug. 1889(175-176), (copy held)
1 Nov. 1890 (sup. p 9)

Cooper, J.B., The History of Prahran, 1924

Melbourne/Vic. directories

MMBW plan Prahran No. 959, 1896 (copy held)

Prahran Chronicle 4 Jan 1890(4), 2 Aug. 1890(9) (copies ordered)

Victoria and its Metropolis, vol 2, 1888

C. KELLAWAY

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