

NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)

CLASSIFICATION REPORT

1. NAME OF PLACE

Prahran Market

2. OTHER/CURRENT NAME

As above

3. LOCATION

Commercial Road, Prahran

4. DATE

1891 and later alterations

5. TYPE OF PLACE

Market

6. LISTING DETAILS

Classified at State level

7. EXTENT OF DESIGNATION

The whole site

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A complex of State architectural, historic and social significance. The Prahran Market, founded on its present site in 1881, is one of the oldest surviving public markets and still one of the most vibrant public market places in Melbourne. The large rendered brick building fronting Commercial Road was built in 1891 to designs by the notable

architect Charles D'Ebro and is substantially original externally except for extensive ground floor alterations and paintwork. This building is one of the few large-scale and most ornate terrace shop rows in Melbourne. Between 1976 and 1982 the market was substantially rebuilt to the designs of the Gunn Hayball partnership. The use of curved tubular steel and corrugated iron, perforated steel panels and pastel colours, the sympathetic refurbishing of historic buildings and the incorporation of contextual elements make this a notable innovative work of the period. The rebuilt Prahran Market received the RAIA Award of Merit in 1982 and remains intact.

The market site has been of enormous social significance for over a century.

## 9. HISTORY

The Prahran Market began on another site and moved to its present site in 1881. It is one of the oldest surviving markets in Melbourne.

The history of the market is detailed in John Butler Cooper's *The History of Prahran* (1924). At the end of April 1864 there were moves to establish a market in Prahran. The Melbourne City Corporation had refused to reduce what the market gardeners regarded as "exorbitant" rates for selling their produce in the Eastern Market. Dr P. Gordon, the Health Officer for Windsor, Prahran, Toorak and South Yarra, wrote to the Local Board of Health on 29 April 1864, and a long letter was read in the Prahran Council on the matter. Dr Gordon complained about the prices of produce and recommended that the Board of Health consider the needs of the dense populations of the districts of St Kilda, Prahran, South Yarra and Richmond. The local paper saw the importance of the market to the area, commenting: "Our Town Council has earned considerable applause for its spirit in building the first really handsome Town Hall in the colony - it will increase that good feeling by being the first to establish a really successful suburban market."

A motion was passed in the Prahran Council stating that it was its duty to build a public market, but its support cooled because of the expense and Fitzroy Council's unsuccessful attempt to establish its own market. On 2 January 1868 the Council decided to poll its burgesses on the question, and a sufficient number voted in favour of a market. Eventually a makeshift market was established in Grenville and Grattan Streets. The places for the market stalls were roughly indicated. Councillors and ratepayers were dissatisfied with the arrangements. Between 1880 and 1890 a fight raged over whether the Council should spend money building a permanent market. From 1881 stallholders sold their goods from a site north of Commercial Road.

In 1890 it was decided that the time had come for constructing permanent market structures because "the demand for stalls was greater than the supply, and the crowds of women attending the markets were so great that it was almost impossible to move between the stalls". On 24 March 1890 the Markets Committee successfully recommended that tenders be invited for the construction of buildings and extension of stalls at the city markets. A building design for the Prahran Market by the architect Charles A. D'Ebro was chosen and tenders were invited for the work. Delay resulted when the lowest tenderer refused to go on with the contract. The sum of £9,000 was allocated for works including fish and refrigerating chambers. An estimated sum of £1,500 had already been spent on initial works. As the lowest tender was £11,000, the Council had consultations with Charles D'Ebro and with his assistance reduced the cost to £8,475. The builder was C. Corlett. Some minor additions, extras and commissions added the sum of £2,000 to the total cost of the work.

On 25 March 1891 the foundation stone was laid. The market was a boost to trading along Commercial Road, which had become a poor relation in Prahran's trade. Cr Thomas Ellis, the Mayor, said, while laying the foundation stone of blue granite: "I now declare this memorial stone well and truly laid, and I sincerely hope it will long continue to remind the inhabitants of Prahran of the progress which has been made, and trust it will serve to mark an era in the prosperity

of this city."

The outline of the market is shown on an MMBW plan of 1895. There were six brick shops fronting Commercial Road, with a covered walkway leading to two long, rectangular shaped brick sections at the back, ending at Elizabeth Street.

The market grew over the years as business was good. From 1907 the Council directly managed the market itself. By the end of the First World War the market required updating to bring it in line with twentieth-century standards of hygiene, for horses were kept behind the stalls and fowls were kept in pens in the market. Major extensions cost £3,155 in 1918, and rose to £9,251 in 1927. In 1919/20 the Council built stabling, but this was obsolete by 1926. The stable block was converted to a new meat market. The 1920s were boom years, with increasing numbers of stalls as the Council purchased adjacent land. The market encouraged the patronage of the neighbouring shops as customers flocked in "from all parts of the metropolis, aided by the good railway, tramway and motor bus services leading from the surrounding suburbs".

In 1924 J.B. Cooper wrote of the success of the Prahran Market:

"The Prahran Market on Fridays and Saturdays is one of the sights of the city. Streams of well-dressed housewives, with market bags on arm, pass along Commercial-road, and enter the market. Within the market on many stalls are the best of seasonable vegetables, of fruit, and of flowers; poultry alive and dead meet the eyes; butchers, fishmongers and other food vendors are busy as bees, serving countless customers. Constantly coming and going, the well-satisfied housewives buy most of the necessities they require at the cheapest rates.

The City Markets are an unqualified success. They are justifiably regarded by neighbouring suburban cities as a model of what municipal markets should be...The good name of the markets has been

carried far beyond the boundaries of the city, until now the crowds which attend the markets include people who regard Prahran as the greatest shopping centre, but who do not live within the city."

The depression years had little impact. The market was used as a depot for distributing groceries, vegetables, boots and clothing to the unemployed. A photograph of the small goods section with throngs of people congregated in the middle passageway was published in J.B. Cooper's *Progress Prahran* (1934). The publication proudly announced that "The Prahran Markets are now the best equipped municipal markets in Melbourne." Sally Wilde has echoed these thoughts in *The History of Prahran 1925-1990* (1990): "Prahran Market had become a Melbourne institution, thriving, it seemed, under all circumstances."

There was a fire on Boxing Day, 1950. The fire destroyed the grocers' arcade and numbers 1,2,3 open sheds, plus 12 brick shops on Market Street. Temporary stalls opened in the open market and the place was reopened within two days. In the 1950s the market saw modest rebuilding. Using the £50,000 insurance money the Council constructed a new brick building with a sawtooth iron roof and room for 213 stalls. The market continued to thrive when southern Europeans - Italians and Greeks- moved into the area vacated by many old working-class residents and added their unique contribution as stallholders and as customers. Mr Pollock, a stallholder from the 1960s, remembers the cultural contribution of the Greeks. "They were good customers. Wouldn't muck about with a kilo of grapes - 10 kilos - "Give us a case mate". Local children mixed with the immigrants and learned to speak a little Greek. By the 1980s the southern Europeans were accompanied by Vietnamese in the delicatessens and on the fruit and vegetable stalls.

In 1971 the Council had plans to rebuild and modernise the market, attracting a lot of argument in the community over exactly what form the rebuilding should take. Mr Loy Chan who worked in the market from 1965 expressed the sentiments of many people today when he

protested back then: "I think the scheme to rebuild the market is shocking. Why should we have a new market when this one is all right..."

A design was eventually chosen that retained the original facade while executing substantial alterations behind it. Mrs Pollock, a stallholder, describes the changes: "It was old and the delicatessens and butchers were small little shops, old fashioned tile front type of thing. It was like a market not a shopping complex...All the roof was renewed...We carried on the same but shifted around when our part was done."

The bulk of the redevelopment was completed in May 1981 with the construction of a courtyard addition on Commercial Road at a total cost of \$6.5 million. The changes resulted in the same number of fruit stalls, but the variety and hardware was expanded.

Sally Wilde concludes: "The market is not quite as busy as it used to be, but still it is a thriving institution and in many ways the heart of shopping in Prahran. Around it, the shops have changed."

The Prahran Market, has been, then, of great social importance for over a hundred years. Each week thousands of people flock to the market, often doing all of their family's weekly shopping during their visit. At its peak the market is a fascinating colourful and exciting spectacle. The educational and cultural value of this historic, cosmopolitan hub of activity has long been realised. People of all nationalities and classes rub shoulders and partake of a wide variety of foodstuffs and clothing.

Charles D'Ebro

The notable architect, Charles A. D'Ebro, reportedly the son of a "Spanish baron", was born in England in about 1849 or 1850, studied to be a painter, but turned to engineering and served his articles in London. D'Ebro arrived in Australia in 1876 and found work as an

assistant in the South Australian Railways. In 1881 he founded an engineering practice with J.H. Grainger, and began to undertake architectural work. In 1884 the partners won two competitions, one for the design of Princes Bridge, and the other the section of the Grace Park Competition for the design of a villa costing less than £1,250. The partnership ended in 1885, and in the following year D'Ebro was responsible for completing Meningoort Homestead near Camperdown. His other designs included the Premier Permanent Building Society offices, the Wangaratta Bridge, Benalla Waterworks, the Freemasons Hall, Melbourne, office buildings in Collins and Bourke Streets, banks, butter factories, several large country houses and early mansions in the Toorak area.

D'Ebro shrewdly recognised the growing importance of the frozen meat industry, and by obtaining engineering work in the industry he was able to survive the 1890s depression. From 1905 to 1907 he was president of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. He won second prize in the competition for Flinders Street Station (1900) and first prize for the Adelaide Abattoirs (1910). His career was crowned by his design of Stonnington (1890), Malvern, the residence of Victoria's Governors during the first 30 years of the Commonwealth of Australia. His notable designs also included Georges in Collins Street, the Prahran Town Hall and part of St John's in Toorak. He formed the partnership of D'Ebro, Meldrum and Wagstaff in 1916. D'Ebro died in 1920 while in Perth in connection with a large works for the West Australian Meat Export Co.

## 10. DESCRIPTION

The D'Ebro-designed rendered brick building is a large, imposing symmetrical facade incorporating decorative elements derived from the Queen Anne revival. Nothing is left of the 1890s interior of the building except for the barrel-vaulted entry way and iron gates. Nothing remains of the rear facade except the roof.

The 1970s covered market area is a simple, functional, large span

steel truss shed. The courtyard section facing Commercial Road includes curved tubular steel and corrugated iron, perforated steel panels and a pastel colour scheme indicative of architectural concerns in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

## 11. EVALUATION & COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The first official fruit and vegetable market in Melbourne was the Western Market in 1841. In its early years it was a general market; in the end a wholesale fruit market. It survived for 90 years and took up the city block bounded by Market, Collins and William Streets and Flinders Lane.

The second public market was the Eastern Market (1847), which was demolished in 1960 to make way for the Southern Cross Hotel. It was much more frequented by the public than the Western Market. Only for the first 30 years was it a wholesale fruit and vegetable market. In later years it was known as "Paddy's Market".

There are some 44 markets listed in the current telephone book. The vast majority of these markets are privately owned; some are trash and treasure and craft markets. Many do not survive for long. There are very few public markets - those owned by the local council - remaining in Melbourne. The largest and most important of these are: Queen Victoria (about 1000 stalls); Dandenong (about 600 stalls). South Melbourne (about 250 stalls); and Prahran (about 110 stalls).

The Classified Queen Victoria Market, the oldest section of which dates from 1868, comprises now the only substantial nineteenth century public market buildings remaining in the central area of Melbourne. Five sections of the market have been Classified: Old Meat Market (1868), Bays A-F (most date from 1878), Two-storey shops and Produce Hall facing Elizabeth Street (1884), Two-storey shops facing Victoria Street (1887), Shops facing Victoria between Queen Street and Peel Street (1887-90). The market is included in the Register of Historic Buildings.

The oldest known surviving suburban public market is South Melbourne, which was established on its current site in 1866. It was renovated in the late 1970s in a quasi-"Victorian" style, and none of the original structures remains. Much of the market is now covered by a concrete carpark.

The second oldest surviving suburban public market appears to be the Prahran Market still on its 1890s site and retaining its Victorian aspect fronting Commercial Road, despite ground floor alterations and internal alterations and additions. It is one of the few large-scale and most ornate terrace shop rows in Melbourne. Comparable examples are the Lygon Building, Carlton and 236-252 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.

There are some other comparable suburban examples but they are mostly privately owned and of a later period. Camberwell Market was established in the 1920s and has been a public market only since 1992. It is much smaller with some 26 stalls. Footscray Market is privately owned and comprises twentieth century concrete structures. Moonee Ponds, Preston, Oakleigh, Croydon, Bundoora and Cheltenham Markets are privately owned.

The Classified Former Metropolitan Meat Market in North Melbourne (1874) is a fine example of a market building, but it stopped serving as a meat market in 1974 and later operated as a craft market. It is also included in the Register of Historic Buildings and the Register of the National Estate.

There are few comparable examples in the country areas. The Classified Trust-managed Castlemaine Market, built in 1861-62 in the style used by Robert Adam, is one of the most important market buildings in Australia, but unlike Prahran it no longer functions as a market. Castlemaine Market is also listed on the Register of Historic Buildings and the Register of the National Estate.

## 12. REFERENCES

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Miles Lewis's research notes on Charles D'Ebro

MMBW plan, 1895

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National Trust Files

## 13. APPENDICES

Nil