

## St. Matthew's Church and Hall, 145-151 High Street, Prahran



### History and Description

The first Anglican Church service in Prahran was held in a rented cottage on the east side of Chapel Street in 1853. Shortly afterwards, a Church of England Schoolroom in Chapel Street served as an Anglican Church for the next few decades. It was known as St. Matthews (Temporary) Church.<sup>163</sup> This building was removed from the site in 1877 when the present church was built.<sup>164</sup>

A new bluestone building designed by the notable church architects, Terry and Oakden, was constructed in High Street between 1877 and 1878.<sup>165</sup> The opening service was on 28 June 1878. Leonard Terry was the Anglican Diocesan Architect in the early 1870s and his ecclesiastical work has been compared to that of William Wardell.<sup>166</sup> This church is comparable to other works by Terry and Oakden, the Catholic Apostolic Church (now Romanian Orthodox) in Queensberry Street, Carlton and the Holy Trinity Church in Williamstown.<sup>167</sup> Terry and Oakden also designed the gothic polychrome Wesleyan Jubilee Church which occupied the corner of Toorak and Williams Roads, Toorak until recently.

The architectural style chosen has been described as Later Gothic Mainstream Decorated. Bluestone for the bulk of the building came from Williamstown and

163. Jill McDougall, *Church, Community and Change*, pp. 28-31.

164. *Argus*, 8 Dec. 1877.

165. *Argus*, 21 March 1877, 3 Sept. 1877, 28 June 1878.

166. Miles Lewis (ed.), *Victorian Churches*, p.23.

167. Lewis, p.50.

Brunswick.<sup>168</sup> The church is particularly notable for its decorated tracery 'which is rich in the west window and slender in the east'.<sup>169</sup>

In 1891, a brick Sunday School was built for St. Matthews from the designs of the Melbourne architects, Laver and Fick, who were well-known as designers of ecclesiastical buildings.<sup>170</sup> The asymmetrical facade of this building remains intact at the upper storey level with alterations at street level relating to shop conversions, including a cantilevered verandah. Important architectural features in the facade include stone tracery in the arched windows of the projecting gables. Elements of architectural folly include decorative 'turrets', finials and terracotta ridge tiles, creating an unusual example of a Gothic ecclesiastical building. Later, in 1898, a two-storeyed brick parsonage was constructed, designed by the architects Sydney Smith and Ogg.<sup>171</sup> This is the present St Matthews parsonage at 48 The Avenue.

During the 1930s, Louis Williams (Diocesan Architect) was responsible for remodelling the St. Matthews Parish Hall (the former Sunday School), with the aim of providing four shops to the High Street frontage.<sup>172</sup> The row of double storey shops is separated from the church by a large modern building (occupied by the RACV), and clearly reflects its church associations in its architectural detailing.



168. Lewis, p. 78; McDougall, p.30.

169. Lewis, p.78.

170. *BEMJ*, 28 Nov. 1891, p. 235. Perspective illustration.

171. *BEMJ*, 7 June 1898 p. 4.

172. *Herald*, 16 Dec, 1936. Contains illustrations and perspective views; MMBW House Cover No. 10039; Louis Williams collection of drawings etc. Picture Collection, SLV.

In May 1982 part of the nave of the church and the south-west corner was destroyed by fire. Some reconstruction was carried out at this time but the original structure of the church was retained.<sup>173</sup> The western transept has been replaced with a bluestone wall with brick quoins finishing the buttresses. An external steel staircase provides access to three levels of offices in this section of the church. The entry on the eastern side of the facade, with its ornate shafted jamb has a new mirror door. A courtyard is a feature of the recent alterations to the church. The offices which occupy the front section of the church are separated from the rear section by the courtyard which is enclosed by the original nave walls. The rear walls of the church, including sanctuary and vestry are intact.

### Significance

The 1870s bluestone church and the former Sunday School Hall (1891, remodelled 1936) have state significance as an Anglican Church complex, an important community meeting place over many decades. The church, which has been altered in recent years, is architecturally significant as an example of a later gothic church. It is externally intact apart from reconstruction of the south -west corner which is sympathetic in materials but distinctly contemporary in design. The church is notable for its decorated tracery, is important as an example of the church work of the architects Terry and Oakden, an architectural firm of high repute, particularly in church design in Victoria in the late nineteenth century. The former Sunday School is of high architectural significance as an unusual example of a Gothic ecclesiastical building, incorporating elements of architectural folly.



173. McDougall, p. 33.

## Sources

*Argus*, 21 March 1877, 3 Sept. 1877, 8 Dec. 1877, 28 June, 1878.

*Building Engineering and Mining Journal (BEMJ)*, 28 Nov. 1891, 7 June, 1898.

*Herald*, 16 Dec, 1936.

Lewis, Miles. (Ed.), *Victorian Churches*, 1992.

McDougall, Jill, *Church, Community and Change. Religion in Prahran, 1836-1984*, 1985.

MMBW House Cover No. 10039.

Williams, Louis, Collection of drawings etc., Picture Collection, SLV.

## Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended that this property be retained at A1 level.