

CITY OF BENDIGO.

HERITAGE CITATIONS, OCTOBER 2006

Site I .D.

Name of place. **The former Freemasons' Hall**
Address/location. 47 Myers Street, Bendigo

Photographs.

Photo location.

Photo Nos.

Photo date.

Locality map.

Title/property info.

Ownership.

Current use. . Community service organisation (Women's Health).

Date/s of construction. 1855, c.1870, c.1875 and c.1886.

Grading.. **Notable**, Significant, contributory.

Listings.	Existing.	Recommended.
Victorian Heritage Register.	-	-
Register National Estate	-	Yes
National Trust.	-	-
Heritage Overlay.	-	Yes

Extent of designation. Whole of title. The interior of former hall and 1870s addition.

Architect.
Not known.

Builder..
Not known.

Integrity generally;
Integrity streetscape;
Major deficiencies.

Excellent, **High**, Moderate, Low.
Excellent, High, **Moderate**, Low.
Loss of former clear storey.
False ceilings to hall.
Poor quality verandah reconstruction to 1886 section.
Painting of 1886 brickwork.
Use of frontage setback for car parking.

Reversibility of changes.	No major works required. Reconstructions of front verandah and hall clear storey are future options.
Significant trees.	No.
Typology.	Public hall. Dwelling addition.
Style.	Early Victorian vernacular hall and late Victorian addition.

History.

The history of the site is recorded in "Some Historical notes on the Property at 47 Myers Street, Bendigo" by Robin Ballinger (May 2002). The following is a summary of these notes.

The Golden Lodge of Bendigo was constituted in October 1854. After initial meeting in the Criterion Hotel, the Myers Street site was purchased and tenders were called for the building of a Masonic Lodge in 1855 and the structure was erected at a cost of 950 pounds complete with all fittings, shortly after. This appears to have been in the form of a hip roofed brick hall with raking ceiling and a clear storey at the ridge. In 1857, an extension of 20 feet and raising the height of the walls to eighteen feet with the introduction of a ceiling, was proposed under the guidance of Bro. W.C Vahland, the prominent Bendigo architect. From the physical evidence, this would appear not to have happened. However, an addition at the north-east side of the building appears to anticipate it, because the height of the wall abutting the hall is greater than the eaves level of the hall. This addition may have occurred at some time between 1857 and the 1870s.

Meanwhile, the Lodge had decided (in 1866) to build a new lodge in View Street to the design of Vahland and its foundation stone was laid in 1873. The old Lodge was sold to the Trustees Court Alexander A.O.F. c 1875. At this stage, the offices on the south-west side of the hall were introduced producing a symmetrical pattern of windows about the central entry. The Trustees Court Alexander retained the building until c1885¹ when it was sold to John Bartley, who by 1886² had converted into a dwelling by the addition of the existing residential front rooms.

The more recent history of the site has been chequered, as a boarding house and as offices for various professionals and businesses, including the law firm, Cohen Kirby and Iser in 1979.

Description.

The original hall, 1855

The original building, (or the hall as lengthened after 1857) is that part of the building below the rear longitudinal hipped roof on the Mundy Street side of the present building and behind the front rooms of the domestic structure facing the street. This

¹ 1875-1884 Rate Books.

² 1886 Rate Book.

roof has been extended to meet the transverse hipped roof over the two front rooms. The former hall is clearly recognizable by the roof form, the arrangement of piers within its perimeter walls and by the timber trusses at each pier.

The proposed 1857 work may not have occurred as the ceilings remain at c. 13 feet rather than 18 feet as requested and there is no clear evidence of an extension of 20 feet. The latter may have been intended at the front.

The roof structure is of Queen Post trusses, but the peak of the roof appears to have been added after removal of the clear storey. Extensions of the top chords of the trusses to the roof peak are of different timber and are crudely added. Based on the fact that the queen posts are roughly cut at the top, it is possible that they were extended upwards to support a clear storey roof at the peak of the hip. This hypothesis is supported by the early lack of windows in the external walls (see later alterations). The choice of Queen post trusses (with two vertical struts off-centre) rather than the more conventional King post trusses (with a single central vertical strut) normally used for plain gabled roofs supports the theory of a clear storey. The lack of a ceiling mentioned in the Ballinger notes was probably intentional, because the original trusses are dressed rather than rough sawn. This also supports the clear storey theory. The existing ceiling is of fibrous plaster suggesting an interwar origin.

It must be assumed that the building fronted Myers Street and it appears that the front of the roof was hipped, but any evidence of the front façade was not seen due to accessibility problems. It can be assumed to have had a parapet façade (possibly rendered) with decorative mouldings. The arched window and door at the rear (to the present kitchen) are probably original.

The hall appears to have had a central fireplace in its north east wall (the back projects beyond the side wall). The skirtings are of plain rendered finish, a form compatible with a basic semi-public hall built on a low budget.

The first addition, c 1870.

This is in the form of a skillion centrally positioned against the hall at the north east with the floor level one step down. The roof of this skillion extends above the eave of the original hall, possibly in anticipation of the raising of the hall ceiling. It contains a splayed fireplace in the western corner. Its original extent can clearly be seen in the brickwork of the north-east wall. The wall between this section and the middle room on the north east side is 230mm thick and was constructed with the skillion section. The former function of this room is unclear. The entry to this room from the hall has required removal of a structural pier.

The consistency of the NAV from 1856 to 1861 suggests no substantial expansion of the building. The general unfinished nature of the exterior and roof form of this section suggests a project abandoned. This seems a reasonable assumption given that the Lodge was probably well advanced in its plans to move to View Street (from 1866).

Alterations for the Trustees Court Alexander A.O.F, c.1875 –1885.

It is assumed that the hall was adapted for office use at this stage. The changes made appear to be the group of four offices and central passage on the Mundy Street side, resulting in the inclusion of the pairs of single double hung windows on either

side of the central entry. The structural piers were modified to allow the ordered placing of windows in the external façade, which was presumably rendered at this stage. The balance of the rear end of the hall was also subdivided to form the present kitchen, but it is unlikely that this was its function at the time. Another internal room appears to have been located in the north corner of the hall, with a small high level window still extant. Evidence of this room can be seen in the plaster repair to the walls and the brick base of the wall visible in the floor surface. The slightly lower floor of this element suggests that it may have been accessed from outside and some interference in the wall surface suggests a former door. The whole of the above work was in single skin brickwork.

Residential occupation from 1886.

The large jump in NAV from 30 pounds in 1885 to 70 pounds in 1887 indicates a considerable expansion in this period. This was undoubtedly the addition of the front two rooms and the second room on the north east side. The late Victorian architectural style of the work confirms this (bi or polychrome brick construction with hipped roof and front gablet and three part façade windows). The extension is clearly identified by the higher internal floor area (excluding that of the plasterboard lined internal partitions in the east corner of the original hall).

Subsequent changes.

Later works are relatively few as follows.

- Addition of the partitioned area in the east corner of the original hall.
- Introduction of a kitchen in the rear room.
- Conversion of the rear office to a strong room in 1979 for Cohen Kirby and Iser, resulting in the bricking up of the last window on the Mundy Street side. This window has since been reinstated.
- Removal of the 1886 front verandah and its later replacement with a poor attempt to reconstruct a Victorian style verandah.
- Various internal changes, new openings, partitions, etc.
- Addition of a toilet block at the north corner.
- Removal of the 1875 room in the north corner of the hall.
- Alterations to the rear verandah.

Elements of major significance.

The built form and detail of the following extant elements.

- The 1855 hall and its structure.
- The north-east addition.
- The 1886 additions except the front verandah.

Condition general.

Excellent, **Good**, Fair, Poor.

Structurally

Sound, deficient, at risk.

Issues noted.

Nil

Assessed by/date.

TW, July 02³. The site was not re-assessed for this report.

Context.

³ See preliminary Report on Cultural Significance, Trevor Westmore, 25/10/06

The 1850s context of the original hall is by now lost with the replacement of early surrounding buildings. Some isolated late Victorian buildings in the area provide a context for the 1886 additions, but the adjacent sites are not contextual, that on the north-east being modern and that on the south-west being Interwar.

Statement of significance.

The building at 47 Myers Street Bendigo, the first permanent home of Freemasonry in the city, c.1855, is of local historical, social, architectural and technological significance.

- Historically it is of the earliest period of development of Sandhurst, following the Larritt survey of 1854. It was also the first dedicated Freemasons Lodge building in the city.
- Socially it is notable for its connection with early Freemasonry, which in turn involved many of the most notable and influential members of the community, including the prominent architect, W.C. Vahland, the man responsible for many of the City and region's major buildings, including the extant Freemasons Hall 1874.
- Architecturally it is of interest as an expression of a basic early quasi-public building, further developed for a succession of different uses.
- Technologically it is important as one of Bendigo's first brick buildings.

Applicable Criteria.

AHC/RNE: A.4 – association with cultural phases and developments; D.2 – demonstrating a cultural activity; G.1 – symbolic cultural and social associations; H.1 – associations with persons of note.

VHC: A – historical associations; B – rarity; D – demonstrating principal characteristics of a type of place; G – social and cultural associations.

Comparative examples.

Masonic Hall, Maldon;

Thematic context. See Bendigo Heritage Study.

Sub theme. ?

Conservation recommendations.

- Retain the major external envelope of the existing historic structures, in particular the 1855 hall, the 1870s addition and the 1886 addition.
- Internal rearrangements should respect the 1875 office layout.
- Retain/restore the existing façade patterns.
- Restore the modified elements listed under *Integrity* above.

Exempt elements.

- Internal flooring, ceilings and walls other than those of the 1875 offices and kitchen at rear of hall.
- Internal services, etc.
- Toilet addition.
- Front verandah and rear skillion.

Threats. Redevelopment.

Development potential.

The site has limited potential for development that will not diminish its significance. The available site area at the north east side and the rear of the hall provide the only options for expansion.

Early Photo location. Not known.

References/sources of information.

- “Some Historical notes on the property at 47 Myers Street, Bendigo” by Robin Ballinger (May 2002).
- Vahland WC, R.W. Bro., *A History of Freemasonry in the Bendigo District during the First 20 Years of its Existence*, Bolton Bros. Bendigo, 1904.

Further information / Plan of site

Further research desirable.

Seek early photographs that show the original built form and façade.