

History

A Mechanics Institute and Free Library were commenced around 1856 by James Young, in Pilgrim Street, reputedly on a very small scale. After a grant from Council in 1861, it moved to Austin Street and from there to Nicholson Street, opposite this site. A more permanent site was that on railway land, at the end of Napier Street (present post office site), opposite what was then the Footscray Railway Station (since relocated).¹ A School of Design (under secretary R. Bennett) functioned there, along with leased overflow accommodation for the Hyde Street government school (q.v.). The usual balls, testimonials, concerts and lectures were held at this site, making it the social centre of Footscray.²

The triangular block bounded by Napier, Nicholson and Buckley Streets was the institute's next acquisition (being permanently reserved for their use in 1886) but

the 1890s financial recession prevented construction of a new building until the foundation stone for this structure was laid in November 1913. The old timber institute was transplanted there in the interim.

Meanwhile, local architect Charles Polain was able to lease (for 21 years) part of the Nicholson and Buckley Street frontages of the block for a commercial development (215-219 Nicholson Street), despite the obvious clash with the reserve's prescribed purpose. However, this became the institute's property at the end of the lease and the improvements were used to finance the new building, aided by the efforts and donations of Dr. C.L. McCarthy, and James Cuming, among others.

The first stone was laid by Cr. Alex McDonald (Mayor) for a design by C.W. Vanheems and the construction to follow by Stahl Brothers.³ During the subsequent 24 years of operation, the local Johnstone family has been prominent in the persons of Bob, Susan (daughter),



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- 1 M1877
- 2 FFOY p.73
- 3 ibid.

Edward and Rea (sons), all serving as librarians for extensive periods.¹ The building has been internally renovated since.

Description

Queen Anne in style, the main building is comprised of two linked half-timbered and gabled wings with ridge-lines parallel to Nicholson Street. Lower walls are red brick, the upper are clad with rough-cast stucco and the roof with Marseilles pattern terra-cotta. Despite the typically asymmetrical configuration of the domestic examples of the style, the Nicholson Street facade is symmetrical about the gabled entrance porch. The ornament used on this porch is, typically, of shaped timbers after Eastern motifs (brackets, shallow segment-arched bressumer and notched detail on the upper face of each post), as are the exposed roof rafters, here and elsewhere. Its floor is paved with red quarry tiles. Another typical attribute is the multi-pane obscured glazing in most window top-lights. The

names, J. Perillo, Adani & Co., have been placed in gold-leaf pattern on one lower sash of the upper level leased tenancy.

External Integrity

New main doors, new glazed door and screen to the south of the Nicholson Street face and intrusion of roof and guttering of adjoining building to north. Brick chimney shafts painted on south and new walling between the buildings.

Streetscape

Adjoins bland utilitarian elevations; the Polain-designed corner shop row at the corner of, and running to the east in, Buckley Street, being the only related structures on the block. The contemporary but altered Mitchell's Building is opposite.



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1 *ibid.*

Viewed from Napier Street, the building is prominent on its island site and a cypress row along its flank is contemporary landscape.

Significance

Architecturally, not significant but well preserved and historically, of some value as the city's main library for many years and a local physical reminder of the mechanics institutes which dominated male social life in the 19th early 20th centuries in Victoria.

Barnett Gallant & Co. Warehouse 232 Nicholson Street

History

Auctioneers and agents (David T.) Barnett (William) Gallant & Co. commissioned this large warehouse and showroom in 1888, after acquiring John Meages' (?) brick and wood furniture shop.¹ J.H. Hooper's clothing factory was there early this century (c1910-20), followed by the Cosmos Knitting Mills in the late 1920s.² The Central Methodist Mission Goodwill Industries were there in the late 1930s but O'Halloran's funeral parlour has been the longest recent occupier of the building.³

Of the first owners, both were active in the Baptist Church and Barnett was Footscray town clerk from 1898 to his death in 1916.⁴

Hooper's twenty year stint there coincided with their occupation of their retail stores in Footscray (199-213A Barkly Street, q.v.) and Sydney Road, Brunswick. As a whitegoods manufacturer, Hooper's employed near 50% of Footscray's female factory workers in 1901.⁵ They also served what was claimed as 'the largest mail order drapery business in Victoria'⁶ This was the 'commodious three-storied factory' cited in *Footscray's First Fifty Years* which paralleled with another (tailoring and dressmaking) behind their Barkly Street stores (now demolished). At that time (1909) they also had an emporium at Williamstown. Photographs of c1909 show the factory with its original post verandahs and describe graphically the working life within.⁷

Local architect, C.J. Polain, accepted tenders for an 'auction room' at Footscray late in 1888. The builder was G. Matthews.⁸

Description

A substantial three-storey warehouse, former factory building, this dominates the Nicholson Street south skyline and offers, as well as its scale difference, right-of-way loading access on its southern side, over-looked by open slatted timber balconies and closed off by iron gates at the street alignment.

Typically, the cemented main elevation is austere detailed with a balustraded parapet, moulded window label-moulds, and string-course mouldings terminated by vermiculated blocks at each floor line. Still visible on its north side is the warm colour of old brickwork, in this case laid with a bonding course at each sixth.

External Integrity

Shopfronts and canopy new, brickwork painted over, post verandah and parapet urns gone.

Streetscape

Relates in part to the 1923 row and Mitchell's Buildings on the north and the slatted, late Victorian facade on the south. The adjacent Belgravia Hotel (1920s renovation) and Polain buildings opposite also lend support to the buildings period expression.

Significance

Architecturally, typical of the austere ornamented suburban warehouses of the 1880s, but also retaining an unusual enclosed loading R.O.W. and related balconies on its south side. Historically, associated with two major Footscray businesses, one of (Hooper's) which achieved State-wide prominence for their retailing and their actions in achieving standard working conditions.

- 1 RB1887-8,2703; RB1888-9,3249; RB1890,3300
- 2 D1900-30
- 3 D1930-55
- 4 Lack, site notes
- 5 Lack, FISC p.444
- 6 op.cit. p.446
- 7 FFF, n.p.
- 8 ABCN 22/12/88