

## **ADELAIDE TOWN HALL, PRINCE ALFRED, EAGLE, GLADSTONE AND QUEEN'S CHAMBERS**

South East Corner King William Street and Pirie Street

The Corporation of the City of Adelaide was created in 1840 during Governor Gawler's reign in a period of optimism and of massive public spending. The Corporation was the first in Australia, but it soon fell into decline and apathy and in 1843 its affairs were taken over by the government until 1849 when the city commissioners appointed by the government took control. In June 1852, the corporation was re-established. Fourteen years later the present Adelaide Town Hall was built, becoming the premier venue for concerts, civic receptions, club meetings and public gatherings in the city and state. It has continued in this role to the present day.

When the Adelaide Town Hall was built it was the most significant structure in King William Street, the tallest, grandest and the most expensive. After it was built, specific conditions regarding style and materials were stipulated by Edmund William Wright for all the other buildings constructed on the corporation acre: the Prince Alfred Hotel, Eagle, Gladstone and Queen's Chambers. These buildings are an integral part of the Town Hall complex. They were at first leased as a hotel (Prince Alfred Chambers) and as private offices, but were eventually taken over in the 1950s by the Corporation as the business of the Adelaide City Council expanded.

The Town Hall buildings are an essential part of the King William Street townscape. Together with the General Post Office opposite, they dominate the street as it leads into Victoria Square. Of particular note are the balcony and Albert Tower which in straddling the footpath are unique in the City of Adelaide.

The first council offices were erected during the city commissioners' period on the corporation site in King William Street. The buildings were constructed by James Bowley for £166 with a further £100 being spent on furniture, fixtures and fittings.

The first elections for the re-formed council were held on 2 June 1852 with James Hurtle Fisher again being chosen as mayor. The council met for the first time at the Blenheim Hotel in Hindley Street. It had three meetings there before being granted the use of the civic buildings on Town Acre 203.

The small chamber erected by the city commissioners soon became too small, and by 1857 a design competition was organised inviting architects to submit their ideas for a new town hall. In 1858 the architect chosen was E.W. Wright, with E.A. Hamilton second. Council believed it could raise as much as £30 000 laying out blocks on the remainder of the corporation's town acre and letting them out. However, neither the government nor influential citizens would entertain the idea.

Led by R.R. Torrens, public meetings opposed even the addition of one room, but in 1859 a small ante-chamber was built by William Bunday for a mere £120.

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When the builder Thomas English became mayor in 1862 he proposed the erection of a new town hall and offices and produced a sketch. A clause in The Municipal Corporation Act, 1861, gave council the power to borrow a sum not exceeding £20 000. Another design competition was held which was again won by E.W. Wright.

The citizens voted favourably this time. The plans were scrutinised, modifications were suggested and the excavations began in March 1863. The foundation stone was laid on 4 May 1863 by the governor, Sir Dominic Daly. This foundation stone was later hidden behind the Albert Tower, and its precise position has never been located.

During the early period of construction, there was much lively debate over the best building materials. Benjamin Herschel Babbage, government assayer in 1852, suggested concrete as it was cheap: 'one only had to look at the dome of the Pantheon in Rome to realise the potential of concrete'. Robert Todd organised a petition criticising the 'motley facade', for if as the plans depicted, it was to be built in Glen Osmond stone with dressed cornices:

*That the contiguity of elegant Architecture faced entirely with freestone will daily occasion painful comparison, especially with the Albert Tower, and that such eye sore will not diminish with the advancing taste of the colonel during the lengthened period these buildings are calculated to stand.*

The debate for cut freestone continued throughout construction. By the time the first stone of the tower was placed in January 1864, the words 'No Stucco' were understood by anyone who was concerned for the way in which the Town Hall could be constructed. At a public meeting held later in January 1864 the citizens sanctioned a further loan of £4000 to face the Town Hall with cut stone instead of stucco. The alteration details were conveyed to the builders English and Brown. The freestone used came from their quarry at Tea Tree Gully.

On 20 June 1866 the whole day was devoted to the Town Hall's inauguration, followed by a banquet at night 'for gentlemen.' On 22 June a grand opening ball was held, attended by 800 persons who presented a scene of such gaiety and beauty as never before witnessed in the colony. The ball continued with unabated vigor until early morning.

The *South Australian Register* of 21 June 1866 described the front of the building as 73 feet wide projecting over the footpath. The arcade was furnished with a series of massive arches, above which was an open colonnade with a handsome cornice. The tower was 146 feet from the pavement. 'The enrichments are in the Corinthian Order, and the whole design is elegant and striking.' Above the cornice of the main building were sculptured the city arms, with apertures intended for clock faces, ' . . . which it is hoped the liberality of the citizens will shortly supply'.

The belfry was provided with a splendid peal of bells, which from feelings of loyal respect also dictated the name given to the tower itself, the Albert Bells. The main entrance had an iron gate. The entrance lobbies were inlaid with Mintons ornamental tiles. On either side of the Council Chamber were rooms to be used by agreement with the government as a local court, police court and insolvency courts and offices. There were also apartments for council officers and a refreshment room on the second floor. At the grand entrance was a great staircase, ' . . . a very excellent piece of workmanship carried out by Mr G.L. Bonython'. Upstairs the Town Hall proper was ' . . . indeed a magnificent one, and no amount of technical description can convey any idea of what one glance at its interior reveals . . . ' The ceiling

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alone was considered a triumph of decorative art. ' . . . The workmanship reflects the greatest credit upon the artisans . . . it is richly decorated with a large and handsome ventilator studded with embellishments and mouldings forming a complete and decorative *tout ensemble* admirable in all its details'. Three glass chandeliers from Messrs Defries & Sons were ordered from England, arriving in February 1866.

The carved keystones on the front of the building represented ' . . . the heads of Her Majesty the Queen, the late Prince Consort and our respected Governor being considered admirable likeness'.

Other structures were soon also built on the corporation acre. The vacant land was leased and lessees required to construct buildings within a specified time and in keeping with the Town Hall design.

T.C. Bray completed the Prince Alfred Hotel as a 'south wing' in 1869. Adelaide City Council specified that the building be erected using Glen Osmond stone ' . . . or other equally hard stone or brick'.

A suggested rough sketch of a building suitable for the site was drawn on to the back of Bray's lease, most probably by Wright who was still used by the corporation as an advisor. The sketch was then used by Daniel Garlick as Bray's architect, but his plans were criticised by Wright who prepared the working drawings, much to Garlick's annoyance.

The modest original Council Chamber was demolished. In its place rose the two storey 'south wing', consisting of the hotel at the southern end, continuous with merchants and lawyers offices next to the Town Hall. The ' . . . whole design and appearance of the building are according to the terms of the lease, such as to correspond with the Town Hall itself, though only in part of freestone'.

Queen's Chambers was completed in Pirie Street in the same year. Although on the corporation acre, it was built in a style quite different from the other buildings. It was designed as offices by Garlick and McMinn, and built by Crocker and Lawson for lessee, George Witherage Cotton.

In 1873 Messrs Blyth & Co. proposed to construct a building as offices on the north of the Town Hall fronting on to Pirie Street. E.J. Woods drew up the plans.

The *South Australian Register*, 12 January 1876 described the completed block, called Eagle Chambers, as ' . . . a very good feature . . . on a valuable site which before was very bare', and supplying a number of first class offices. Like the Prince Alfred Hotel, the facade is composed mainly of Dry Creek bluestone. Stucco has been liberally used, particularly on the ground floor and on parapets, columns, and window surrounds. Eagle Chambers was not at first entirely a three storey building. Parts of the back were only two storey. In 1880 extensions were added in brick.

At the same time Gladstone Chambers was built between the Eagle and Queen's Chambers to a design by Wright and Reed for G. Mumme and W.T. Dalwood. Halfway through construction it was discovered that the new chambers were not being built in accordance with the covenants of the lease and work was temporarily halted until the matter was rectified.

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E.W. Wright, the city architect, contravened the very covenants he devised for all buildings on the corporation acre. The corporation had to seek advice from George Soward and Thomas English. Unfortunately their opinion is not known. To add insult to injury, when the building was eventually finished the lessees demanded a reduction in their rent as they discovered their frontage was not 40 feet as stipulated in their lease, but only 38 feet 5 inches.

The first major additions to the Town Hall were made in the 1880s. In 1880 a contractor Huckson & Co. was chosen to construct a new council chamber on the ground floor with a supper room on the first floor. Some alterations were made to the rooms adjacent. The new chambers were completed in July 1882. The furniture was designed by Edmund Wright, and:

*. . . arranged in horse-shoe fashion as is the mode now adopted in the chief cities throughout the world, and which has been found to answer admirably both to the comfort of the speakers and audience.*

By the twentieth century the corporation's operations had expanded to such an extent that space for employees was at a critical level. The lord mayor opposed taking over the Prince Alfred Hotel as it was a 'well conducted hostelry' which provided £1500 in revenue to the council. In 1914 the council decided to build directly behind Queen's Chambers. A building was constructed in 1915 by Milburn & Jeffrey for £8500.

Until the 1950s only minor alterations were made. One welcome addition was an electric clock which completed Albert Tower and was donated by Councillor Bonython and 'started up' in 1935.

In 1936 the balcony was removed from the Prince Alfred Hotel. There was then mounting pressure for the Victorian buildings to be replaced with a modernist structure. One plan even proposed spanning King William Street. Although none of the plans were carried out, between 1953 and 1958 the Town Hall buildings underwent a dramatic modernisation and conversion costing approximately £120 000. These alterations involved the Town Hall, and Prince Alfred Hotel and Eagle Chambers which were taken over for the corporation's own use.

The rather unimposing Town Hall entrance was transformed by a 'modern' treatment. Consultant architect Dean Berry and the building surveyor suggested ' . . . that the vestibule should be covered with marble . . . and that the whole of the columns, pilasters and arches in the vestibule on the ground floor should be removed'. McEntee & Williams Limited carried out all the alterations.

The Prince Alfred Hotel, now Prince Alfred Chambers, was extensively modified inside, creating office accommodation for the city treasurer, the medical officer, the director of Parks and Gardens, and the Metropolitan County Board administration.

The 1915 building behind Queen's Chambers was demolished in the 1970s for the Colonel Light Centre which also involved the demolition of the Pirie Street Wesleyan Church, alongside Queen's Chambers. From that time the Town Hall buildings have been refurbished inside, while intact facades of all buildings on the corporation acre have been restored.

ACA, Annual reports, City engineers docketts, *City of Adelaide reference book*, 1983, *Digest of Proceedings*, Mayor's reports up until 1900, Minutes of council from 1840, Minutes of

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Public Works Committee, Minutes of Town Hall Committee, Photograph collection, Rough minutes of Public Works Committee, Town Clerk's docket; *Advertiser*, 13 January 1915; *Chronicle*, 25 June 1859; Jensen E.,R., *Colonial architecture in South Australia*, 1980; MLSA, Historical photographs (Town Acre 203); Morgan, E.J.R., & Gilbert, S.H., *Early Adelaide architecture 1836 to 1886*, 1969; *Observer*, 23 June 1866; Opie, E.A.D., *South Australian records prior to 1841*, 1917; *South Australian Register*, 27 May 1845, 5 May 1848, 10 June 1859, 27 January 1864, 26 August 1865, 30 November 1865, 16 January 1866, 21 June 1866, 26 August 1866, 18 January 1869, 12 January 1876, 2 January 1880, 27 July 1880; Spry, A.L., *The Adelaide Town Hall cleaning, maintenance and restoration*, Amdel Report, 1979; Worsnop, T., *History of the City of Adelaide*, 1878.

The text in this Information Sheet was copied from the **Heritage of the City of Adelaide: An Illustrated Guide**, (1996). The photographs contained in this Information Sheet are a selection of those held by Heritage Services, in digital format.

The property described in this Information Sheet is included in the Register of State Heritage places.  
A heritage listing does not mean or imply right of access by the public to such properties.

*The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.*

*Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.*

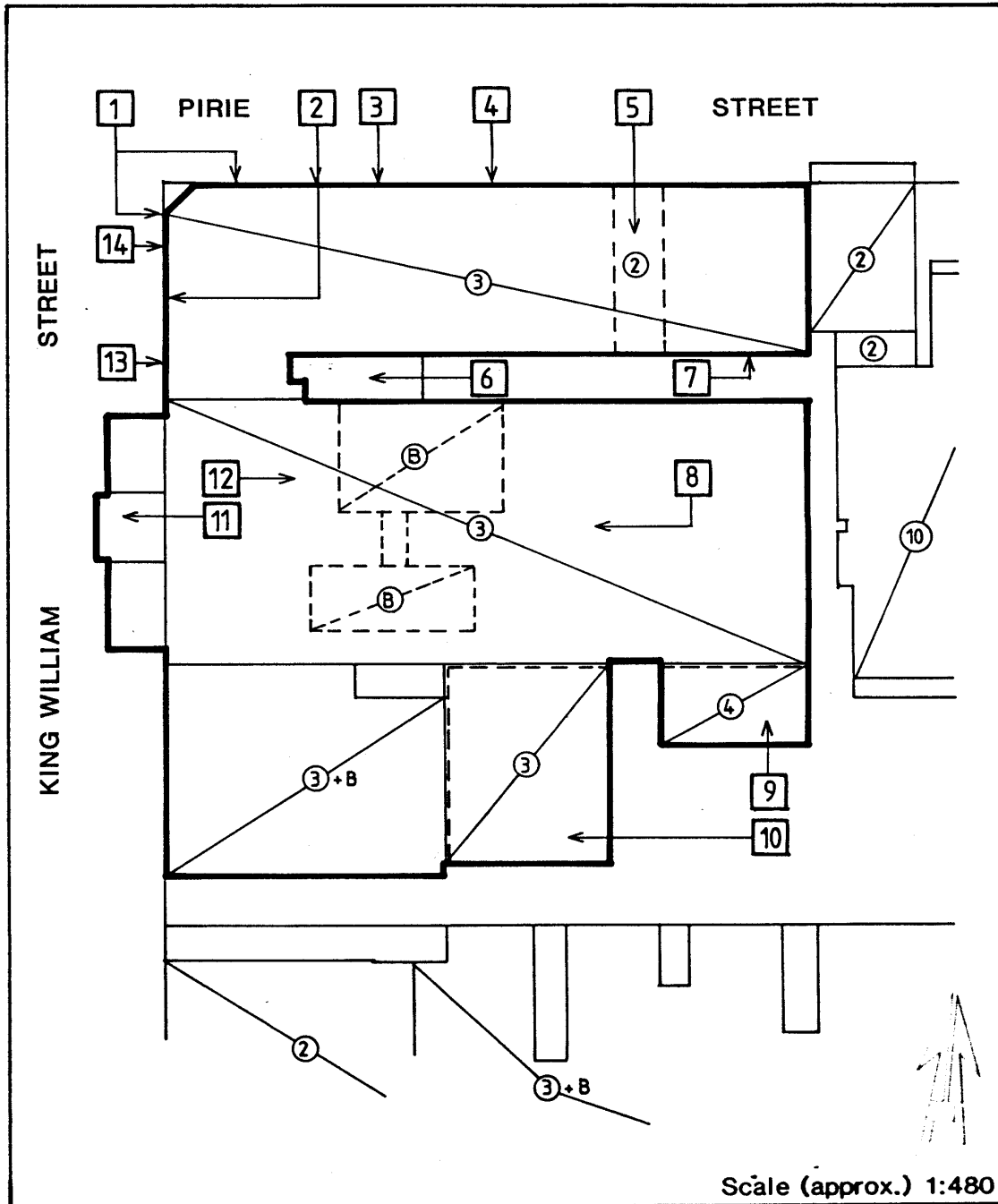


# CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

## The City Heritage Register-Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	ADELAIDE TOWN HALL	Building No	7/2001-1
Address	122-140 King William Street; 1-19 Pirie Street	NUA	0203/1



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### NOTES:

1. Note Pediments above all first and second floor windows.
2. Coursed roughly squared bluestone with stuccoed enrichment and drafted sandstone quoins and plinth.
3. Balustraded parapets.
4. Raised pointing.
5. Carriageway.
6. New additions (Mezzanine).
7. Brick.
8. Cathedral Organ.
9. Fourth floor addition excluded from curtilage.
10. Third floor addition excluded from curtilage.
11. Sandstone Clock/Bell Tower and balcony including all detailing. Note Corinthian columns.
12. Much of internal public area retains original character.
13. Balustraded parapets.
14. Strong rustication.



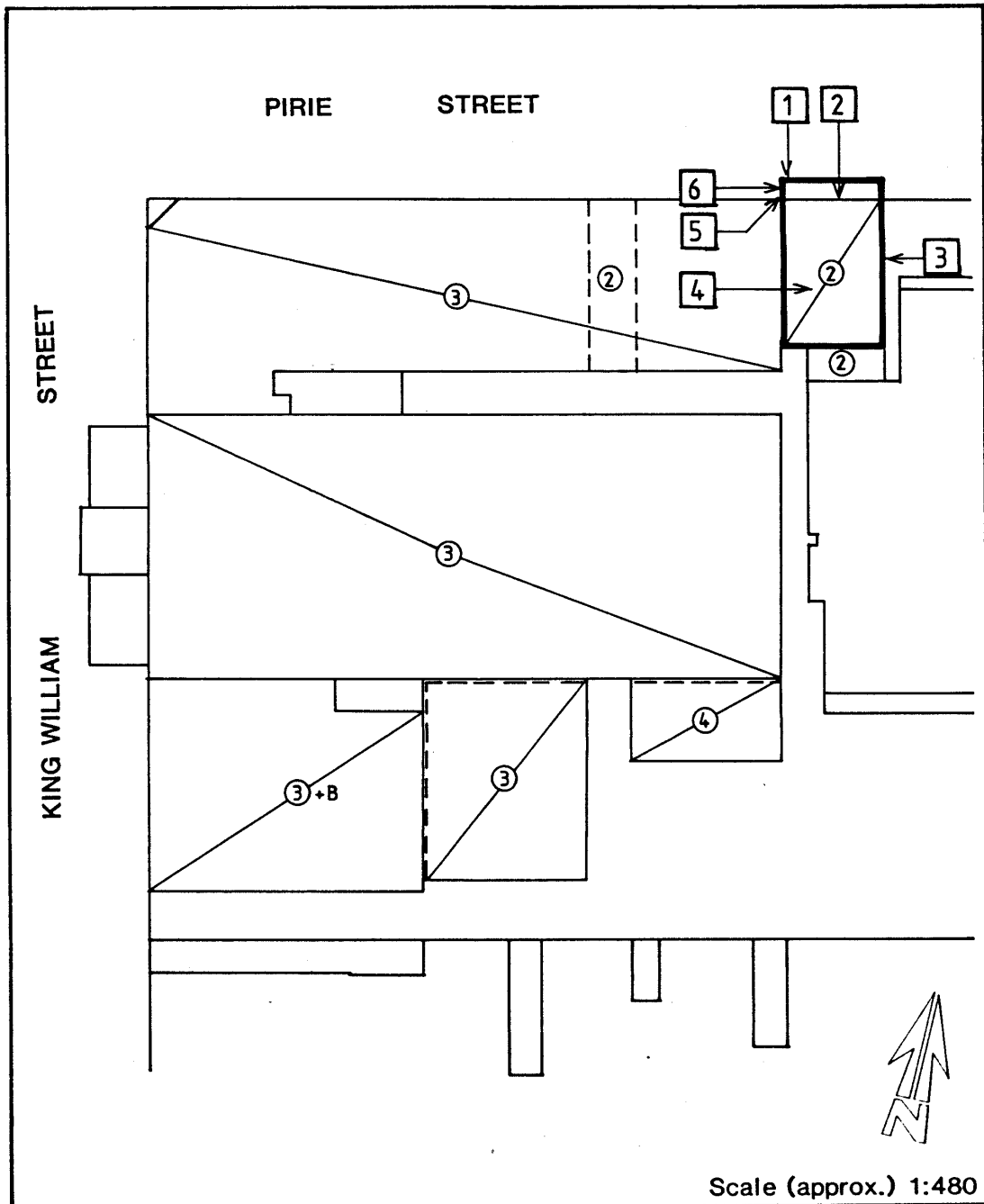


# CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

## The City Heritage Register-Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	QUEENS CHAMBERS	Building No 7/2001-2
Address	19 Pirie Street; (on part of land 1-19 Pirie Street; 122-140 King William Street)	NUA 0203/1



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### NOTES:

1. Balcony with cast iron balustrade, frieze and spandrels.
2. Rendered facade with stuccoed enrichment.
3. Brick (English bond).
4. Internally refurbished.
5. Vermiculated quoins at first floor level.
6. Note Ornate consoles.