

SUPREME COURT **(formerly the Local and Insolvency Court)**

261-279 Victoria Square

From 1837 until 1850 the proceedings of the Supreme Court of South Australia were held in a variety of temporary premises around Adelaide (see also Royal Victoria Theatre). The first purpose-built Supreme Court was the present Magistrates Court which stands nearby, across King William Street.

The present Supreme Court building was not designed as such, but as a Local and Insolvency Court. Plans for this court house were begun when it was announced in 1865 that a new General Post Office would be built, the site for which included the 1851 Post Office, and the Police, Local and Insolvency Courts. Plans were drawn up to house these courts, first together, and then separately on Town Acre 408 at the south-west corner of King William Street and Victoria Square.

The Police Court building on King William Street was completed first, then the Local and Insolvency Court building which presented an imposing facade to Victoria Square.

Most contemporary and secondary sources suggest that Robert George Thomas was the architect. He was appointed second-in-charge of the Department of Engineer and Architect in 1866 and was colonial architect from 1868 to 1870. George Thomas Light may also have had some role in the designs, in relation to the original plans of 1865 which included a third court (which was never built) to the south, beyond the main stairway.

Construction work was bedevilled by the usual delays over poor quality workmanship and other squabbles between the government and contractors. Initially all the foundation walls were constructed 'out of a square line'. Work started in 1866 and was completed in 1869.

Brown and Thompson won the tender to construct the superstructure in cut-stone. These were busy years for them as they also built the new General Post Office. The main facades of the court are Tea Tree Gully sandstone (once described as 'Glen Ewin freestone') as they owned a quarry (McEwin's) at Tea Tree Gully. The more modest south and west elevations were of bluestone.

Even while being constructed the new building excited high praise for its imposing facade to Victoria Square classically derived in the Palladian manner. The judges, who were cramped and unhappy in the existing Supreme Court building, in the words of R.M. Hague, became ' . . . consumed with envy, and decided they would much prefer it to the one they were occupying'. They soon had their way and to prepare, the new building for their projected move, extensions and adaptations were made to suit 'their Honours' and court officers during 1868. One such major extension was the addition of a colonnaded arcade at the rear.

Yet the judges were not satisfied and decided that the building would not suit until renovations were completed. In the meantime, the building was occupied by the Local and

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Insolvency Court from 1869 but in 1873 the Supreme Court and the Local and Insolvency Court moved across King William Street exchanging buildings.

Perhaps the most accomplished and best known of South Australia's chief justices was Sir Samuel Way who presided over the Supreme Court from 1876 until his death in 1916. During his term minor changes were made to the building such as the addition of handsome wrought-iron gates in 1875. The problem of three judges for only two courts was never properly resolved because an additional courtroom was built in 1919 and a fourth judge was appointed in the same year.

Many of the subsequent internal alterations and additional buildings were made in an equally unsuccessful attempt to cope with the increase in number of judges and the dramatic increases in court business and staff, especially during the 1920s and 1950s. The pressure was finally eased by the creation of the Sir Samuel Way Law Courts which were opened in 1983.

Fortunately, most of the original layout and many of the historical features within the building have survived, or are being restored, and the facades are almost intact.



(CD Ref 1606/20)

The Supreme Court remains one of the most impressive of Adelaide's public buildings, as befits the importance attached to the administration of justice. It has played a dominant role in the expansion and development of the legal system, not only in housing courts but also as a legal library, the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, and probate office.

This grand structure provides a landmark in Victoria Square and

forms part of the state's most important group of law buildings in a distinct precinct at the southern and south-western margins of Victoria Square.

Hague, R.M., *History of the law in South Australia, 1837-1867* (typescript), 1936, (MLSA); Marsden, S., 'The history and cultural significance of the Supreme Court building, Victoria Square, Adelaide' in Danvers Architects, *Supreme Court conservation study report*, Adelaide, 1987; SA Department of Housing and Construction, Historical documents and drawings relating to the Supreme Court.

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.

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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	SUPREME COURT	Building N ^o
		15/1101-2
Address	261-279 Victoria Square; (on part land 279-299 King William Street; 261-279 Victoria Square; 1-7 Gouger Street; 2-20 Mill Street	NUA 0408/1

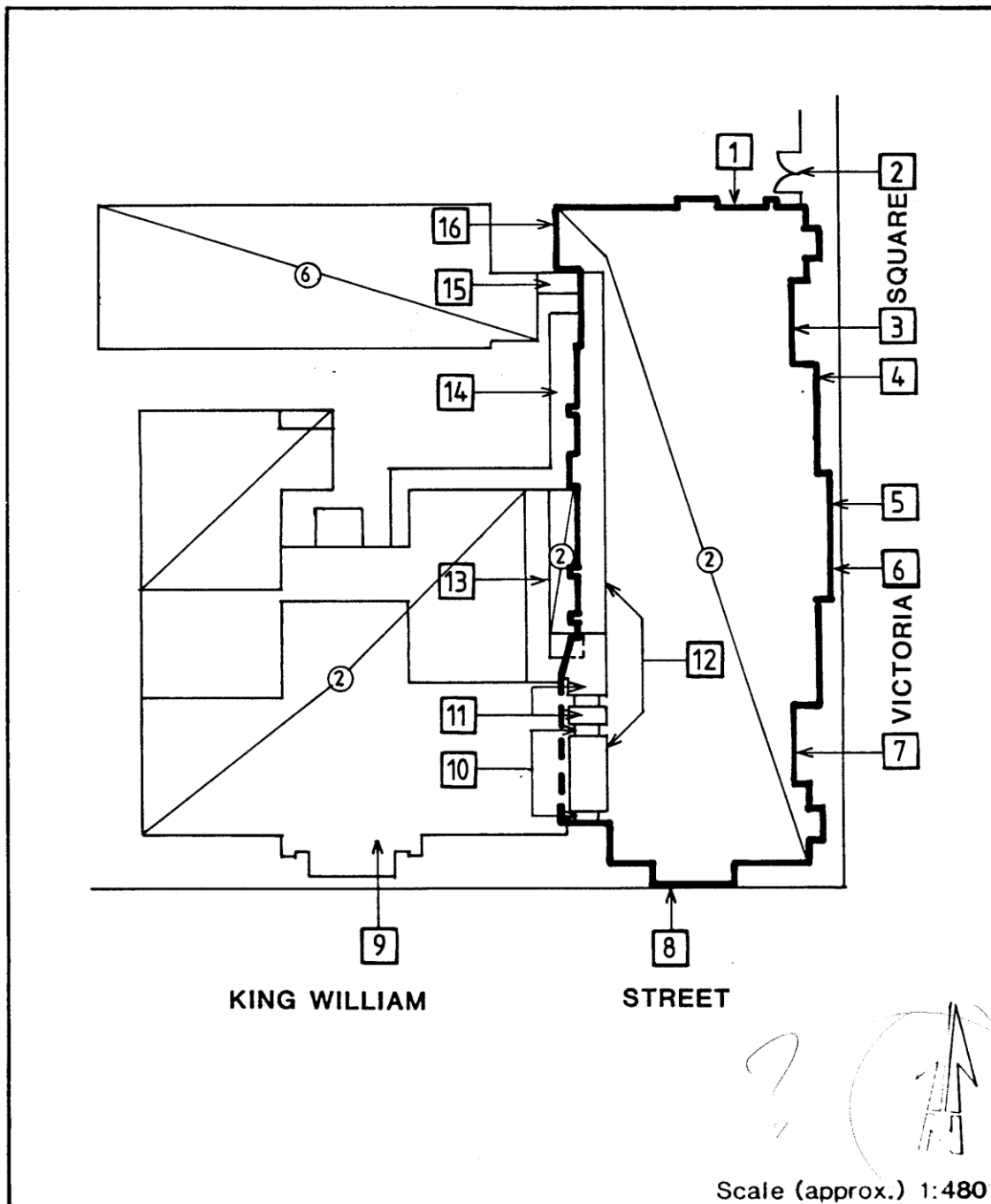


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NOTES:

1. Coursed random bluestone with drafted sandstone quoins and plinth and sandstone enrichment.
2. Cast iron gate.
3. Note: Balustraded parapet.
4. Note: Urns and figureheads.
5. Note: Coat of Arms on pediment.
6. Note: Columns and cast iron gates.
7. Rusticated drafted sandstone at ground floor with ashlar sandstone at first floor level.
8. Portico.
9. Note: Local Court also listed.
10. Stucco enriched arches with figurehead on keystone.
11. Vaulted brick ceiling.
12. Coursed random bluestone.
13. Red brick addition.
14. Exposed timber balcony at first floor level.
15. Above ground walkway.
16. Rendered.