

MITCHELL BUILDING University of Adelaide

North Terrace

In February 1872, Union College was formed to train young men for the Christian ministry. Later that year in September, a university association was formed out of Union College to establish the University of Adelaide following assent to the act in 1874. The University Association was dissolved when the new Senate and Council of the University, established under the act, met for the first time on 11 November 1874. The government agreed to provide land in the Park Lands for a university site.



(CD Ref 2835/80)

Until the first building was erected, temporary accommodation was found. The first classes were held in the Teachers' Training College in 1876. The university was formally inaugurated at a meeting in the Adelaide Town Hall on 25 April 1876. Women were admitted to classes from the start which began before the inauguration. Of the first sixty students admitted, there were eight matriculated students and fifty two non-matriculated students, with thirty three of them being non-matriculated women. The first woman graduate was Edith Dornwell who was admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Science in 1885.

During its formative years the University of Adelaide received substantial gifts of money from Sir Walter Watson Hughes and Sir Thomas Elder to endow professorships. With these gifts the university could entice distinguished men from overseas who did so much to establish the university's reputation. One was William Mitchell who became one

of the university's first philosophy academics. He was a member of the university council for fifty two years from 1896 and is best remembered as an administrator.

As the institution grew to include about forty buildings many distinguished past scholars, academics and benefactors were commemorated by their names being given to the various buildings.

The Mitchell Building was the first to be built in the university grounds, and until the end of the nineteenth century was the venue for administration and all the teaching for five different

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faculties. The library was in this building until 1932 and until 1900 was used as the 'great hall'. Plans for such a building to be established began in 1876, but it was to be six years of controversy before it was officially opened.

A design competition was held and a winner duly chosen in February 1877. The choice of the winning design was to cause much controversy. James MacGeorge was awarded first prize, but this caused some consternation among the losers and gained space in the press as it was a most unpopular choice. The architect most upset about the results was Michael Egan of Melbourne who was awarded second prize. His sentiments were expressed in a prolific burst of letter-writing to W. Barlow the university registrar. It did appear that the winner's design was in every way contrary to the conditions of the competition, '. . . drawn from an impossible point [it] . . . is certainly 'cooked''.

The Council entered into negotiations with Michael Egan and recommended that he should be appointed architect. Egan went to particular lengths to produce a design fitting for the colony's first university building. His enthusiasm was short-lived for the council decided it could not really afford to implement his ambitious plan, probably because it was told that a maximum of £11 000 would be available for building.

Egan was surprised at the change of plans although he said he had already been informed by others that the Design Committee had thrown his design aside and got another from an architect who had not competed at all. By all accounts Michael Egan was shabbily treated. He had made several trips from Melbourne and was much involved in the working drawings for the new building. Much time, effort and expense on his part was now deemed to be thoroughly wasted.

The other architect Egan referred to was William McMinn who had competed in the design competition with Edward John Woods but withdrew. However, Woods and McMinn became the advising architects to the Committee and so must have gained a good idea of the kind of building which would be appropriate. Michael Egan had been in regular contact with Woods and McMinn for advice and other matters and he was understandably upset about McMinn taking his place:

I feel that I have been sold all round in this business, but nothing has hit me harder than McMinn pretending to be my friend and ally and afterwards snatching the bread out of my mouth . . .

McMinn was given all the credit for the final design, yet it is, by all accounts, remarkably similar to Egan's. Even the costs were much greater than McMinn's estimate of £10 200. After some debate his Gothic style was accepted for tenders up to £23 000. Brown and Thompson won the contract for £24 736.

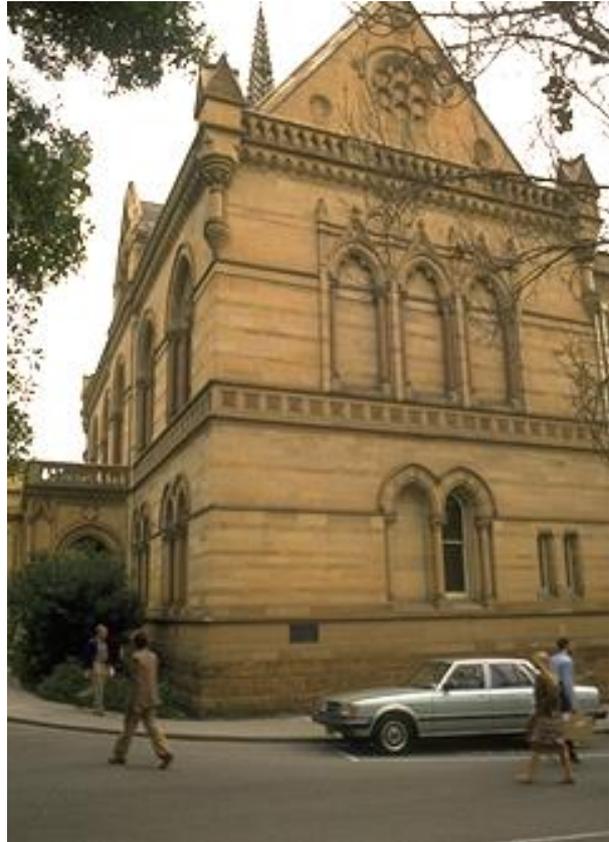
The foundation stone was laid in 1879 by the governor in an elaborate public ceremony. Classes and examinations were held in the building from March 1881, although building work continued for another year. The final cost of the building, including the prizes, advertising and costs of variation in materials used, was almost £34 000. Internal fixings, furnishings and landscaping between 1883-89 amounted to a further £5600. As less than £2000 was received by public subscription the construction of the building made a large deficit in the building account and £500 was charged annually by the government as rent for the university as a

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means of extinguishing the debt. The building was officially opened by the governor on 5 April 1882.

William McMinn supplied the following details to the *South Australian Register* (in summary):

The design is modern Gothic. The roof is high pitched, covered with slate of two different shades in alternate bands and surmounted by an ornamental iron casting. From the centre of the ridge springs a ventilating turret 35 feet high. The upper floor (library front) has five large two-light traceried windows, with columns of red stone imported from Dumfries, Scotland. The central portion of the building projects slightly beyond the general face and is carried up an additional storey. The stonework of the front is finished with a cornice and pierced parapet above. The ground floor has four two-light windows, with columns of brown coloured stone, and the principal doorway in the centre is protected by an open stone porch, with clustered pillars of red stone and rich carved work on the cornice and elsewhere. The porch projects 12 feet, and forms a balcony above. The front of the building has been executed in Sydney white stone with rubbed surfaces. Bands of darker tinted stone are introduced in the height and in the arches of the window openings. The dressings throughout the remainder of the building are to be of Sydney stone, the general face of the walls of pick-dressed freestone from Tea Tree Gully. The stone carving throughout the exterior and interior is by the sculptor Maxwell.



(CD 2835/80)

Advertiser, 2 February 1877; Duncan, WG.K., Leonard, L.R., *The University of Adelaide 1874-1974*, 1973, pp. 1,5,9; MLSA, Historical photographs; Old Parliament House Library, Lands Department photographs; *South Australian Register*, 6 April 1882; University of Adelaide Archives, Letters: Egan to Barlow 11.6.1878, Egan to Bishop of Adelaide 4.5.1879, McMinn to Barlow 19.12.1878, Minutes of Building Committee, Historical photographs; *The University of Adelaide Centenary 1874-1974*, pp. 8, 15, 18-19, 22; Woodburn, S., *The founding of a university: the first decade of the University of Adelaide*, 1983 (pamph.).

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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	MITCHELL BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE	Building No	122003
Address	North Terrace		

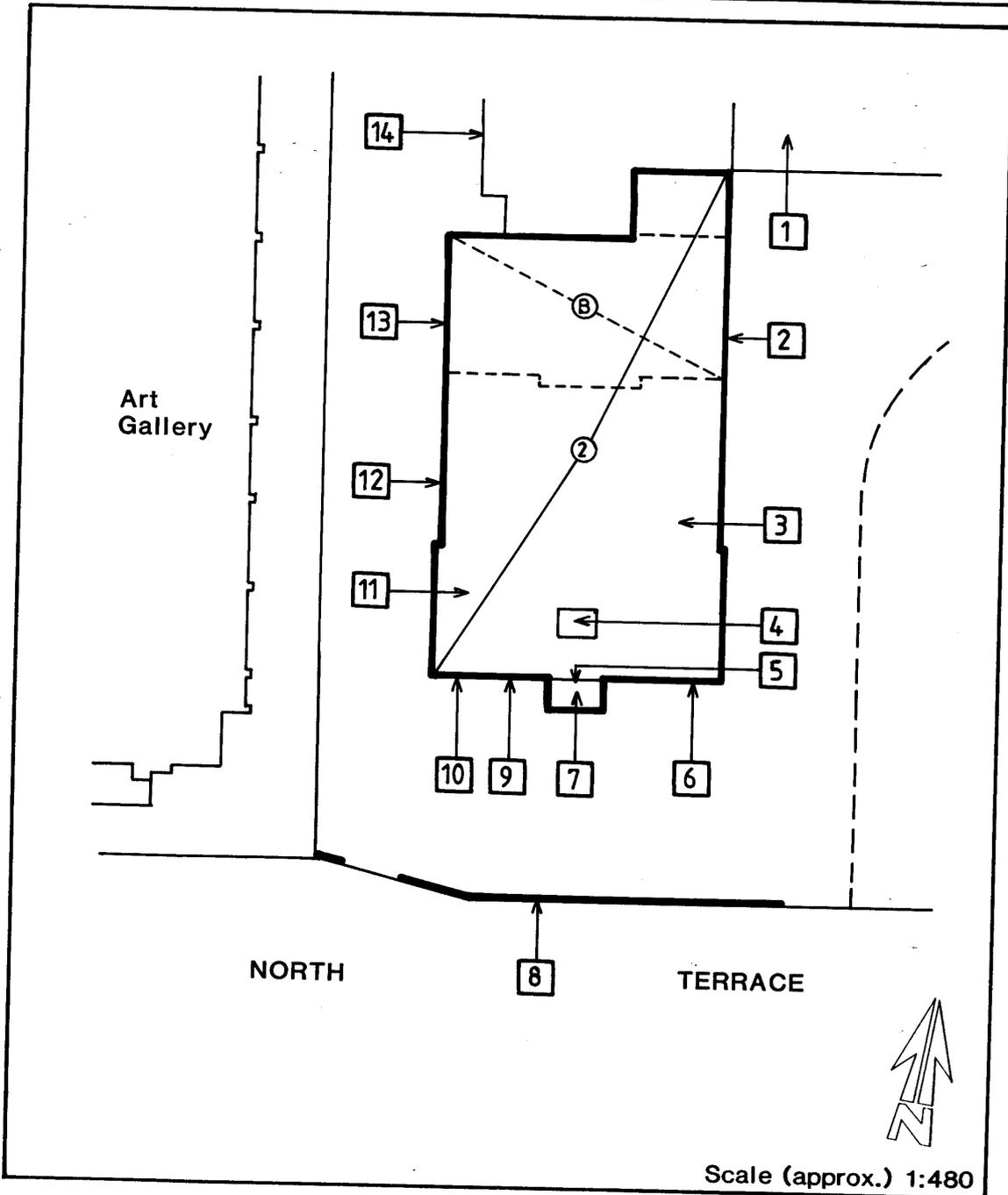


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Building No

Address North Terrace

122003

NOTES:

1. Building of sympathetic style and materials.
2. Note: Concealed jalousies.
3. Note: Chimney.
4. Note: Spire.
5. Note: Dormer window.
6. Note: Tracery.
7. Highly decorative arched portico.
8. Rock faced sandstone and cast iron fence.
9. Ashlar sandstone facade with extensive sandstone detailing and rock faced plinth.
10. Note: Replacement of leadlight windows with aluminium frames.
11. Slate roof with metal cresting.
12. Hammered squared sandstone with rock faced plinth.
13. Hammered sandstone with squared sandstone plinth.
14. Exposed aggregate pre-cast concrete panel addition.