

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

North Terrace

As the name Old Parliament House suggests, this is one of South Australia's most important historical buildings as it was the first permanent site of the South Australian Parliament. The earliest parts date from 1843. The building is of architectural interest for its use of contrasting building materials, such as red-brick and white limestone, as used in the Adelaide Gaol. The limestone was quarried from either the site now taken up by the Adelaide Railway Station or one of the other quarries in the River Torrens embankment. The Elizabethan style facade to North Terrace is also of note.



(CD Ref 2835/41)

It is remarkable that these buildings have survived at all given the unrelenting complaints about the chambers by members from as early as 1858 until even the 1960s. On several occasions they were close to demolition. Although they have had substantial internal and external alterations, care was always taken to retain the facade. When renovated as the Constitutional Museum (now Old Parliament House) it was restored, as far as possible, to the 1875 character.

Until 1843 the Legislative Council membership consisted of only five members and meetings were held at Government House.

The decision to build a Legislative Council Chamber arose following an act ' . . . for the better government of South Australia' which was passed by the British Parliament in 1843. The existing council was replaced by one in which the governor and seven persons nominated by the crown, raised membership to eleven. As proceedings were opened to the public a suitable building for the enlarged council membership and public spectators was needed. Jacob Pitman began construction in July 1843 and finished in time for the first session of the new Legislative Council on 10 October. The *Observer* reported, ' . . . the chamber, which with the

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gallery, is calculated to contain about 200 persons, was crowded to the doors by ladies and gentlemen of the first respectability'.

The new council chamber suited the needs of the few council members for a short period. However, a dramatic change was made to government in 1850 which brought membership of the Legislative Council to twenty four, and overcrowded the small chamber. The Australian Colonies Government Act of 1850 provided for sixteen elected members and eight crown nominees.

Plans to build a more commodious structure were held up by:

... a great exodus of population to the Victorian goldfields in the early fifties [which] created such a scarcity of labour and such a rise in wages that the execution of even urgently needed public works had to be postponed.

A design competition held in 1851 was won by Bennett Hayes before his appointment as colonial architect on 1 January 1852.

In 1853 Hayes was asked to prepare plans and estimates for a House of Assembly to accommodate two chambers, one for thirty six members and the other for twelve, costing no more than £20 000. As the times were so uncertain not a single tender was received. However, work was started in 1854 by English & Brown by 'day work', an arrangement where they received the usual builders' profits on the labour employed and on the materials used. The government appointed a timekeeper who kept an account of the workmen's time and the materials. The building was completed in about July 1855 at a cost of about £17 000.

The first major addition to the building followed the new constitution for South Australia which allowed for two elected Houses of Parliament in South Australia. This received Royal Assent in June 1856.

In ten weeks flat a new chamber was constructed on the site of the 1843 building. Some of the old building was incorporated to save in construction time and expense. The contractor I.W. Perryman completed the work in time for the opening of the colony's first bicameral



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parliament on 22 April 1857.

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The second council chambers of 1857 and the building known as the refreshment room of 1861 appear to have been constructed of a similar limestone to that of the South Australian Institute of 1860 and the Treasury additions at that time. The 1864 library is of Dry Creek stone and subsequent alterations, such as the 1876 addition to the south-west front, are of Mitcham sandstone.

In 1874 E.J. Woods' designs for enlargement and improvements in ventilation were carried out as a temporary measure until the House of Assembly moved to the new building next door in 1889. The Legislative Council was relocated in the old House of Assembly Chamber from 1894 until 1939 (see Parliament House). The building was saved from demolition by the outbreak of the Second World War when it was used as an RAAF recruiting office.

Modifications and alterations continued throughout, and by the 1970s the complex was a conglomeration of sadly neglected buildings. Finally, between 1978-80 total renovation was carried out by the government for conversion into the Constitutional Museum under the direction of the newly formed History Trust of South Australia. The museum is now known more appropriately as Old Parliament House.

Donovan, P., *The old Legislative Council Chamber, South Australia Museum*, 1976, pp. 6, 12-4, 24, 42; MLSA, Bierbaum files, D5215(T) RN101; *Observer*, 14 October 1843; PRO, GRG 2/5, GRG 24/4/25, June 1853, GRG 135/43; Pike, D., *Paradise of dissent* (2nd ed.), 1967, pp. 221, 246; SAPD, 5 December 1873, 13 October 1934, 18 July 1939, 29 September 1953, 16 August 1961. *South Australian Register*, 27 February 1855; Young, D., Verbal information, 1985.

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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	CONSTITUTIONAL MUSEUM (former LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BUILDING)	Building No 263002
Address	North Terrace	

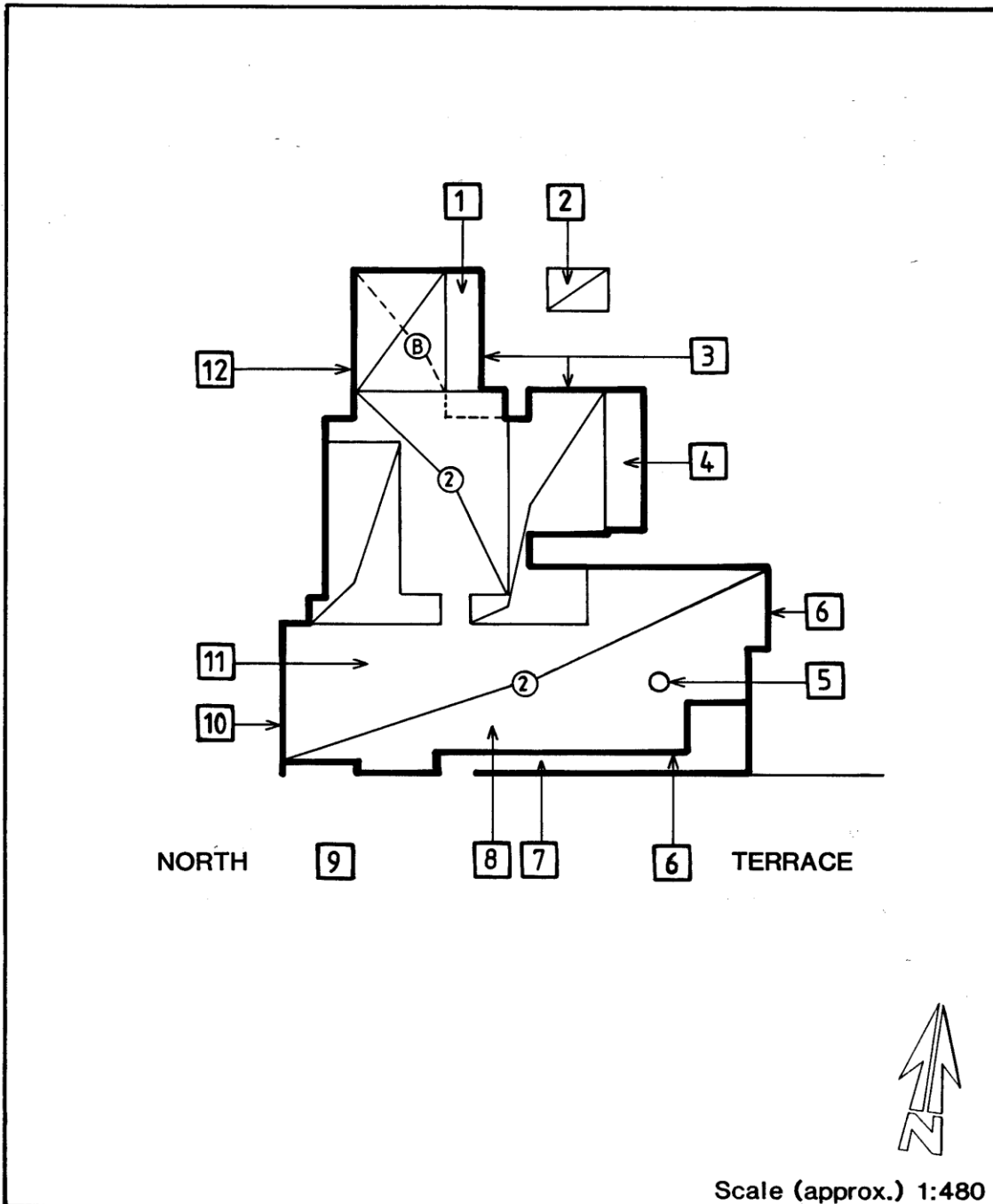


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Item	CONSTITUTIONAL MUSEUM (former LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BUILDING)	Building No 263902
Address	North Terrace	

NOTES:

1. Verandah.
2. Sympathetic bluestone addition.
3. Recently reconstructed.
4. Verandah.
5. Note: Cupola.
6. Note: Dutch gables and stucco finials on parapet.
7. Note: Arched verandah.
8. Squared, tuck-pointed sandstone with extensive brick detailing (note use of different sandstones) and replacement of some brickwork and detailing during recent restoration. Slate roof.
9. Note: Brick parapet (partially rebuilt).
10. Note: Dutch type gable.
11. Note: Decorative brick chimneys (some rebuilt).
12. Bluestone rubble.