

# PARLIAMENT HOUSE

North Terrace

The house of the South Australian Parliament is of undeniable heritage significance, both architecturally and historically.

As the population and prosperity of the colony of South Australia increased so there was a need for an increase in parliamentary representation. This was the second Parliament House, built alongside that of the 1855 building, reflecting the development of parliamentary government and the zenith of an era when substantial public works were being constructed in dressed stone, or as in this case, marble. As the most prestigious building in South Australia it conveyed optimism of that time.

This monumental structure was built in two sections fifty years apart. The west wing was completed in 1889 and the east wing opened in 1939 to commemorate the 136 centenary of the foundation of South Australia.



(CD Ref 2835/40)

Architecturally the building is outstanding. Much trouble was taken in selecting building materials from within South Australia to reflect the colony's pride in its own resources. The resulting marble palace is impressive on all four sides. Even the plainest, northern, front is relieved by an elegant balcony on the first floor. There has been no external alteration since completion in 1939.

The building dominates a major Adelaide intersection. Although the site slopes the building has been designed to take full advantage of this fact and is conspicuous in size, style, material and colour.

As one of Adelaide's most imposing buildings this was the centre of much controversy with regard to its siting, design and construction. As early as 1873 a parliamentary committee which was appointed to consider the question of providing a new chamber drew up plans for a suitable building which could be built very quickly for approximately £15 000. Using the ideas of the chairman, the speaker, the Honourable G.S. Kingston, the assistant architect drew plans which were immediately hotly debated. One member Rowland Rees, also an architect, contended that 'if they were to have a new building let it be for the future, and not a patchwork

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job, which would be penny wise and pound foolish . . . ' He described the plans ' . . . as a little of the palace and a great deal of the privy'.

Yet no-one wanted simply to alter the old Parliament House although it ' . . . had cost a vast amount of money, but had given satisfaction to no single member'. Dread of the chamber ' . . . unfitted a man for business the day before meeting, and the fatigue caused by sitting in it unfitted him for business the day after'. It was hot, stuffy and airless. The temperature at the time of the debate was ninety degrees fahrenheit, and all agreed to call for competitive designs for the building of a new House of Assembly Chamber.

The first tender notice appeared in the *South Australian Gazette*, 11 December 1873. The winning design was by E.W. Wright and Lloyd Tayler. Unfortunately, ' . . . the circumstances of the colony did not allow them to go on with the building of new Parliament Houses', so substantial additions were made after all to the existing parliamentary chambers. In 1875 Wright and Tayler were informed ' . . . that the Government have not at present decided to erect such Houses'. Even so, controversy began to rage over the proposed siting. Four sites were suggested: two on the west side of Victoria Square, another to the west of the Institute Building on North Terrace encroaching on to Government House land, and the fourth on the site of the present Jervois Wing of the State Library. The site on the corner of King William Street and North Terrace was also criticised as it was considered essential for future railway purposes. An act of 1877, however, authorised taking over part of the Adelaide Park Lands for new parliament buildings on the corner of King William Road and North Terrace. That decision was confirmed in 1879.

In 1881 a decision was made to spend £100 000 constructing the building using material produced in the colony. After visits to various quarries, Kapunda marble was chosen as being both durable and beautiful. The Building Committee organised for the work to be carried out from the architect-in-chief's office and gave instructions for considerable alterations and improvements in the plans. The colonial architect Edward John Woods was given the credit for the building's design although he based his plans on Wright and Tayler's winning design. Edmund Wright and Lloyd Tayler deserve the real credit for this building.

In 1883 the Kapunda Marble Company's tender for £102 864.9.3d was accepted for erection of the first section of the new building with a granite basement and marble superstructure. As a tower was included in the original plans, the builders incorporated foundations and the necessary walls in the superstructure but the government could not afford to have the tower built, rationalising its decision by stating that ' . . . like other city towers, it would be doubtless ornamental, but not of much use'. The tower had been estimated to cost £45 568.

The Kapunda Marble Company supplied both the marble and the granite. The porphyritic granite from West Island near Victor Harbor was supplied by M. Oliver of Port Victor. The mere mechanics of quarrying granite from an island almost a kilometre off shore must have presented particular engineering difficulties. It was apparently taken by vessel around the coast to Port Adelaide and by horse and cart to the nearby railway.

Construction became a continuing nightmare for Woods and his professional clerk, Charles Edward Owen Smyth. The Kapunda Marble Company had many difficulties understanding the conditions of the building schedule and was continually criticised for the poor quality of bricks, marble and workmanship. The marble to be used as the facade encasing the brick

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structure, had to be attached by a process called 'iron-bonding'. The wrought-iron used had to be thoroughly cleaned of all rust and paved over with hot Stockholm Tar and sand but the company was very lax and would not do this. These criticisms and the increasing antagonism on site between labourers working for the Marble Company and the clerk of works David Cameron led to the eventual stoppage of works and the breaking of the contract by the government.

The halt in July 1885 threw over a hundred men into unemployment in a time of acute economic depression. Finally in February 1886 James Shaw signed a contract to complete the west wing for £98 745. Quarrying of the marble continued as the government leased the Kapunda marble quarry. Ninety-five men were employed at the building site and sixty at the quarry. Although Woods had by now officially retired as colonial architect and the whole department was abolished, he was kept on to oversee the construction of the building. He continued to criticise inferior bricks and the unsatisfactory workmanship by G.W. Maxwell, the stone mason.

The new technology incorporated in the west wing was a marvel of the day. After the old Assembly Chamber (now Old Parliament House), where neither fresh air, adequate space nor comforts existed, Woods decided that members should want for nothing. The supply of fresh air and ventilation was a priority for the new chamber was surrounded on all sides by corridors which prevented using the windows. The new ventilation system had a main inlet 30 feet from the ground in the form of a small tower at the centre of the large light court. From this tower there was a tunnel half underground and built with air space to equalise the temperature of the incoming air in hot weather. The tunnel terminated under a fan driven by a gas engine which renewed the whole of the air in the chamber every twenty minutes. A valve worked from the tables in front of members' benches and controlled the supply which entered by louvered openings on the side walls or through gratings under each table. The air drawn down by the fan, after passing over trays of water on Dr Campbell's patent, were delivered through large air channels in the basement, and finally entered the chamber at those numerous points. In the winter the air passed over hot pipes to keep temperatures in the chamber at about sixty-five degrees fahrenheit.

Gas lighting was first used, but arrangements were made for the future use of electricity and wires were installed all over the building. Even the lighting of the gas in the chamber was done by electricity. On the clerk's table there was a switch with a dial showing the number of jets in the chandeliers (also designed by Woods). By turning the switch from one to two as it passed each number, electric communication was established between the Lechanche primary batteries - which were in the basement - and the burners, and a momentary spark was induced and the gas was lit. On the same dial as the switch were four push buttons to communicate with messengers, and another button which rang electric bells in every room to summon members to a division. These ingenious and scientific devices were much admired.

Sixteen years after the first serious plans were made to construct a new Parliament House, the west wing was completed in June 1889.

In an 'At Home' reception on 5 June 1889 given by the president of the Legislative Council, Sir Henry Ayers, and the speaker of the House of Assembly, the Honourable J.C. Bray, the new buildings were thrown open for 1500 guests from nearly every section of the community.

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The *Observer*, 8 June 1889 provided a lengthy description. Built from marble and granite:

*. . . the style of the principal fronts is almost 'Palladian' in character, with its heavy basement and large Corinthian order, including two storeys . . . The keystones of the front windows have carved portraits of the late and last Governors of the Colony, past Speakers, and Presidents of the Legislative Council. The main entablature has several enrichments on its members, and the frieze has carved wreaths over the columns . . . The building is finished with a heavy balustrade.*

The building was described as one:

*. . . which externally and internally is as imposing as any building in the southern hemisphere. Inside, the chief feature is the Chamber . . . and a remarkably handsome hall it is. With fluted pillars, beautifully finished walls, and an elaborately gilded and panelled ceiling, artistically ornamental with no less than seven porcelain chandeliers . . . the effect is most striking.*

An exquisitely carved American walnut chair, richly upholstered in brown morocco, was provided for the speaker. The clerk's table:

*. . . fitted with numerous cupboards and drawers and its top containing switches, discs, buttons and other contrivances connecting with a network of electric wires below, running to all parts of the building . . . bears the appearance of an ingenious mechanical appliance.*

All members' benches and tables were of walnut and formed three parts of an oval. 'The seats are beautifully upholstered in brown morocco and present an appearance of comfort that should be a strong deterrent to *'cacoethes loquendi'*, which necessitates rising from their springy depths'. The tables, unlike those in the old chamber, were fixtures. There were the Speaker's and Ladies' galleries, shut in with doors, and the Strangers' Gallery opposite the Reporters' Gallery:

*The furnishing throughout is sumptuous, and the fitting up of the Chamber in the Renaissance style has been carried out by Mr P. Gas, in splendid style for £2000. The numerous staircases throughout the building are of marble, and the corridors are tiled in black and white marble.*

The only regret expressed was that there was no immediate prospect of the building being completed. In fact it was to be exactly half a century to the day before the east wing, the Legislative Council, was officially opened and this was only because of Sir Langdon Bonython's gift of £100 000. The gift was presented to the government in 1934 with the hope that plans could be hurried along to complete the parliament buildings as part of a centenary project. Sir Langdon stated:

*. . . when I sent my gift to Mr. Butler, [the premier] I remember saying in my letter that to some extent I was influenced in my action by the realisation that the completed building would mean the wiping out of a gross disfigurement of one of the most important sites in the city.*

Compared to the trials and tribulations of the building of the west wing, the east wing was built within five years. The work was estimated to cost £256 000 and began in the centenary

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year with Slater as the contractor under supervision of the government architect, A.E. Simpson. Sufficient Kapunda marble and granite from West Island was quarried to complete the building with only minor delay caused by the difficulty in obtaining large dimension blocks for the marble work.

When Sir Langdon was in his ninety-first year the completed parliament buildings were opened on 5 June 1939 by the governor general of Australia Major General Sir Winston Dugan, and a former governor of South Australia Lord Gowrie. Lord Gowrie stated:

*We know the effect which environment and atmosphere have on the minds of us all, and I cannot help feeling that a dignified building and an artistic setting must have an influence on the conduct of our proceedings. Anything which tends to enhance the respect of the public for parliamentary institutions is much to be encouraged, and the psychological effect of stately buildings of this kind on the minds of those who labour within its walls must be considerable.*

Seldom in South Australia has the progress of a building been watched with such public interest. When the building was opened for public inspection 26 667 visitors passed through during the first week.

The Legislative Council's overall dimensions are the same as those of the House of Assembly. Galleries surround the chamber on three sides on floor level and on all four sides on the first floor level. The project provided accommodation for the Legislative Council Chamber, Parliamentary Library, committee rooms, parliamentary offices, hansard staff offices and federal members' offices. The council chamber was acoustically treated and mechanically ventilated.

Completion of the entire building presented North Terrace with an imposing facade emphasised by a colonnade of ten Corinthian columns and a spacious flight of marble steps. The King William Road facade has an appropriate pilaster treatment with two accentuations of four columns and their superstructure.

*Advertiser*, 6 June 1889, 6 June 1939; MLSA, BRG 18/1433, Specification of works, Historical photographs; *Observer*, 8 June 1889; PRO GRG 38/13/2.7.1883, GRG 38/13/Feb 1885; Peak, H., *Record of the opening of the new Legislative Building*, 1939; SAPD, 5 December 1873, 18 August 1875, 18 November 1885; SAPP, No. 139, 1873, No. 136, 1875, No. 29, 1881; *South Australian Government Gazette*, 11 December 1873; *South Australian Register*, 1 May 1874.

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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*

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*(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.*

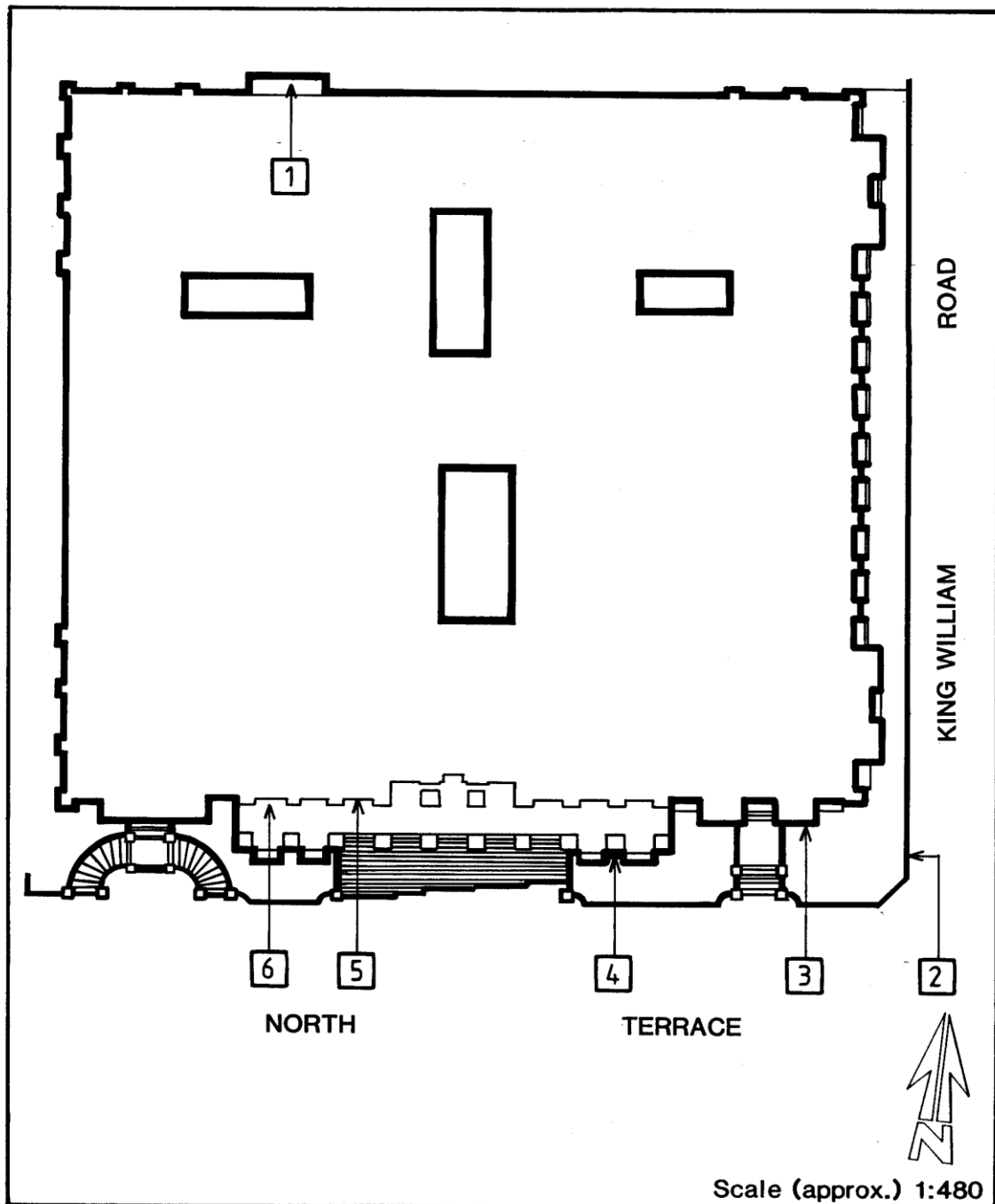


# CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

## The City Heritage Register-Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	PARLIAMENT HOUSE	Building No
Address	Corner North Terrace and King William Road	263001



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#### NOTES:

1. Note: Balcony with cast iron balustrading, frieze and columns.
2. Granite walling.
3. Note: Detailed entablature and balustraded parapet.
4. Note: Corinthian columns to large portico.
5. Ashlar marble facade with extensive ornate detailing and granite plinth.
6. Note: Detailed window surrounds including figureheads on keystones.