

MORTLOCK LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIANA, THE FORMER JERVOIS WING

North Terrace

This handsome building was the first structure of a planned group of three which was to alleviate chronic space shortages for the South Australian Institute. The building had such controversial beginnings, with disputes over design, site and construction, that it took ten years to build.

The exterior is of fine dressed stone. The interior is unique in South Australia with its lofty central space, galleries and ceiling-high book-shelves which reflect the 'grandly contemplative' cultural attitudes of the time. The interior details and fittings - the bookshelves, carved timber tables and chairs, door surrounds, handrails, balustrades, timber beams supporting the roof lanterns and the iron lacework - also demonstrate excellent workmanship. The well-known Sydney architect Clive Lucas has stated that '... as a mid-Victorian public library interior it is arguably without equal in Australia'.



(CD Ref 3964/61)

In 1873 the South Australian Institute and Museum advertised a design competition, pointing out that only one portion of the complex was to be erected for the present and that the foundations were already in. However, the government called for an investigation into the whole South Australian Institute and Museum question as well as the oddity of designing a building to suit the foundations already laid.

The commission recommended that the South Australian Institute should be separated from its two offspring organisations - a national library and museum.

Robert George Thomas won the competition for the design but it is not certain how much of his original plans were changed, as in 1876 the colonial architect George Thomas Light and his temporary assistant William McMinn made '... some suggestions, which if adopted, would totally alter the character and arrangements of the proposed buildings'. Their plans were considered '... superior to the original prize design'.

The foundations laid in 1873 were taken up as being unsuitable and relaid by late 1876.

In 1877 new plans were prepared which must have incorporated some of McMinn's ideas. The board of governors still had not decided which design was to be implemented when a premature release of the plans by Light, to the newspaper, *Frearsons*, upset them. The drawing was painted by the artist C.B. Richardson and showed the west elevation notably different from the eventually constructed design.

Tenders were called, but at first received no response. When advertised again the only proposal received, by Brown & Thompson, was more than double the envisaged cost and so the plans were altered to reduce costs. At this time the new colonial architect Edward John Woods took both office and the time to examine and further modify the plans between December 1877 and June 1878.

R.G. Thomas and E.J. Woods were both involved in the design controversy for the General Post Office which was completed in 1872. When the General Post Office was being built, R.G. Thomas was the colonial architect, making drastic modifications to the design which had been prepared by Wright & Woods! Now positions were completely reversed, as Woods was colonial architect and Thomas the designer. Perhaps, with an old score to settle, Woods altered Thomas' plans (giving the excuse of cost). The final design of the west wing was based on Thomas' plan but with the hands of both McMinn and Woods evident.

There was one more setback when it was suggested that the site could be used for the new Parliament House. After a barrage of petitions against this idea and another Royal Commission into the proposed sites for the new Parliament House, the building finally got underway in 1879. However, this was again delayed when it was found that the foundations of 1876 were not in a satisfactory state.

The superstructure was eventually built by Brown & Thompson for £36 395, but during August 1880 further modifications were made to the plans. The building was at last opened on 18 December 1884.

Cited from the Bierbaum files, a contemporary description gave the architecture as Romanesque:

The walls are built of hard brick with facing of Sydney freestone, with bands, columns, and other parts of Manoora stone of a darker shade, which will harmonize rather than contrast strongly with the general tone of the facing . . . The window and door openings are deeply recessed and semi-arched; those in pavilion wings at each end and in the staircase turrets are divided by mullions treated as columns or pilasters . . . the whole building is surmounted by a bold cornice and parapet, above which rise the roofs, that over the Library being constructed with a clerestory containing the windows which light the room from above.

One hundred years later in 1984 the Jervois Wing underwent major refurbishment and the upgrading of services for archival purposes. This work was undertaken by Danvers Architects. It was reopened in mid-1986 as the Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

MLSA, Bierbaum Files, historical photographs; PRO, GRG 19/353, sketch of proposed SA Institute Building, C.B. Richardson, 1877, drawing of library/museum complex, 1885-87, GRG 19/365 Minute book 1876-90 of Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, 22 March 1876, 24 April 1876, 2 August 1880, GRG 19/355 Minutes of board of governors, 9 July 1877, 7 June 1878, 13 June 1879, GRG 38/14/1/no. 239/23 June 1876; Public Buildings Department, *SA Museum redevelopment heritage study*, 1980, p. 4; SAPP, no. 23, 1874, pp. iv, 1, 44; *South Australian Government Gazette*, 11 September 1873, 27 November 1873, 2 February 1874; *South Australian Register*, 8 November 1879, supp. p. 1.

Heritage of the City of Adelaide

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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	JERVOIS WING STATE LIBRARY	Building N ^o
Address	North Terrace	126502

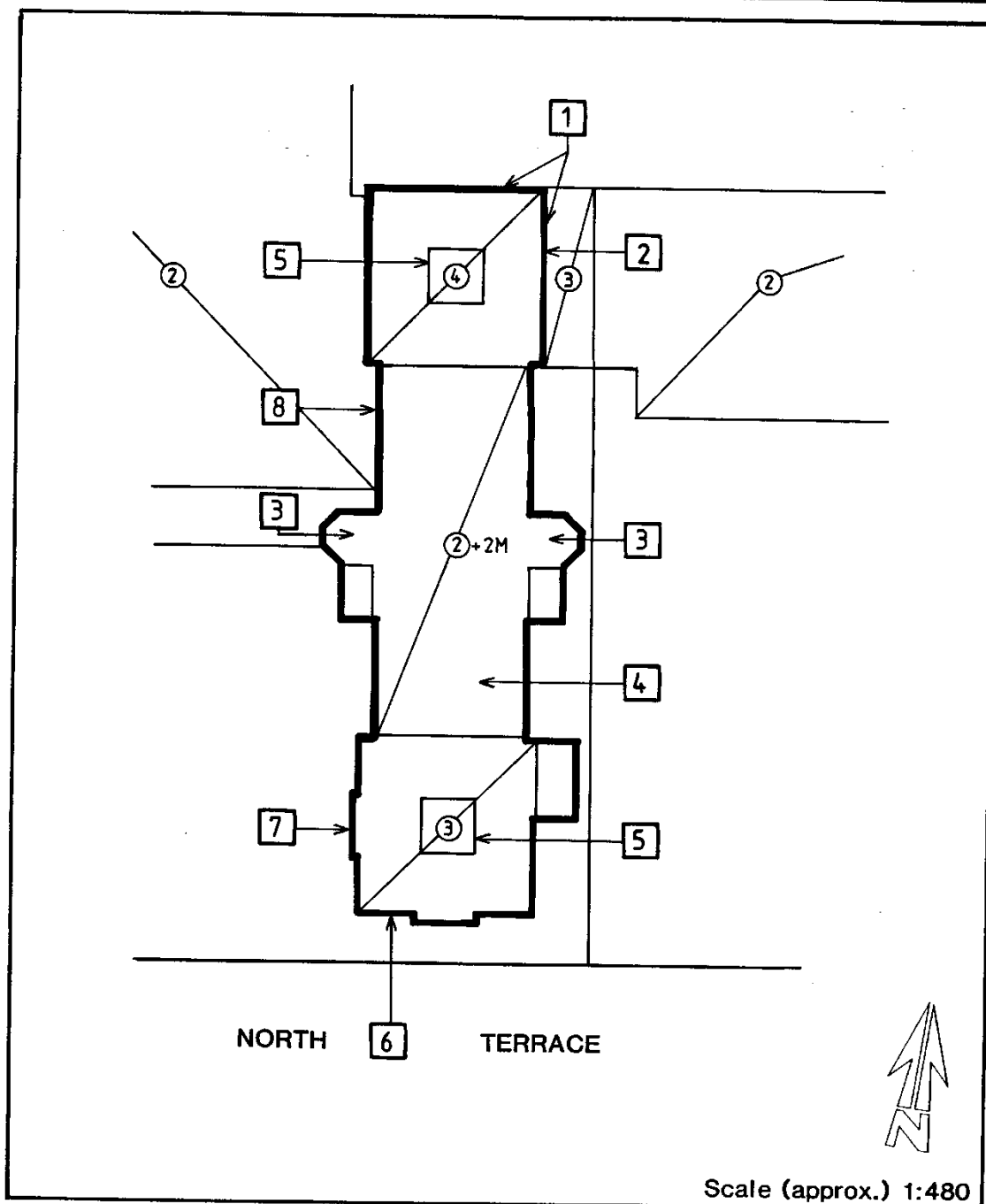


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Item JERVOIS WING STATE LIBRARY

Building No
126502

Address North Terrace

NOTES:

1. Red brick with bluestone plinth.
2. Note: Museum wing abuts building.
3. Spires with metal roofs and small dormer windows and finials.
4. Interior remains intact. Note: High central arched ceiling with timber beam supports and skylights; mezzanines; cast iron balustrades; ornate columns, original timber furniture and fittings.
5. Tiled mansard roof with widows walk.
6. Ashlar sandstone facade (all detailing in sandstone) and rock faced plinth.
7. Note: Arched windows and doorways.
8. Harsh juxtapositioning of new building.