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# Prahran Soldiers Memorial Hall



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prahran2.jpg

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## Location

293-303 High Street PRAHRAN, STONNINGTON CITY

## Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

## Level of significance

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## Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

## Veterans Description for Public

The Returned and Services League (RSL) was founded in 1916 to support serving and ex-service Defence Force members and their families. The first RSL headquarters were established in Melbourne; however, by the mid 1920s RSL branches were quickly established throughout Australia. By way of comparison, the Castlemaine RSL had already approached the Council about obtaining a grant of land for the construction of a hall in 1918. The RSL hall at 293-303 High Street was constructed as a war memorial to the Soldiers of Prahran. It was designed by Haddon & Henderson architects and constructed by W. Machin at a cost of £3,500.

The foundation stone of the building was laid on 25 August 1920. A report by the Mayor, records the event:

I had the honor of performing the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the clubrooms which are to be erected for the use of returned soldiers on the 25th August in the presence of a large number of people. On its completion, the new building will be handed over to the Prahran Branch of the Returned Soldiers' League unencumbered.. The new building is to occupy at the present fifty feet of the High Street frontage and will be of monumental classic design, two stories in height. The accommodation comprises a spacious entrance hall, leading to a large open club lounge and reading room, occupying one side of the site. On the other side are president's committee, and secretary's room and lavatory accommodation. The upper floor is approached by a spacious stairway from the north east corner, which leads into a fine general room to be fitted by the club with four billiard tables and other conveniences, as also a buffet. The design makes provisions for future extensions in the shape of an assembly hall at the rear of the present structure, such hall to include stage, dressing rooms and other accessories.

In fact, the final cost of the building (not including the architect's fees) was £3,942/8/5. Notice of the hall's completion, was sent to T. Romanins Esq (Town Clerk) on 17 June 1921. The original plans for the building were given to the Mayor (which may explain their absence from the Council's collection). Despite the RSL taking over responsibility for the building, Council retained ownership of the land, renting it out on a quarterly basis for the "rent of one peppercorn if demanded". The Council attached a number of conditions to the lease, including that the members of the RSL not fall below 25, that the hall only be used by the RSL, that no disorderly or offensive conduct take place or any party political meetings or meetings of a sectarian nature take place.

In 1926 an assembly hall was added to the structure (along the lines of that initially outlined in the Mayor's speech). There have been some alterations to the building since. Of note is the addition of a stage banner, featuring the words "We will remember them" measuring 5.5m x 4.3m that was painted by R. W. Bridges in 1949.

It is a two-storey building with a rendered facade in the Beaux Arts style, articulated by four rusticated pilasters. One is at either corner and terminates in a rendered globe above the cornice. The central two pilasters define the entry and their tops flank a segmented arched pediment which shows influence of the Arts & Crafts style. The pediment conceals a gabled roof clad in corrugated metal.

Inside, the entire west wall of the entrance hall is covered by an attractive Blackwood honour board. There is a doorway set into the middle of it, above which are two carved wreaths. The double doors are of matching varnished timber and have nine lights each at the top. Other doors in the entrance hall appear to have been replaced with standard four-panel doors.

Architect Robert Haddon was born in London in 1866 and emigrated to Melbourne in 1899. He established his own practice in 1901. William Henderson joined the practice in 1903 and in 1919 became a partner. Haddon was known as an innovative architect who's style can be considered within the context of the Art Nouveau movement. His architectural ideas are well communicated in his text *Australian Architecture*, which was published in 1908. He died in 1929.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*