
Freemasons' Hall (former)

Location

47 Myers Street, BENDIGO VIC 3550 - Property No 173832

Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO698

Heritage Listing

Greater Bendigo City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

Statement of significance.

The building at 47 Myers Street Bendigo, the first permanent home of Freemasonry in the city, c.1855, is of local historical, social, architectural and technological significance.

- Historically it is of the earliest period of development of Sandhurst, following the Larritt survey of 1854. It was also the first dedicated Freemasons Lodge building in the city.
- Socially it is notable for its connection with early Freemasonry, which in turn involved many of the most notable and influential members of the community, including the prominent architect, W.C. Vahland, the man responsible for many of the City and region's major buildings, including the extant Freemasons Hall 1874.
- Architecturally it is of interest as an expression of a basic early quasi-public building, further developed for a succession of different uses.
- Technologically it is important as one of Bendigo's first brick buildings.

VHC

A - historical associations; B - rarity; D - demonstrating principal characteristics of a type of place; G - social and cultural associations.

The built form and detail of the following extant elements.

- The 1855 hall and its structure.
- The north-east addition.
- The 1886 additions except the front verandah.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Greater Bendigo - Heritage Advisor report, City of Greater Bendigo, 2016;
Construction dates	1855, 1870, 1875, 1886,
Hermes Number	165359
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

The original hall, 1855

The original building, (or the hall as lengthened after 1857) is that part of the building below the rear longitudinal hipped roof on the Mundy Street side of the present building and behind the front rooms of the domestic structure facing the street. This roof has been extended to meet the transverse hipped roof over the two front rooms. The former hall is clearly recognizable by the roof form, the arrangement of piers within its perimeter walls and by the timber trusses at each pier.

The proposed 1857 work may not have occurred as the ceilings remain at c. 13 feet rather than 18 feet as requested and there is no clear evidence of an extension of 20 feet. The latter may have been intended at the front.

The roof structure is of Queen Post trusses, but the peak of the roof appears to have been added after removal of the clear storey. Extensions of the top chords of the trusses to the roof peak are of different timber and are crudely added. Based on the fact that the queen posts are roughly cut at the top, it is possible that they were extended upwards to support a clear storey roof at the peak of the hip. This hypothesis is supported by the early lack of windows in the external walls (see later alterations). The choice of Queen post trusses (with two vertical struts off-centre) rather than the more conventional King post trusses (with a single central vertical strut) normally used for plain gabled roofs supports the theory of a clear storey. The lack of a ceiling mentioned in the Ballinger notes was probably intentional, because the original trusses are dressed rather than rough sawn. This also supports the clear storey theory. The existing ceiling is of fibrous plaster suggesting an interwar origin.

It must be assumed that the building fronted Myers Street and it appears that the front of the roof was hipped, but any evidence of the front facade was not seen due to accessibility problems. It can be assumed to have had a parapet facade (possibly rendered) with decorative mouldings. The arched window and door at the rear (to the present kitchen) are probably original.

The hall appears to have had a central fireplace in its north east wall (the back projects beyond the side wall). The skirtings are of plain rendered finish, a form compatible with a basic semi-public hall built on a low budget.

The first addition, c 1870.

This is in the form of a skillion centrally positioned against the hall at the north east with the floor level one step down. The roof of this skillion extends above the eave of the original hall, possibly in anticipation of the raising of the hall ceiling. It contains a splayed fireplace in the western corner. Its original extent can clearly be seen in the

brickwork of the north-east wall. The wall between this section and the middle room on the north east side is 230mm thick and was constructed with the skillion section. The former function of this room is unclear. The entry to this room from the hall has required removal of a structural pier.

The consistency of the NAV from 1856 to 1861 suggests no substantial expansion of the building. The general unfinished nature of the exterior and roof form of this section suggests a project abandoned. This seems a reasonable assumption given that the Lodge was probably well advanced in its plans to move to View Street (from 1866).

Alterations for the Trustees Court Alexander A.O.F, c.1875 -1885.

It is assumed that the hall was adapted for office use at this stage. The changes made appear to be the group of four offices and central passage on the Mundy Street side, resulting in the inclusion of the pairs of single double hung windows on either side of the central entry. The structural piers were modified to allow the ordered placing of windows in the external facade, which was presumably rendered at this stage. The balance of the rear end of the hall was also subdivided to form the present kitchen, but it is unlikely that this was its function at the time. Another internal room appears to have been located in the north corner of the hall, with a small high level window still extant. Evidence of this room can be seen in the plaster repair to the walls and the brick base of the wall visible in the floor surface. The slightly lower floor of this element suggests that it may have been accessed from outside and some interference in the wall surface suggests a former door. The whole of the above work was in single skin brickwork.

Residential occupation from 1886.

The large jump in NAV from 30 pounds in 1885 to 70 pounds in 1887 indicates a considerable expansion in this period. This was undoubtedly the addition of the front two rooms and the second room on the north east side. The late Victorian architectural style of the work confirms this (bi or polychrome brick construction with hipped roof and front gablet and three part facade windows). The extension is clearly identified by the higher internal floor area (excluding that of the plasterboard lined internal partitions in the east corner of the original hall).

Subsequent changes.

Later works are relatively few as follows.

- Addition of the partitioned area in the east corner of the original hall.
- Introduction of a kitchen in the rear room.
- Conversion of the rear office to a strong room in 1979 for Cohen Kirby and Iser, resulting in the bricking up of the last window on the Mundy Street side. This window has since been reinstated.
- Removal of the 1886 front verandah and its later replacement with a poor attempt to reconstruct a Victorian style verandah.
- Various internal changes, new openings, partitions, etc.
- Addition of a toilet block at the north corner.
- Removal of the 1875 room in the north corner of the hall.
- Alterations to the rear verandah.

Integrity

Integrity generally: High

Physical Conditions

Major deficiencies:

Loss of former clear storey.
False ceilings to hall.

Poor quality verandah reconstruction to 1886 section.

Painting of 1886 brickwork.

Use of frontage setback for car parking.

Reversibility of changes:

No major works required.
Reconstructions of front verandah and hall clear storey are future options.

Condition general:

Good
Structurally:

Sound
Issues noted.
Nil

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/>