# FORMER NORTH MELBOURNE TOWN HALL AND MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS



North Melbourne Town Hall_KJ_Nov 09



3016 Hotham Town Hall Errol St Detail 02



3016 Hotham Town Hall Errol St Fountain 02



3016 Hotham Town Hall Municipal Buildings View 02



3016 Hotham Town Hall Queensberry St Door 02



3016 Hotham Town Hall Queensberry St Entrance 02



3016 Hotham Town Hall Queensberry St View 02



Municipal Buildings_North Melbourne_shops_KJ_Nov 09



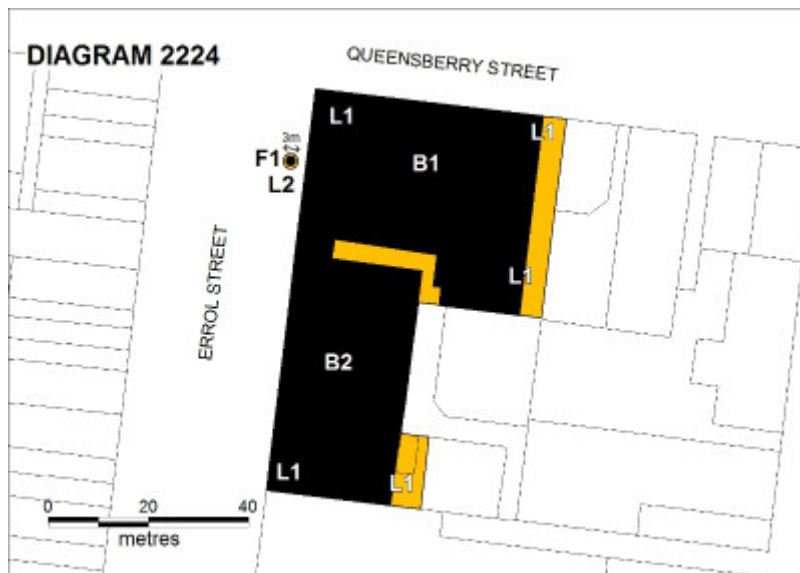Municipal Buildings_North Melbourne_shops_KJ_Nov 09



Municipal Buildings_North Melbourne_shops_KJ_Nov 09



North Melbourne Town Hall_Henderson Fountain detail_KJ_29 nov 09 (36).jpg



3016 Hotham Town Hall Cnr Queensberry and Errol Sts 02

north melb town hall plan.jpg

## Location

513 QUEENSBERRY STREET AND 52-68 ERROL STREET NORTH MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2224

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO987

## VHR Registration

March 11, 2010

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

## Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The former North Melbourne Town Hall, first known as the Hotham Town Hall, was built in 1875-6 to the competition-winning design of the architect George Johnson. It replaced the first town hall built in 1861. In 1859 Hotham was one of the first of the inner suburbs of Melbourne to become an independent municipality, the name changing to North Melbourne in 1887. The new Town Hall was built by David Parry, the contract price being £9,603.10.0, but it was eventually to cost about £20,000. It included a large hall and the municipal offices, which opened off Queensberry Street, and the Post and Telegraph Office and Courthouse opening off Errol Street. The corner tower was designed to have a clock and bells: the five bells, made in 1877 in Glasgow, were installed in 1878, and the clock, designed by the Government Astronomer Robert Ellery and made in Melbourne by Thomas Gaunt, was added in 1879. In 1881 Johnson drew up plans for a new Municipal Building, in a similar style to the Town Hall. It included a Mechanics Institute and Library, as well as eight shops to generate an income. The first stage, the north end of the present building, with two shops and a lecture hall behind on the ground floor and reading and billiards rooms on the first floor, was built by Delbridge and Thomas and was completed in 1883. Fallshaw Bros & Hodgson completed the remaining six shops in 1888. In 1886 Johnson also designed major alterations to the Town Hall: the main hall was extended by 20 ft and a stage and dressing rooms added, and a space for a supper room was created beneath the main stairs. The Henderson Fountain, cast in Glasgow in 1875 and donated by the Councillor and several times Mayor, Thomas Henderson, was placed opposite the Town Hall in the middle of Queensberry Street in 1877, and moved to its present location outside the post office in 1973. In 1905 North Melbourne was again amalgamated with the City of Melbourne, and the Town Hall was no longer the Municipal centre. However it continued to house some council services, including a child health centre, and the hall continued to be used for meetings and dances, and even briefly as a cinema. The Town Hall was converted for use as the Arts House in 1996. The north end of the Municipal Buildings is still used by the North Melbourne Library, while seven of the shops are still used for their original purpose.

The former North Melbourne Town Hall is a two-storey Free Classical style building with a clock tower. To the south, separated from the Town Hall by Johnson Lane, is the two storey North Melbourne Municipal Buildings, built to match the Town Hall, but with an impressive wide verandah. Both of the buildings are of brick on a bluestone base, and the street elevations are rendered. The entrance to the Town Hall and municipal offices is marked by a shallow portico in the centre of the Queensberry Street elevation. The main hall and offices are on the ground floor, and a grand staircase of cast iron with a timber handrail leads to the upper floor, with the Council Chamber and Meeting Room, the Mayor's Office and two former residences: one built for the Hall caretaker, the other for the Postmaster. Impressive cast iron gates close off the laneway to the east. On the Errol Street frontage of this building is a recessed arcade with the entrances to what were once the Post and Telegraph Office and the Court House, now the North Melbourne Post Office. The Library now occupies the northernmost end of the Municipal Buildings, and seven shops remain, all with their original shopfronts. The Henderson Fountain is an elaborate cast iron structure with a central basin covered by a canopy supported on four columns. The four bubblers above the central basin are surmounted by a kangaroo (restored in 2001).

How is it significant?

The former North Melbourne Town Hall and North Melbourne Municipal Buildings are of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The former North Melbourne Town Hall is architecturally significant as one of the earliest of the grand municipal buildings that characterised Victoria in the post-gold era. It is an outstanding and intact example of the grand town halls which were built in the inner suburbs of Melbourne in the 1870s and 1880s, and demonstrates the prosperity of these municipalities at the time. The shops in the Municipal Buildings are significant for their intact nineteenth century shopfronts, which form an exceptional group. Both buildings are architecturally significant for their association with George Johnson, one of Victoria's most important architects during this period, and the pre-eminent architect of town halls.

The former North Melbourne Town Hall and Municipal Buildings are historically significant as a demonstration of the wealth of Melbourne, and of its inner suburbs, in the period after the gold rushes. They are also significant for the residential quarters provided on the first floor of the Town Hall building for the caretaker and for the postmaster, and also above the shops in the Municipal Buildings, which demonstrate the nineteenth and early

twentieth century custom of workers residing at their place of employment. The clock and bells in the Town Hall tower are a reflection of the importance of these features to the community at a time when few people owned watches and public clocks were a necessity. The Henderson Fountain is significant as a reflection of the importance of such public facilities at the time, and its kangaroo centrepiece is an interesting demonstration of increasing nationalism in the young colony.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must notify the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions here.

### Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

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|---|---|
| Construction dates | 1875, 1883, 1888, |
| Architect/Designer | Johnson, George R, |
| Heritage Act Categories | Registered place, |
| Other Names | The Arts House,   Hotham Town Hall, |
| Hermes Number | 3016 |
| Property Number | |

## History

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

In the 1870s and 1880s Victoria's municipal governments built impressive classical town halls which symbolised their prosperity and became and remain powerful symbols of public identity. All had council chambers, municipal offices, and a large hall that was the town's principal entertainment centre. They might also include a post and telegraph office, a courthouse, library and spaces for cultural and educational activities. A Classical style was considered most appropriate for such civic buildings.

The pre-eminent town hall architect was George Raymond Johnson, who in his day was noted as a builder of theatres, few of which have survived, and his fame now rests largely on his seven remaining town halls.

### The architect: George Johnson (1840-1898)

[George Tibbits, Peter Johnson, 'Johnson, George Raymond (1840 - 1898)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Supplementary Volume, Melbourne University Press, 2005, pp 202-203.]

George Johnson, architect and surveyor, was born in 1840 in Middlesex. He was articled to George Hall, architect to the Midlands Railway Co., and then worked in London, before leaving for Queensland in 1862. In Brisbane he joined John Townsend Godfrey as a house- and ship-builder and claimed experience in both London and New York. In 1863 they had contracts for the Toowoomba Gaol, Woogaroo Asylum and Woogaroo Congregational Church, but the partnership was insolvent by April 1864. In 1865 Johnson was at Bowen and next year was licensee of the Criterion Hotel, Townsville.

Again in financial difficulties, in 1867 he moved to Melbourne, where he began modestly, building cottages, villas and small hotels; he may have gained clients through Masonic connections, though many commissions came from competitions. His earliest works included cottages for the Old Colonists' Association (1869), Fitzroy; the Eastern Arcade (1872), Bourke Street; the New German Club (1878), Adelaide; and the Austin Hospital for Incurables (1881), Melbourne.

His town halls mostly had landmark towers and the distinctive and powerful designs that sustained Johnson's reputation. They were at Hotham (North Melbourne, 1875), Collingwood (1885), Fitzroy (1887, an addition to the first part by W. J. Ellis) and Northcote (1888), in Melbourne, and at Daylesford (1882), Maryborough (1887) and Kilmore (1893). These were all classical designs with bold and rich character from Johnson's mannerist palette, an idiom in which he was a master. Another of his dominating classical works, featuring giant Corinthian pilasters, was the Metropolitan Meat Market (1879), North Melbourne.

He was a prolific architect of theatres, long since demolished or radically altered, including the Prince of Wales Opera House (1872), the Cyclorama (1888) and the Bijou Theatre (1889), Melbourne, the Theatre Royal (1878), Adelaide, the Criterion Theatre (1886), Sydney, and the early plans for Her Majesty's opera houses in Sydney (1883) and Brisbane (1884). Johnson's greatest contemporary acclaim came from his design for the extensive and wonderful Centennial Exhibition complex (1887), which he added with sensitive deference to the northern side of the earlier Exhibition Building (1880), by Reed & Barnes.

During the financial depression of the early 1890s, Johnson sought opportunities elsewhere. In Western Australia he worked on the Theatre Royal (1896), Perth. While returning to Melbourne in the *Pilbarra,* he took ill and died of septicaemia on 25 November 1898 at sea.

HISTORY OF PLACE

[Information from Bill Hannan, *Pride of Hotham. A tale of North Melbourne and a red-headed architect*, North Melbourne 2006]

Created in 1855, Hotham in 1859 became one of the first of the inner suburbs of Melbourne to become an independent municipality. Known as Hotham until 1887, when it became North Melbourne, it was named for Victorian Governor Sir Charles Hotham, whose family coat-of-arms was adapted for use by the municipality, seen on the town hall and the fountain in front.

The site for a town hall was chosen in 1861 and permanently reserved for municipal buildings in 1870. The first town hall, designed by the architect John Flannagan, was built in 1862 at a cost of £1200. It was described as a plain unpretentious building, but no images of it survive.

In the early 1870s the Hotham councillors decided to build on a grander scale. A competition for a town hall design, which was to include a Courthouse and Post and Telegraph office fronting Errol Street, was announced in 1874. It was to be a two-storey classical style building with a tower and was to cost no more than £9,000. The municipal rooms specified were a Town Hall 80 x 40 ft, a Town Clerk's office 14 x 12 ft, an office for the Inspector of Weights and Measures and Nuisances 14 x 12, a Mayor's Room 16 x 16, a Councillors' and Committee Room 25 x 16, Council Chambers 40 x 20, and a strong room 10 x 8. There was also to be a library 40 x 22. The winner of the competition was George Johnson.

Tenders were called on 22 March 1875, and the contract was awarded to David Parry for a price of £9,603.10.0. The old town hall was sold for £360.4.9 and was demolished. The foundation stone (which has never been identified) was laid on 1 May 1875. The exterior was completed by 25 May 1876, and the Opening Ceremony and Ball were held on 27 June 1876. The new building was eventually to cost about £20,000. On the ground floor were the main hall and municipal rooms opening off Queensberry Street, and opening off Errol Street were the post office and courthouse. On the ground floor also were cloakrooms and toilet facilities. On the first floor were a meeting room, offices, mayor's room, council chamber, and two residences: one for the Hall-keeper or caretaker, who was to be a married man without children, and larger quarters for the postmaster.

The wrought iron gates at the north end of the alley on the east side of the building were added in 1877.

The Henderson Fountain

In 1877 the Henderson Fountain, fed by Yan Yean water, was placed on the road in Queensberry Street, near the present cast iron urinal. It was cast in Glasgow in 1875 by the Saracen Foundry, and was donated by the Councillor and several times Mayor Thomas Henderson as a public drinking fountain. In 1882 it was moved to the footpath on the corner of Errol and Queensberry Streets. It originally had four metal cups chained to four water spouts, but these were abandoned after the 1917-8 flu epidemic and the ornate centrepiece was replaced with an ordinary bubbler, though the canopy was retained. In 1973 it was moved again, to its present location, further from the kerb. In 2001 it was restored to its original design, with the kangaroo in the centre, the restoration based on similar examples in Bathurst and Castlemaine.

The clock and bells

In 1878 the five bells, part of yet to be installed clock, were installed in the tower. The bells (which no longer ring) were made in 1877 in Glasgow by John C Wilson & Co, and cost (installed) £677.10.11. The clock, a necessity in the days before cheap watches, was designed by the Government Astronomer, Robert Ellery, one of the colony's chief scientists, and was installed in 1879 at a cost of £672.11.5. It was made by Thomas Gaunt of Bourke Street, a major figure in clock-making in Australia, who made the clocks for the GPO, the Town Halls at South Melbourne, Collingwood and Bendigo, among others, as well as the Gog and Magog in the Royal Arcade and the Chronograph for timing the races at Flemington Racecourse. The clock was converted to run off electricity in the mid-twentieth century.

The North Melbourne Municipal Building

Although a library was intended to be part of the original Town Hall design, the first library was a modest affair in what became the upper meeting room, which was more often used as a supper room. Council in 1881 proposed to build a new library and reading room on vacant municipal land to the south on Errol Street, together with shops which would generate an income. Johnson made sketch plans in 1881, and in 1882 tenders were called for the first stage, with a 'Library, Reading Room, Classroom and 2 Shops'. Descriptions soon included reference to it as a Mechanics Institute. The contact was awarded to Delbridge & Thomas for £5,645, and it was built in 1883. On the ground floor were two shops with a lecture hall behind (now the library and one shop), and on the first floor were separate reading rooms for ladies and gentlemen and a billiards room. In 1887 Fallshaw Bros & Hodgson leased the remainder of the land to the south and completed another six shops in 1888.

In 1886 Johnson also designed major alterations to the earlier building: the main hall was extended by 20 ft and a stage added, and a space for a supper room was created beneath the main stairs.

The name Hotham for the suburb was changed to North Melbourne in 1887. In 1905 North Melbourne was again amalgamated (together with Flemington and Kensington) with Melbourne to form Greater Melbourne, and the Council moved out of the Town Hall. It continued to house a few council services - a child health centre on the corner and some rate collecting inside. The Post Office expanded further and a caretaker remained on the premises for a long time. The Hall continued to be used for public meetings, dances and concerts. It housed army facilities during WW2 and served for a while as a cinema - the platform for the projector room is still there, or was until lately. The Red Book fair was an annual event for a good while. It was also commonly used as a voting booth. It was converted for use as the Arts House in 1996.

## Assessment Against Criteria

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

The former North Melbourne Town Hall is a demonstration of the wealth of Melbourne, and of its inner suburbs, in the period after the gold rushes, and also reflects the changes which occurred in local government in Melbourne during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The residential quarters provided on the first floor for the caretaker and for the postmaster, and also those above the shops in the Municipal Buildings, demonstrate the nineteenth and early twentieth century custom of workers residing at their place of employment. The clock and bells in the Town Hall tower reflect the importance of these features to the community at a time when few people owned watches and public clocks were a necessity. The Henderson Fountain is a reflection of the importance of public water facilities at the time, and its kangaroo is an interesting demonstration of increasing nationalism in the colony.

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

The former North Melbourne Town Hall is one of the earliest of the grand municipal buildings that characterised Victoria in the post-gold era. It is an outstanding and intact example of the grand town halls which were built in the inner suburbs of Melbourne in the 1870s and 1880s, and demonstrates the prosperity of these municipalities at the time. The shops along Errol Street form an outstanding group with intact nineteenth century shopfronts.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

The former North Melbourne Town Hall and Municipal Buildings were designed by George Johnson, one of Victoria's most important architects during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the pre-eminent

architect of town halls.

## Plaque Citation

Designed by the architect George Johnson, this Classical style Town Hall, with a Post Office and Courthouse, was built in 1875-6, and the Municipal Buildings, with eight shops, a Mechanics Institute and Library, in 1883-8.

## Extent of Registration

1. All the land marked L1 and L2 on Diagram 2224 held by the Executive Director, being the Crown Land described as Allotment 10, Section 2, Parish of Jika Jika at North Melbourne and part of the Errol Street road reserve.

2. All the buildings B1 and B2 and feature marked F1 on Diagram 2224 held by the Executive Director.

B1 Town Hall
B2 North Melbourne Municipal Buildings

F1 Henderson Fountain