Former Masonic Temple and Hall,
36 St Edmonds Road and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran

Heritage Place: Former Masonic Temple and Hall
Address: 36 St Edmonds Road and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran

HO Reference: HO778
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: Francis G. Gibbons
Builder: Messrs. R. A. Dixon and Son

Year of Construction: 1924



Photograph of Former Masonic Temple and Hall at 36 St Edmonds Road and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Location map and extent of the Former Masonic Temple and Hall at 36 St Edmonds Road and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran.

Heritage Group: Community Facilities
Heritage Type: Hall, Masonic

Key Theme: Community and culture
Key Sub-theme: Helping other people

Significance Level: Local

Controls:	☐	External paint controls	☐	Internal alteration controls	☐	Tree controls
	☐	Include on Victorian Heritage Register	☐	Incorporated Plans	☐	Outbuildings and fences not exempt
	☐	Prohibited uses may be permitted	☐	Aboriginal Heritage Place	■	Solar energy system controls

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 36 St Edmonds Road, Prahran and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran (otherwise known as the Former Masonic Temple and Hall), is significant. Specifically, the form, detailing, materials and fenestration of the interwar Masonic Temple and Hall, is of local heritage significance. Alterations and additions to the property, including the rear extension at 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran, are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Former Masonic Temple and Hall is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The Former Masonic Temple and Hall is of historical significance as a Masonic Temple and Hall that was established in the interwar period following the growing popularity of freemasonry after World War I. The building not only illustrates the proliferation of Masonic groups within the City of Stonnington during this period, which culminated in a legacy of buildings associated with Freemasonry across Prahran and Malvern, but also demonstrates the important cultural, charitable and recreational role freemasonry once played in the municipality. It is also noted for having served the community from its inception until the late twentieth century for various freemasonry and community events, and thereby forms a tangible link to community culture in the City of Stonnington. (Criterion A)

The Former Masonic Temple and Hall is of representative significance as an intact interwar era Masonic Temple and Hall. It exhibits all the key features associated with this typology, including the distinct combination of Free Classical features and Masonic iconography, as demonstrated in its symmetrical composition, stucco finish, Tuscan columns, flat parapet with dentils, festoons and an entablature. These features, combined with its imposing scale, lend the building a formal landmark quality that is characteristic of interwar Freemasonry architecture. (Criterion D)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Former Masonic Temple and Hall is of historical significance as a Masonic Temple and Hall that was established in the interwar period following the growing popularity of freemasonry after World War I. The building not only illustrates the proliferation of Masonic groups within the City of Stonnington during this period, which culminated in a legacy of buildings associated with Freemasonry across Prahran and Malvern, but also demonstrates the important cultural role freemasonry played in the municipality. It is also noted for having served the community from its inception until the late twentieth century for various freemasonry

		and community events, and thereby forms a tangible link to community culture in the City of Stonnington.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	The Former Masonic Temple and Hall is of representative significance as an intact interwar era Masonic Temple and Hall. It exhibits all the key features associated with this typology, including the distinct combination of Free Classical features and Masonic iconography, as demonstrated in its symmetrical composition, stucco finish, Tuscan columns, flat parapet with dentils, festoons and an entablature. These features, combined with its imposing scale, lend the building a formal landmark quality that is characteristic of interwar Freemasonry architecture.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	This place does not meet this criterion.
F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	This place does not meet this criterion.
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 the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	This place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

- ### Physical Analysis

The Former Masonic Temple and Hall at 36 St Edmonds Road and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran consists of a two-storey interwar era Masonic building distinguished by its use of Free Classical style features and Masonic iconography. The structure occupies a large allotment and fronts St Edmonds Road to the west and Macquarie Street to the east. The masonry structure is finished with stucco. The roof consists of hipped and open gabled sections clad with corrugated sheet metal which remains largely obscured from view by the flat parapet with dentils. The exception to this is the open gable section directly above the main entrance that is visible along St Edmonds Road.

The façade fronts St Edmonds Road. With the exception of the visible open gabled roof section, the façade presents a balanced form with an almost symmetrical composition. The façade is subtly demarcated into five bays. The main central bay features a projecting upper level, supported on two Roman Tuscan columns with two single timber sash windows and a shared expressed sill in between. Meanwhile, the upper level of the projecting bay features a semi-circular window with an expressed sill with three equally spaced dentils, and a sill course with dentils joining the label mould. The window features a central circular pane bearing the Masonic symbol encircled by lettering reading 'THE UNITED SOUTHERN MASONIC HALL LIMITED' and "SPECTEMUR AGENDO". The crowning entablature includes a moulded cornice with shaped consoles under moulded capital lettering reading 'TEMPLE'.

The bays flanking the central bay are largely symmetrical in composition. The bay to the left includes three timber sash windows with an expressed sill, while the bay to the right includes two timber sash windows with a shared sill. This is to accommodate the recessed main entrance, which formerly included a portico that has since been demolished. The portico and painted concrete floor threshold, houses the timber ledged and braced double doors with four fixed top light panes and a side bullseye window with leadlight textured and stained glass forming a logo motif. The upper levels of both bays are symmetrically arranged, each consisting of a bank of four single timber sash windows with a shared expressed sill and alternating engaged piers in between. Topping the façade under the parapet is a central expressed Masonic symbol with festoons on both sides.

The flanking corner bays are smaller in width and feature alternating expressed horizontal banding on the ground level. The upper level includes one timber sash window with an expressed sill and an expressed level course with dentils. The corner bay to the south features an inset painted notice plaque topped with a nib mould with dentils. The plaque is painted black with gold lettering and border, highly weathered in sections, reading '*UNITED SOUTHERN MASONIC HALL LTD. REGISTERED OFFICE*. *Particulars of letting from Hallkeeper R. Jones (...)3 Brandon St…*'.

In contrast, the building's northern elevation is asymmetrically arranged. The alternating expressed horizontal banding is extended along the ground level which also houses two secondary entrances and a number of small louvred windows and one timber sash window. The larger of the two entrances is recessed and consists of double timber ledged and braced doors. The threshold is defined by a cantilevered concrete skillion awning with moulded lettering to the entrance reading 'LECTURE HALL'. Located east of the larger entrance is another set of double

timber doors, defined by engaged piers and topped with a nib mould with dentils. The upper level is visually demarcated into two bays defined by the fenestration and stepped parapet. The shorter bay along the corner includes a central blind opening with the lower parapet section detailed with a level course with dentils and console mouldings.

Located off the northern elevation is a single storey wing. This wing includes a main entrance under a projecting portico supported on two Roman Tuscan Columns. The portico presents an entablature with a moulded corner and pediment form with dentils. Located north of the entrance and portico is a central pair of sash windows. A decorative entablature sits above the windows with scroll mouldings, dentils, consoles, and expressed capital lettering reading 'HALL'. Festoons are located on either side of the decorative entablature.

The main structure presents no setback from the property boundary along its façade to St Edmonds Road. The northern elevation and single-storey wing open on an open bitumen laid parking area. The street front boundary along the corner is partially demarcated by two piers with a stacked rectilinear form topped with a half round precast ball moulding. The piers include black wrought iron gates that feature the Masonic symbol. The Former Masonic Temple and Hall also includes a rear gable roofed section to the west. This rear two-storey structure fronts Macquarie Street with no setback and consists of face red brick laid with a stretcher bond.

The Former Masonic Temple and Hall is finished with stucco that appears highly weathered and stained. In addition, major cracking of the external face can be seen throughout. Timber window frames also appear highly weathered in sections. Some wall mounted accretions are highly rusted and downpipe brackets are left unconnected on the façade. The painted inset plaque beside the main entrance from St Edmonds Road is in poor condition and illegible at its lower half. The building is affected by graffiti, especially along its rear elevation fronting Macquarie Street. As such, the Former Masonic Temple and Hall is in fair condition overall.

The original massing, form, fenestration arrangement and detailing appear highly intact. Major external alterations are limited to the demolition of the former main entrance portico, likely to accommodate road widening works. While the removal has seen the loss of an important element to the building, the refurbishment of the affected section has been largely sympathetic to the form and detailing of the building. As such, the Former Masonic Temple and Hall is of moderate to high integrity.

- Alterations and Additions

- Original portico along the front façade demolished and replaced with present recessed entrance and sympathetic detailing to the corner bay (after 1954).
- Historical alterations include to the kitchen (1969), new roof sheeting and gutters (1973), and refurbishments to the Lodge Room (1980).
- Refurbishment of the brick north hall wall comprising of partial demolition and rebuild (1993).
- New portico entrance and security grills added to the windows (1993).
- Internal alterations to hall to accommodate use as an office building (2006).
- Ground floor sash window at the central bay along the façade replaced with a twelve-pane upper sash.
- Contemporary red timber door added to the northern single-storey wing portico.
- Roof reclad with new corrugated sheet metal (2016).

- Internal alterations to the Lodge Room (2019).
- Minor accretions include new rainwater goods and flashing, exposed piping and vents along the front façade, and wall mounted commercial advertising.

History

• Historical Context

The area presently known as Stonnington is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the East Kulin Nation. Formerly characterised by pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot) and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), this once thriving habitat provided Traditional Owners access to a range of water, plant and animal resources integral to their way of life. The onset of colonialism not only saw the transformation of these landscapes, but also Woi wurrung and Bunurong displacement through violence and land dispossession, as is evident in the establishment of George Langhorne's Aboriginal Mission Station Reserve along the southern banks of the Yarra River in present day Prahran and Toorak. Operating under the guise of 'protection', this reserve ultimately became a focal point for segregation, dislocation, and colonial control of Aboriginal people's lives (Context Pty Ltd 2006, 31).

Despite decades of ongoing dispossession, the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington has an enduring presence to this day. Through continued resistance and the passing down of Indigenous knowledge, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people maintain an ongoing connection to, and care for Country.

European settlement in what would become the suburb of Prahran grew gradually following the 1849-1850 Crown Land Sales, which saw the subdivision of land bounded by present day Toorak Road, Orrong Road, Dandenong Road and Punt Road into fifty-one allotments (Context Pty Ltd 2006, 39). George Langhorne, the Commissioner of an 1837 Aboriginal mission in the area south of the Yarra River around Punt Hill, called this area 'Pura-ra-ran', a compound of two Bunurong words believed to mean land partially surrounded by water (O'Callaghan 1922, 54). In 1840 the name was changed to Prahran for official use.

While higher ground overlooking the Yarra to the north of Prahran was quickly acquired and settled by the colonial elite following the 1840 Crown Land Sales, the majority of present-day Prahran, being of poorly drained low-lying land characterised by wetlands, was primarily purchased by land speculators. These areas were subsequently and re-sold for farming, industry and housing the working classes. The high level of natural deposits of alluvial clay in the area meant that pockets of low-lying land were used as brickyards (Context Pty Ltd 2006, 17). By 1856, the land encompassing Prahran was primarily characterised by a scattered series of timber and brick workers cottages set on narrow allotments to the west of Williams Road, while land to the east and south remained undeveloped or in use as paddocks (Surveyor-General's Department 1856). The area was also distinguished by its strong market garden character during this period, with much of the land awaiting development being used for cultivation during the 1850s and 1860s (Malone 1983, 12).

The area underwent a period of rapid change following the 1880s land boom, which spurred the replacement of many small, mid-nineteenth century cottages with more ornate, single-fronted Victorian and Edwardian style terraces that could house the influx of factory workers as part of

the area's growing brick manufacturing, food processing and textiles industries around Chapel Street and Commercial Road. Additionally, upper-middle class enclaves and mansion estates in the formerly undeveloped area of eastern Prahran were also developed to house the wealthy settling adjacent to the suburb of Armadale (Malone 2000, 20). Comprising higher ground with no major drainage problems, this area attracted comparably wealthier residents (Malone 2003, 1). These transformations were also compounded by the construction of impressively detailed shops along Chapel Street, solidifying the strip as a popular retail and commercial centre by the late nineteenth century (Allom Lovell 2000, 45).

Pockets of the suburb continued to be used as a centre for small-scale manufacturing into the early- and mid-twentieth centuries. Although business restructuring and trade liberalisation in the late twentieth century ultimately resulted in the closure and demolition of many of these factories, built remnants of this era can be seen at the c.1910 Former Kia-ora Cordial factory chimney at 181-187 High Street, Prahran and at the former milliner factory at Grattan Street, Prahran (Context Pty Ltd 2006, 95). Today, Prahran's working-class history is best represented through the relatively modest late nineteenth and early twentieth century single fronted cottages and dwellings that dominate the suburb's building stock. Meanwhile, traces of late nineteenth century middle-class residential development are best seen in the grand Victorian dwellings adjacent to Armadale along Grandview Grove.

• Place History

The land on which the former Masonic Hall and Temple currently sits was part of Lot 41 during the 1849-50 Crown Land Sales (City of Stonnington 2006, 39). Purchased by merchant Hugh Glass and solicitor Thomas Budds Payne as tenants in common, this allotment measured thirty-four acres, two roods and twelve perches (Division of Survey and Mapping c. 1850). In the 1850s, subdivisions of Lots 40 and 41 resulted in the small streets of St. Edmonds Road and Macquarie Street to maximise the return for developers in cheap rented cottages on small allotments (Malone 1999, 3). By 1856, this area, the site and surrounds of the Former Masonic Temple and Hall was characterised by a scattering of buildings (Figure 1).



Figure 1. 1856 map showing approximate location of the Former Masonic Temple and Hall (then occupied by another freestanding dwelling) in red. This building would be demolished by 1896. *Source:* Public Record Office Victoria.

As depicted in an 1896 MMBW map, these early mid nineteenth century buildings were largely either demolished and/or replaced during the 1880s land boom years, and the site of the Former Masonic Temple and Hall is shown as vacant (see Figure 2).

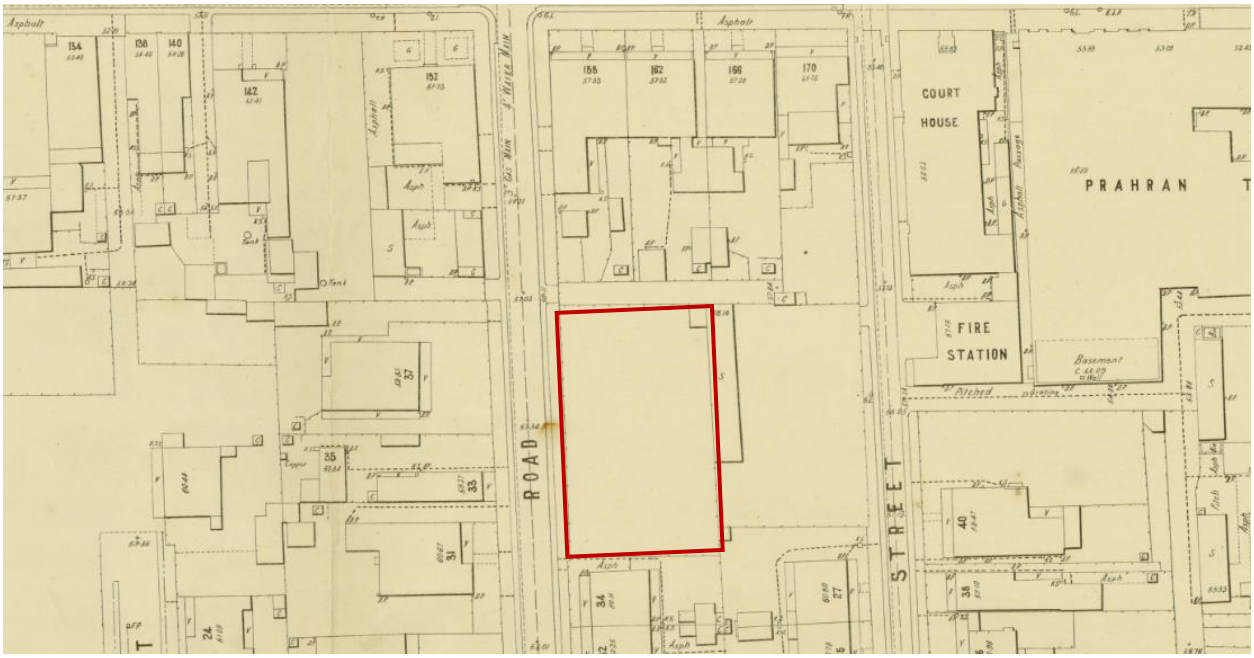


Figure 2. 1896 MMBW detail plan 961 showing the site the Former Masonic Temple and Hall (then a vacant allotment) in red. *Source*: State Library of Victoria.

In 1888, a Masonic Hall Company was formed for the purpose of establishing a Masonic Hall in Prahran (The Telegraph, St. Kilda, Prahran and South Yarra Guardian 1888, 5). According to a newspaper article published in August 1924, the interwar growth of Freemasonry in the City of Prahran caused four Masonic lodges in the district to form another company named United Southern Masonic Hall Limited, again, for the purpose of erecting a new temple and hall to meet the ever-growing needs of the district (The Argus 1924, 11). Indeed, the proliferation of Masonic groups within the municipality after World War I would culminate in a legacy of buildings associated with Freemasonry across Prahran and Malvern. Freemasonry comprised fraternal organisations dedicated to self-improvement, mutual support and community work.

The Masonic Temple and Hall was subsequently built on vacant land at 36 St. Edmonds Street in 1924 by Messrs. R. A. Dixon and Son to designs by architect Francis G. Gibbons of Chancery Lane, Melbourne (The Argus 1924, 11). The completed temple and hall fronted St Edmonds Street in the vicinity of Prahran's railway station, and comprised a two-storey building featuring a lodge portion of the temple, two public halls with prepared ballroom floors, stage and dressing-rooms, conveniences, cloak-rooms, with caterer's kitchens that included gas cookers (The Prahran Telegraph 1924, 6) (see Figure 3). One hall seated 800 persons, and the other, 400. A letter to the editor in a 1928 newspaper indicated that dilapidated outbuildings and fencing existed on the north side of the Temple in early days, with the writer suggesting these blights on the Temple's external surroundings could be tidied up (The Prahran Telegraph 1928, 5).

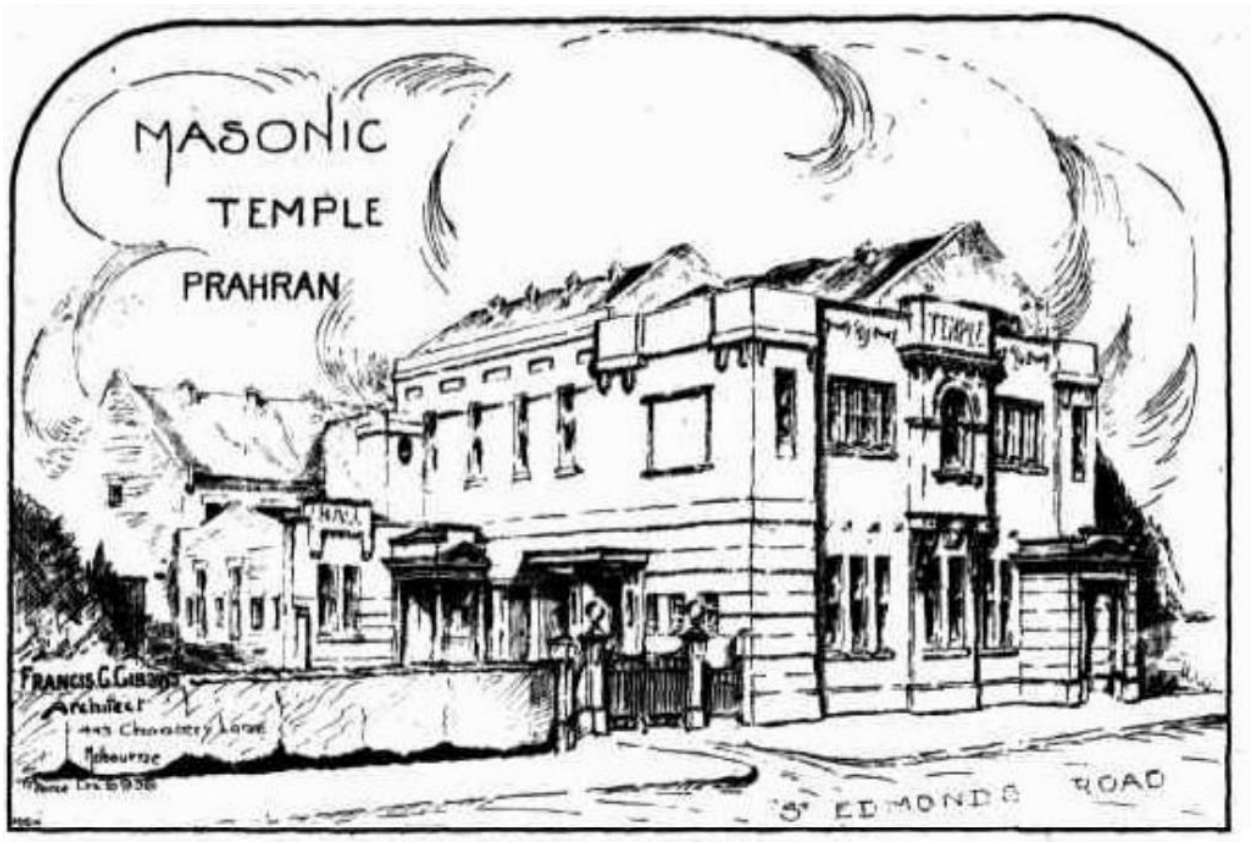


Figure 3. 1926 drawing of the Former Masonic Temple and Hall. *Source:* The Prahran Telegraph.



Figure 4. 1954 aerial view showing the Former Masonic Temple and Hall. *Source*: Museums Victoria

Throughout the twentieth century, a variety of functions and activities were held at the building, including Masonic Dances, wedding receptions and presentations (Wilde 1993, 261; Table Talk 1938). Internal improvements were made to the first-floor toilets in 1979-80, and further repairs were carried out to the existing lodge room in 1980 (City of Prahran Building Permit 1980).

In 2006, the interior of the temple building was converted into an office space (City of Prahran Property File 2006-14). As of 2023, the building is leased by various businesses as both an office space and a dance studio.

Comparative Analysis

The nineteenth century proliferation of Masonic groups within the City of Stonnington culminated in a legacy of buildings with strong associations with Freemasonry across Prahran and Malvern (John Statham and Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd 2009). Typically designed in the Classical Revival style with Masonic iconography only a handful remain in the City of Stonnington that can be directly compared to the Former Masonic Temple and Hall at 36 Edmonds Road and 29 Macquarie Street, Prahran. These include:

- **Former Morton Ray Masonic Temple, 945-947 Dandenong Road, Malvern East (HO381).** Built in 1922 to designs by Leslie J. W. Reed, the Former Morton Ray Masonic Temple is a substantial and imposing example of an Interwar Free Classical Masonic building. Although more monumental than the Former Masonic Temple and Hall due to its landmark appearance and over scaled elements, it nevertheless shares several key features, including the use of Masonic iconography, adoption of Classical elements, and a formal symmetrical composition. It has similarly undergone several alterations, although they are largely sympathetic and/or obscured from view.
- **Former United Friendly Society Hall, 14 Valetta Street, Malvern (HO667 interim control).** Designed in the interwar period to designs by noted architects Hudson & Wardrop, this building is a comparably modest and undistinguished example of the former Masonic hall. While it shares several similarities to the Former Masonic Temple and Hall, including smooth rendered walls of brick, and incorporation of Classical Revival elements, including Doric pilasters and a front parapet with returns on either side, its integrity has been compromised by conversion into a residence. Noted alterations include the replacement of the original fenestration and entrance door with Victorian era proportions.

The Former Masonic Temple and Hall can otherwise be compared to interwar era Masonic buildings outside of the municipality. These include:

- **Masonic Centre, 12 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell (HO539 Boroondara City).** Constructed in 1923 by local Lodge member L. F. Lewellen to designs by architects Gawler & Drummond, the Masonic Centre in Camberwell comprises a two-storey Classical Revival style building. Although more refined than the Former Masonic Temple and Hall due to its highly intact expressive entrance portico and entablature, it nevertheless compares in terms of its monumental scale, use of rendered brick, and incorporation of Masonic iconography and Classical derived elements, including a symmetrical composition, Ionic columns and dentils.

As per the above comparative analysis, aside from the aforementioned Former Morton Ray Masonic Temple in Malvern East (HO381), the only other known surviving Masonic Hall in the

municipality is at 14 Valetta Street, Malvern (HO667 interim control), however this building ultimately does not compare well to the subject site in terms of intactness. While the Former Masonic Temple and Hall ultimately lacks the landmark character of the Former Morton Ray Masonic Temple (HO381), it is otherwise distinguished by its expressive façade detailing and intact hall, the latter of which is not a feature at the Former Morton Ray Masonic Temple (HO381) nor the Masonic Centre at the Masonic Centre (HO539 Borrondara City) at Camberwell.

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Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain as well as desktop resources.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

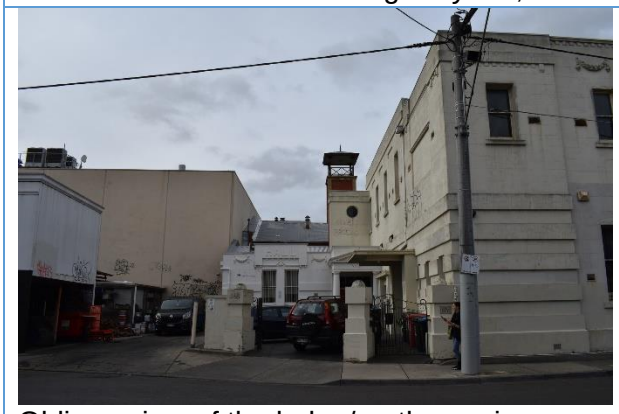
Images



Oblique view of the façade from St Edmonds Road. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Oblique view of the façade from St Edmonds Road. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Oblique view of the lodge/northern wing. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Oblique view of the northern elevation. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Close up view of the window detailing along the front façade. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Close up view of the window detailing along the front façade. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the entrance gate and piers. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the fenestration and detailing along the northern elevation. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Closeup view of the wrought iron gate. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the fenestration and detailing along the hall/ northern wing. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



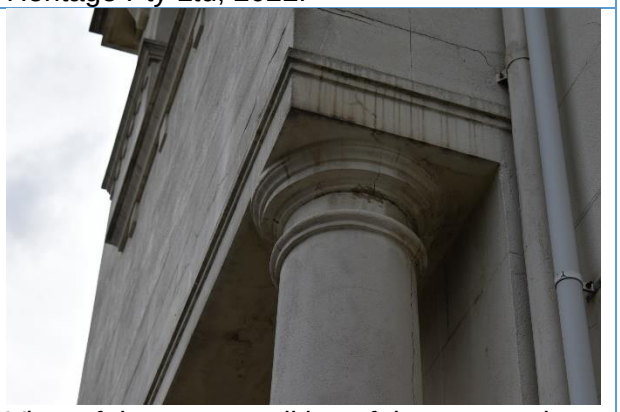
Oblique view of the front façade. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the rusted elements and poor condition of the stucco. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View cracking visible on the northern wing portico. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the poor condition of the stucco along the front façade. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the poor condition of the stucco and graffiti along the northern elevation. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of the weathered inset plaque beside the main entrance along the front façade. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.

Authors

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