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University of Adelaide



Official Opening and Inspection of the Bonython Hall

By

His Excellency Brigadier-General the Right Honourable
Lord Gowrie, *PC.*, G.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.

Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

September 8, 1936

Printed at The Hassell Press, Adelaide
1936

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P1986

“FOR YEARS PAST I HAVE HAD IT IN MY MIND TO PROVIDE THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE WITH A GREAT HALL SIMILAR TO THE HALLS POSSESSED BY THE UNIVERSITIES OF MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY. WHENEVER I HAVE VISITED UNIVERSITIES ELSEWHERE THEIR HALLS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TO ME PLACES OF SPECIAL AND PECULIAR INTEREST. WITH THE CONSENT OF THE COUNCIL I PROPOSE TO MAKE PROVISION FOR SUCH A HALL FORMING PART OF THE EQUIPMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE.”

At a special meeting of the Council called to consider this letter from Sir Langdon, it was unanimously resolved:


“The Council of the University of Adelaide accepts with the greatest readiness and pleasure the munificent offer of the Honourable Sir Langdon Bonython, K.C.M.G., for the erection of a Great Hall as part of the equipment of the University, and desires the Chancellor to convey to Sir Langdon an expression of its profound thanks for his splendid benefaction.” The Council further resolved that the Hall should be styled The Bonython Hall.

The Chancellor, in conveying these resolutions to Sir Langdon, wrote: “The consent you asked for was immediately accorded, and I was desired to convey to you, with the least possible delay, the profound thanks of the Council for your splendid benefaction. On whatever site the Hall may ultimately be placed—and we hope that you will live to see it completed in accordance with your wishes—it must inevitably be not only the central ornament and one of the most useful adjuncts of the University, but a cherished memorial of the distinguished services you have rendered to South Australia in so many departments of education.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY K. P. PHILLIPS

WESTERN ELEVATION. Taken in mid-winter, this view shows the northerly inclination of the sunlight giving shade without shadow. At mid-summer the function of the arcade would be emphasized by the shadows thrown over the traceried windows.



The Bonython Hall

BEFORE accepting the present design, full consideration was given to the selection of the most suitable site and the determination of the functions of the future building. Proximity to the earlier buildings on the North Terrace frontage required the adoption of a style and material appropriate to them. The present site had the advantage of greater accessibility, and the Gothic style has strong claims of sentiment as being the tradition of the older Universities; for these and other reasons the present site and design were adopted. The most obvious advantages of this choice are apparent in the added effect of the frontage of the University to the City, together with the balance afforded to the arrangement of the earlier buildings.

The most renowned Halls of Oxford and Cambridge were built during the sixteenth century, that of Christ Church, Oxford, for Cardinal Wolsey in 1529, and that of Trinity College, Cambridge, after 1593, during the mastership of Dr. Thomas Neville.

They were essentially dining halls, and were not used for congregations or public addresses, so that the question of acoustics did not enter into their design. On the other hand they required an amount of natural lighting far in excess of that which is necessary in this climate. The problem to be solved consisted in satisfying these and other needs of the age and place, without departing too far from traditional proportions, and the no less traditional effect of traceried windows and open timbered roof.

The conservatism, which prompts the revival of historic types as symbols of a continuity of idea, needs no apology if it is successfully accomplished, but the result must offer a convincing analogy.

How would an architect of the Tudor period grasp the problem if he were re-awakened after a sleep of four centuries and confronted with radical differences in circumstance and building material? It was concluded in answer to this query that while instinct would prompt him to adopt the forms and contours familiar to him, reason, if he were thoroughly awakened, would induce him to avail himself of the more facile and tensile methods of construction at present in vogue. Steel has therefore replaced timber in the roof trusses, stone vaulting has given place to reinforced concrete structure, and plastic materials to fibrous compounds in the ceiling.

For a building of this size and length the acoustics may be considered very satisfactory. That an ordinary speaking voice is audible in an empty hall

at a distance of one hundred and thirty feet should be sufficient indication that a full audience will have no difficulty in hearing a platform speaker even without the aid of the microphone. This result has been obtained by developing a relatively large area of wall surface in proportion to the volume of the interior, and by lining the larger reflecting surfaces with materials having sound-absorbing properties.

A system of electrical sound transmission, designed by Mr. D. M. Gooding, has however been installed so that speech aid can be obtained in the Hall, and, further, so that organ, vocal, or other music can be transmitted from the Elder Hall by means of the two moving coil dynamics inserted in the northern wall.

Light has been subdued by recessing the windows, and by the use of an amber tinted glass. The clerestory galleries are not a characteristic feature of the Tudor hall. They contribute towards the same objects, the absorption of reverberation and the control of excess light, apart from their decorative and structural functions.

The exterior is faced with Murray Bridge limestone, the greater part of which is worked so as to reveal the natural texture of the stone and thus retain the full intensity of its colour.

The roof is covered with slates from the Willunga quarries. The flooring timbers are of jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) glossed to show its rich colour, and Queensland hoop pine (*Araucaria Cunninghamii*). The wainscot and joinery are of oak, partly Manchurian and partly of the Tasmanian timber (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) known as Australian oak, oiled and very lightly polished.

The escutcheons which form part of the ceiling decoration display the arms of the University alternately with those of Bonython. On the façade of the towers these arms appear in company with those of the Chancellor.

The architectural correspondent of *The Advertiser* has given a fuller description, which is annexed.

The design and supervision of the building has been in the hands of Mr. Walter H. Bagot, F.R.I.B.A., F.R.A.I.A., of the firm of Woods, Bagot, Laybourne-Smith & Irwin.

The contract was signed on the first day of June, 1933, and has taken about three years to complete. During the whole of this period Mr. James Henderson has acted as clerk-of-works.

The various contractors have throughout the work shown a proper conception of the finish required, and have loyally contributed to the general effort to obtain it.



PHOTOGRAPH BY K. P. PHILLIPS.

INTERIOR. The ceiling panels are outlined in gold and colour against a background representing oak. The slope of the floor, although slight, assists visibility and hearing. The drop is equal to the elevation of the dais.

Bonython Hall

EXTRACTED FROM "THE ADVERTISER", JUNE 11, 1936.

By "Our Architectural Correspondent".

"The Bonython Hall is an interesting building in more senses than one. First, it is a modern essay in Gothic, a successful attempt to adapt a mediaeval style, in which visual effect was everything and acoustic properties were not considered, to the modern requirements of a building in which acoustics are a very important factor. Secondly, it represents an adaptation for a southern sunny climate of an architectural style evolved under the grey skies of northern Europe. There are some who will claim that this is an architectural anomaly, but, if so, are we therefore to be debarred entirely from the use of an architectural style linked up with the history of the race from which we have sprung?

Acoustic considerations which cannot be lightly dispensed with dictated the proportions of the hall, and made necessary a considerable modification of the ceiling treatment. The hall is by no means as lofty as would be its ecclesiastical counterpart; nevertheless, one does not realize an effect of dwarfing. Moreover, the extremely rich ceiling is thus brought within easy visual distance, and not hidden in the dim and frequently cobwebby heights as in so many Gothic buildings.

The substitution of a honey oak treatment for the deep brown of the traditional Gothic was a happy inspiration. In both wainscoting and ceiling the effect is rich without being sombre. The artificial lighting directed to the ceiling enhances its beauty, and emphasises this most important detail of the architectural composition.

SUBDUED LIGHTING.

Windows are large as the style dictates, but on both side walls the lighting, which might otherwise be overpowering, has been subdued by setting the windows within an arcading to shade them from the glare of direct sunlight.

Modern text-books almost without exception state that to-day acoustics is an exact science, and the designing of a successful building from that standpoint is merely a matter of arithmetic. This is far from correct. Each building presents problems of its own which have to be solved more by the instinctive sense than by mathematics. Of these the Bonython Hall is undoubtedly one, and as these considerations so materially modified the design, it is pleasing to be able to chronicle that as far as one can judge from the empty building, acoustically the Bonython Hall would appear to be a complete success. Words spoken in a natural tone on the dais are clearly audible at the far end of the building, with just the slight amount of resonance which one may expect in a building without an audience. With the audience seated, echo should be reduced to the necessary minimum."

Contractors

For the Building and its Fittings: Mr. H. S. C. Jarvis.

Comprised in the building contract were the following major sub-contracts:

Steelwork: The Perry Engineering Co., Ltd.

Synthetic Stonework: Mr. E. W. Willment.

Fibrous Plaster Ceilings: Messrs. Miller's Lime, Ltd.

Sound Absorbent: The Bell Manufacturing & Trading Co.

Slate Roofing: Messrs. A. W. Sandford & Co., Ltd.

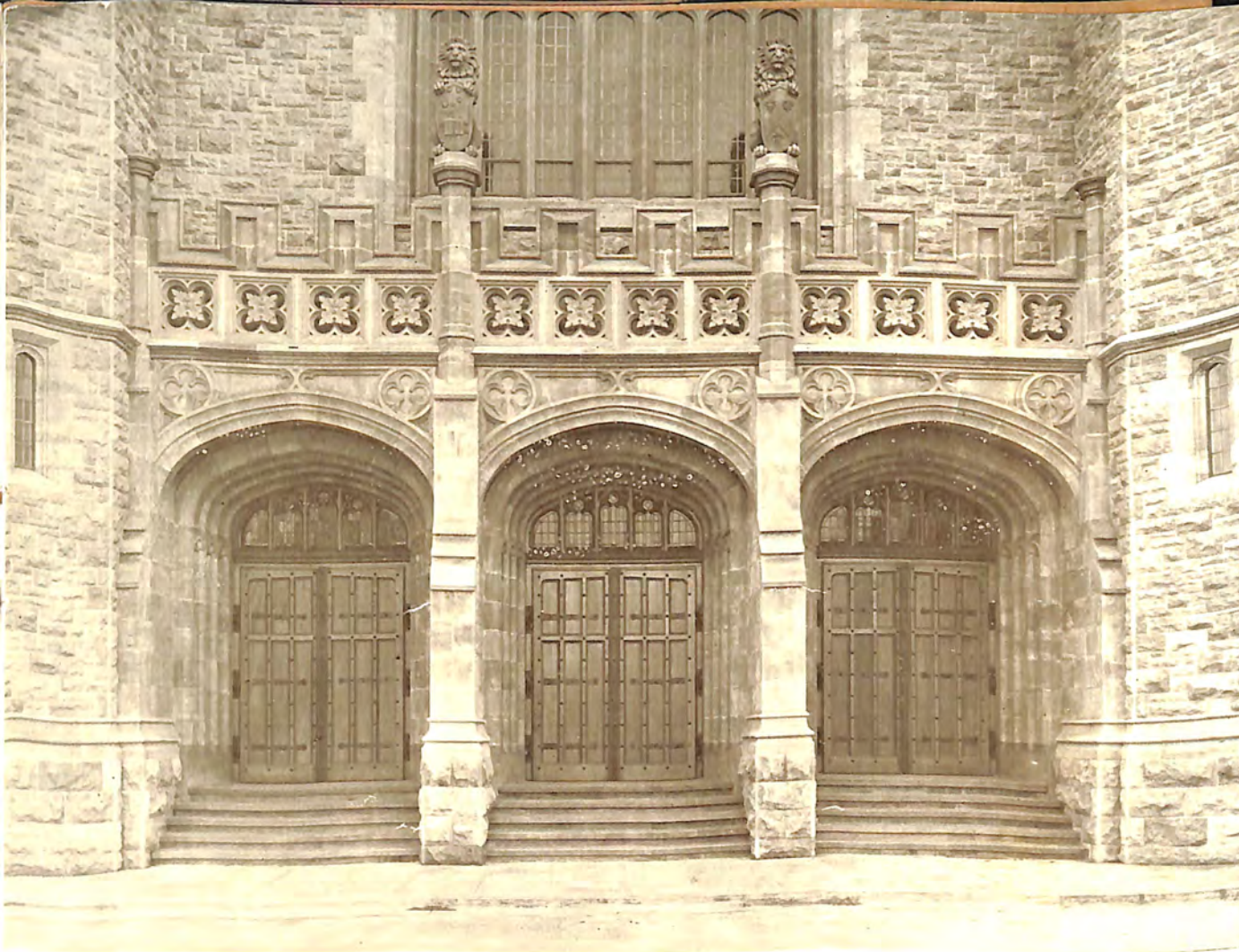
Ceiling Decoration: Messrs. A. H. Nicholls & Sons, Ltd.

Leaded Glazing: Messrs L. G. Abbott & Co., Ltd.

Electric Light and Power Installation: Messrs. Unbehaun & Johnstone, Ltd.

Sound Transmission: Mr. William V. Benbow.

Seating: The Lincoln Seating Co.



PHOTOGRAPH BY K. P. PHILLIPS

FRONT VIEW. Southern porches leading to the main vestibule. The doors are of oak with forged iron hinges and fittings; the steps are monoliths from the Mintaro quarries.



The University of Adelaide

Opening Ceremony of the Bonython Hall

SEPTEMBER 8th, 1936

Order of Proceedings

1. THE PROCESSION OF THE SENATE.

The Members of the Senate and Graduates will meet in the Elder Hall and proceed to the Bonython Hall punctually at 10.50 a.m. by way of the main entrance.

2. THE ACADEMIC PROCESSION.

Members of the Council and Professors will meet in the Robing room of the Bonython Hall. Lecturers, Researchers and Members of Boards will meet in the Elder Hall.

The Academic Procession will proceed to the Bonython Hall in the following order punctually at 10.55 a.m.:

Teachers of the Elder Conservatorium

Members of Boards

Lecturers and Researchers

Professors

The Council

3. Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Lady Gowrie, His Excellency the Governor and Lady Dugan will be received by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor at 11 a.m.

The Vice-Chancellor will conduct His Excellency the Governor and Lady Dugan to their seats, followed immediately by the Chancellor who will conduct Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Lady Gowrie to their seats.

The National Anthem

4. The Chancellor will ask His Excellency the Governor-General to declare the Building open.

His Excellency will address the assembly.

A vote of thanks to His Excellency the Governor-General will be proposed by the Vice-Chancellor and supported by the Warden of the Senate and the Hon. Sir Langdon Bonython.

The Chancellor will close the proceedings.

The National Anthem

The Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor will conduct Their Excellencies to the door.

Guests are requested to remain in their places until the Vice-Regal Party, the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the Warden of the Senate, the Council, Professors and Graduates have left the Hall.