HO115 – Masonic Centre, 223 Watton Street, Werribee

Heritage Place: Masonic Centre	**HO Reference:** HO115 **Date updated:** 15 October 2026
Address: 223 Watton Street, Werribee	



Figure 1. The Masonic Centre at 223 Watton Street, Werribee. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025

Item Group: Community facilities **Item Type:** Hall public	**Key Theme:** Governing and keeping order; servicing the community **Key Sub-theme:** Local government; establishing places of worship
Designer: John Barter (Shire Engineer) (bluestone hall). **Builder:** Robert Roberts (bluestone hall)	**Construction:** 1867 (bluestone hall), 1920-1950 (brick hall). **Style:** Victorian Rustic Gothic (Rural Gothic) and Interwar Stripped Classical
Significance Level: Local	
Recommendation: Retain tree controls. Retain solar energy controls. Update schedule to specify no external paint controls and no internal alteration controls.	

Controls:	○	External paint controls	○	Internal alteration controls	●	Tree controls (peppercorn tree (*Schinus molle*))
	○	Included on Victorian Heritage Register	○	Incorporated Plans	○	Outbuildings and fence not exempt
	○	Prohibited uses may be permitted	○	Aboriginal Heritage Place	●	Solar energy system controls

Curtilage



Figure 2. Aerial map showing the curtilage boundary of the Masonic Centre at 223 Watton Street, Werribee. *Basemap source:* Nearmap. 2025. Spatial data source: VicMap & Department of Transport and Planning

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Masonic Centre is of historical significance for its association with the establishment of local government in the municipality. As the first building constructed for the Shire of Wyndham, to designs by the Shire engineer, the building demonstrates the early establishment of local government and the implementation of formal places designated for this purpose. The building is also demonstrative of the needs of the early local government to have a place to conduct Council business. The Masonic Centre is also of historical significance for its association with the Freemasons Society. The Freemasons were brought to the Werribee area by colonialists and were one of a number of local groups that were important to the early development of social life in the region. The Freemasons first leased the building in 1901 and purchased the hall from the Shire of Wyndham in 1920, maintaining an occupation of the hall for over 100 years. The Freemasons are responsible for the improvements to the site including the red brick hall, linking structure and the peppercorn tree located within the grounds.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	The 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 Masonic Centre is demonstrative of the building typology and style of the early community buildings, including ecclesiastical buildings, within the municipality which typically adopted a simple vernacular design including an elongated gable form, bluestone construction with pitched corrugated sheet roofs, regular fenestration and limited ornamentation.

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*	The 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*	The Masonic Centre is of social significance for its ongoing connection with the Werribee branch of the Freemason society, who have occupied the bluestone building since 1901.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	The Masonic Centre has strong associations with the Shire of Wyndham (now City of Wyndham) as a key building in the history of municipal governance following the establishment of the local government early in the nineteenth century. The Masonic Centre is also of associative significance to the Werribee Freemasons Society as long standing occupants and later owners of the hall from as early as 1900 and remaining in use by them today.

Statement of Significance - Masonic Centre, 223 Watton Street, Werribee

Address: 223 Watton Street, Werribee	**PS ref no:** HO115



Figure 3. Photograph of the Masonic Centre at 223 Watton Street, Werribee. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025

What is significant?

The Masonic Centre, comprising the entirety of the 1867 bluestone hall including the pitched roof form, and the entirety of the face red brick hall constructed during the Interwar period including the mirrored pitch roof forms, is significant. The peppercorn tree (*Schinus molle*) in the northeast corner of the site, is also significant. The central glazed wing which connects the two halls, constructed in the mid-to-late twentieth century, is not significant. Later alterations, including the asphalt car park and bluestone wall perimeter to the property, are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Masonic Centre is of historical, aesthetic and social significance to the City of Wyndham

Why is it significant?

The Masonic Centre is of historical significance for its association with the establishment of local government in the municipality. As the first building constructed for the Shire of Wyndham, to designs by the Shire engineer, the building demonstrates the early establishment of local government and the implementation of formal places designated for this purpose. The building is also demonstrative of the needs of the early government to have a place to conduct Council business (Criterion A).

The Masonic Centre is also of historical significance for its association with the Freemasons Society. The Freemasons were brought to the Werribee area by colonialists and were one

of a number of local groups that were important to the early development of social life in the region. The Freemasons first leased the building in 1901 and purchased the hall from the Shire of Wyndham in 1920, maintaining an occupation of the hall for over 100 years. The Freemasons are responsible for the improvements to the site including the red brick hall, linking structure and the peppercorn tree located within the grounds (Criterion A).

The Masonic Centre is demonstrative of the building typology and style of the early community buildings, including ecclesiastical buildings, within the municipality which typically adopted a simple vernacular design including an elongated gable form, bluestone construction with pitched corrugated sheet roofs, regular fenestration and limited ornamentation. (Criterion D)

The Masonic Centre is of social significance for its ongoing connection with the Werribee branch of the Freemason society, who have occupied the bluestone building since 1901. (Criterion G).

Source:

Masonic Centre Citation, Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2026.

Description

Bunurong Country

The Masonic Centre is situated on the lands of the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of Country. Despite the effects of colonisation, including dispossession of land, the Traditional Custodians have maintained a continuing connection to land, waters and culture within the City of Wyndham.

Physical Analysis

The Masonic Centre complex comprises two adjoining halls within a large allotment at the corner of Greaves Street South and Watton Street, Werribee. The two halls are located to the southwestern corner of the site, with a significant setback from the north and east property boundaries.

The two buildings are adjoining single storey halls with pitched roofs and open gabled ends, distinguished by their scale and materiality as nineteenth and twentieth century civic buildings.

The easternmost hall is a coursed bluestone structure with two intersecting pitched roof halls constructed in the Victorian Rustic Gothic or “Rural Gothic” style. The bluestone hall includes a later terracotta tiled roof, with a singular corbelled chimney and a varied fenestration of square and rectangular window openings, some now boarded. Distinguishing features of the building include its extended roof to the eastern elevation, as well as the classically framed doorway to the northern elevation. The doorway is a double timber door surrounded by projecting classical pilaster and triangular pediment.

The westernmost hall is a modest face red brick hall, and is reminiscent in scale and form to the adjacent bluestone building, with a central timber double door to the gabled northern elevation. Constructed in the Interwar period, the hall is of a stripped classical style, expressed in the squared pilasters framing the northern entrance and simple rectangular lintel without gable, which references the early Gothic hall but without ornamentation. The style is further indicated by the contrasting concreted window sills to the eastern and western fenestration. The hall is topped with a red corrugated sheet metal roof.

The two halls are joined in the centre by a section of contemporary infill which provides an entry to the halls. The linking structure is setback from the front of the halls creating a small courtyard with a central concrete pathway covered by a portico of metal construction and corrugated sheet roofing.

The broader site consists of a large asphalted carpark to the northern extent, with a large grassed area to Greaves Street South. A singular large peppercorn tree is located to the northern corner of the site with low shrub plantings to the northern perimeter. The site is enclosed by a low bluestone wall to Greaves Street South which evolves into a larger retaining wall to the north.

Alterations and Additions

- c. 1920-1940s red brick hall.

- Central c. 1970-1990s infill entry between halls, including extended portico, concreted pathway and timber lined garden beds.*
- Asphalted carpark to the northern extent of the site.*
- Bluestone wall and retaining wall to the Watton Street and Greaves Street South boundaries (post 1951).*
- Roof replacement to the bluestone hall with terracotta tiling, and removal of earlier roof vents.
- Alterations to fenestration of the bluestone hall including the boarding and replacement of select windows.
- Implementation of contemporary Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning units to the eastern and western elevations of the bluestone hall.*

The Masonic Centre is of high integrity and in good condition.

**** Denotes element that does not contribute to the cultural significance of the place.***

History

The Masonic Centre is situated on the lands of the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of Country.

The Masonic Centre is located close to Wirribi Yaluk. This is the Bunurong name for the waterway we now know as Werribee River. Wirribi Yaluk is a predominant feature of this Country, carving its way through these plains as it flows from its headwaters north of Ballan into the saltwater of Naarm (the Bunurong word for Port Phillip Bay). It is also the border between the lands of Bunurong and Wadawurrung peoples. Bunurong peoples are the Traditional Owners of this Country, and Wirribi Yaluk is a place of sustenance, abundance and community. The majestic River red gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) growing along its banks have provided bark for containers and canoes, while the river's waters have sustained nutritious crustaceans and fish, including the Short-finned eel (*Anguilla australis*), and have supplied fresh water throughout the year. (BLCAC 2026, 11).

Upon the arrival of colonists into Port Phillip Bay from 1835, land north and west of the fledgling Melbourne settlement was quickly usurped. Reports from early explorers highlighted the basalt plains as open, grassy and lightly vegetated. These conditions were ideal for overlanding stock, thus the Wyndham region was soon dominated by squatter pastoralists (Vines 1993, 9; Broome 1984, 23).

The early township of Werribee was positioned in proximity to a ford over Werribee River, connecting the route between Melbourne and Geelong (Murray 1974, 11; Lovell Chen 2024, 51). As traffic grew along the Melbourne to Geelong route, the Werribee settlement expanded steadily. In 1849, Surveyor General Robert Hoddle reserved land for a township, gazetted as 'Wyndham' in 1850 (James and Pritchard 2008, 15; Hocking 2013, 177; Murray 1974, 14). Crown land was sold from 1850, with the country allotments rapidly absorbed by the region's prominent pastoralists (James and Pritchard 2008, 17).

Place History

Shire Hall and Offices, 1867

Following establishment of the District Road Board in 1862 at Armstrong's Hotel (Geelong Advertiser 1863, 3), and the establishment of the Shire of Wyndham in 1864, there was a need to construct a building to facilitate municipal activities. An acre of land to the corner of Greaves Street and Watton Street was subsequently reserved in 1864 as a site for a Shire Hall and Offices for the use of the Council (Victoria Government Gazette 1884, 2388). At the time, the township was centred around the Werribee bridge, and the selected location for the Shire Hall was in relative proximity to both the main thoroughfare as well as the Police Paddock & station, and the Pound Reserve (Figure 4).

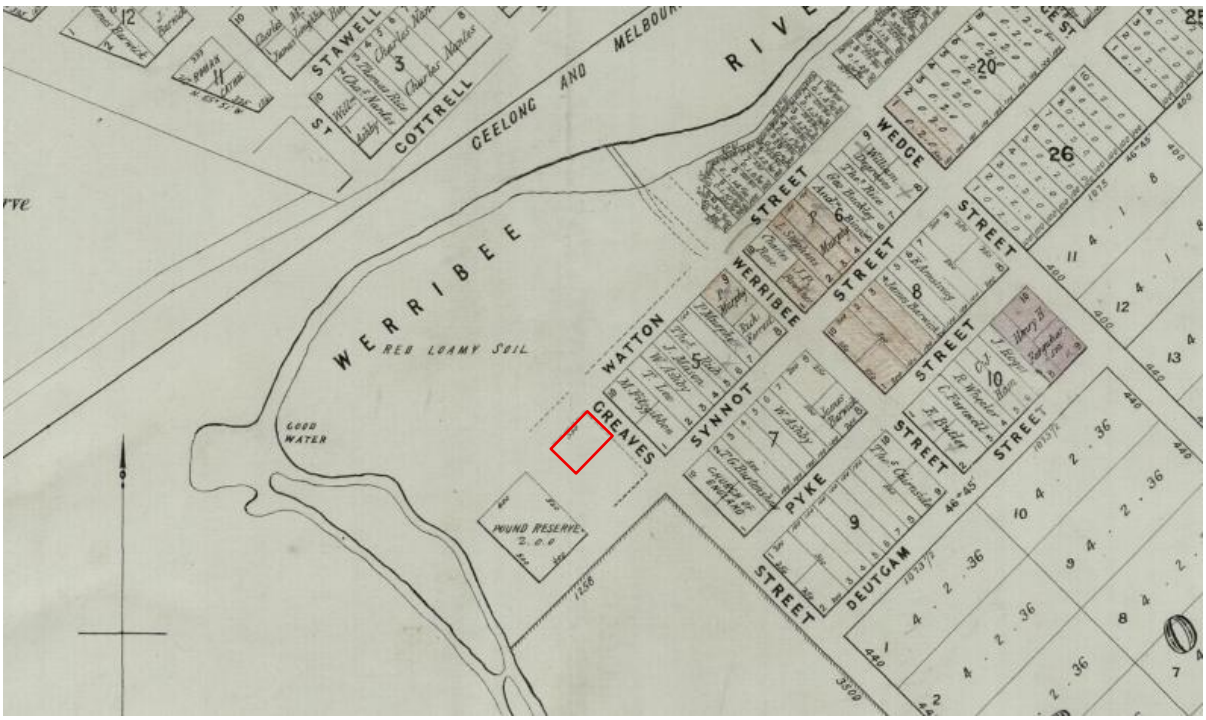


Figure 4. Extract from 1863 map of Wyndham (Werribee), showing the location of the Masonic Centre (former Shire Hall) within the early township, outlined in red. *Source:* Geological Survey of Victoria. 1863. *Township of Wyndham.* Digitised cartographic material. State Library of Victoria (website). http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/159894.

In November 1864, the then Council Secretary Thomas Haynes advertised on behalf of the Shire of Wyndham for plans and specifications for a Shire Hall. The notice stipulated "the building is to be of brick or stone, and to consist of one large room and two offices, the cost of the whole not to exceed £400" (The Argus 1864, 7). Two plans were submitted, one being a skeleton plan by the shire engineer, Mr John Barter. Upon review of the two plans as a council official, Mr Barter raised concerns with the other proposal noting that "the specifications were such that he could not carry them out. The roof was altogether disproportionate to the walls which had to sustain it" (Geelong Advertiser 1866a, 3). The Council proposed that Mr Barter should be instructed to complete his plans and to advertise for tenders (Geelong Advertiser 1866a, 3). In 1866, Council received a letter from Robert Robers requesting permission to quarry stone for the building of the Shire Hall (Geelong Advertiser 1866b, 2). The Shire Hall was completed in 1867, with notice given that the Council would sit at the Shire Hall on the first Wednesday in each month (The Argus 1867, 7). This was the first municipal building to be constructed in the region.

By 1892, the existing building was considered too small for the Shire of Wyndham Council offices and no longer situated in close proximity to the town centre, with development booming around the railway station (HO22). An article from 1892 noted that "A goodly proportion of the business done both at the Court and with Shire officers, is by ratepayers and others arriving by train, and to drag them each and all into a couple of miles walk on each occasion is felt to be very oppressive, and not calculated to advance the growth and prosperity of the Shire."

(Independent 1892, 2). This prompted the development of a new Shire Hall at the corner of Watton Street and Station Street (now Duncans Road).

Occupation by Wesleyan Church, 1897

In 1897, the old Shire Hall was put up for auction, however a satisfactory bid was not received, and the sale fell through (Williamstown Advertiser 1897, 3). The hall was let by the Shire of Wyndham to the community and was used as a secular space for the local Wesleyan church congregation and the St. Thomas's Social Union, whilst further social purposes such as for cards and draughts playing were proposed (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1898, 3).

Occupation by Freemasons, 1901

In 1901 the hall was let to the Freemasons at £3 per year for the purpose of a Masonic Lodge which held monthly meetings. As a nondenominational group, it was preferential for services to be held only in halls, not churches, and the old shire hall offered a suitable location (Werribee Shire Banner 1916, 3). The Freemasons were brought to the Werribee area by colonialists and were one of a number of local groups which were important to the early development of social life in the region. Obtaining a physical location for the Masonic Lodge fortified the status and value of the Freemasons to the area, whilst also providing a base to collect and provide a number of charitable offerings (Werribee Shire Banner 1918, 2).

Masonic Lodge [Masonic Centre], 1920

The property was advertised for sale again in 1920, which included the bluestone hall as well as a bluestone stable and buggy shed (outbuilding now demolished) (Werribee Shire Banner 1920, 2). The property was sold in 1920 to the Werribee Branch of the Masonic Lodge for £550, with funds from the sale to be directed towards establishment of a high school in Werribee. It appears the land may have been retained by the Shire of Wyndham as advertisements for Council assets including a stone road roller, water cart and tank were noted in local papers with the items available for inspection at the Old Shire Hall (Werribee Shire Banner, 1923, 2).

The red bricked hall to the rear of the early bluestone building was erected between c.1920-1949 and the two halls conjoined with later infill between 1950 and the 1970s. A dedication service for the 'new Masonic Hall' was held in October 1925 (Werribee Shire Banner, 1925, 6). This may have been related to the construction of the adjacent red brick hall, or simply a dedication to the bluestone hall following the purchase by the Freemasons. No records of the construction of the red brick hall could be found. The peppercorn tree within the grounds appears to have been planted during the Interwar period, evident as an established tree by 1949. The Masonic Centre was formally known as Werribee Lodge No. 187, established in 1901, in accordance with their occupation of the Masonic Centre.

The hall remains in use as a Masonic Centre, as well as being a hireable community hall.

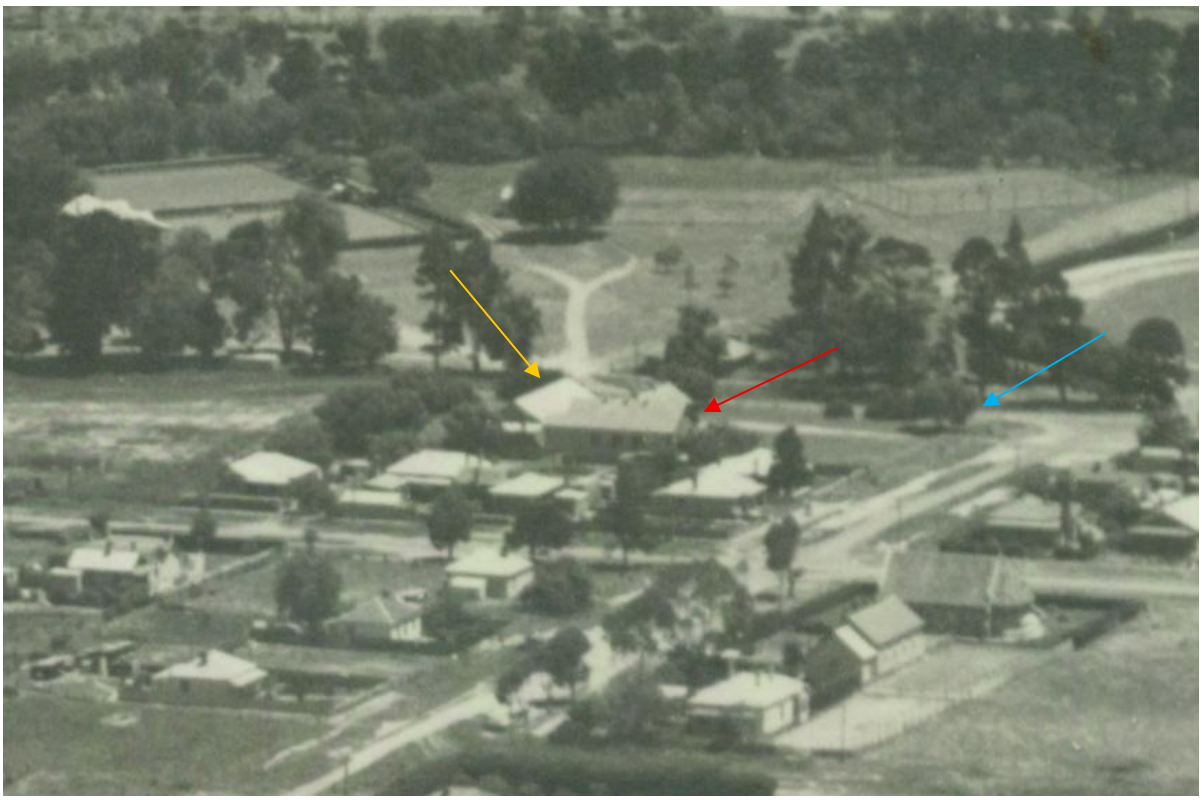


Figure 5. 1949 aerial photograph of the two halls of the Masonic Centre at 223 Watton Street, Werribee. The 1868 bluestone hall is indicated with red arrow, with the later c.1920-1940s hall is indicated with yellow arrow, and the large corner peppercorn tree is indicated with blue arrow. *Source:* Pratt, C. D. 1949. *Aerial view of Carters Egg Farm, Werribee.* Digitised photograph. Airspy collection: Photographs. State Library of Victoria. http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/300844.



Figure 6. Extract from 1951 aerial photograph of Werribee, with the site of the Masonic Centre outlined in red. The two halls of the Masonic Centre are located to the southwestern corner of the allotment and the large peppercorn tree (red arrow) adjacent to the driveway entrance. The image shows the shadows of original, likely timber post and rail fencing to the eastern and northern boundaries as well as the existing peppercorn tree adjacent to the entry. *Source:* Landata. Digitised photograph.

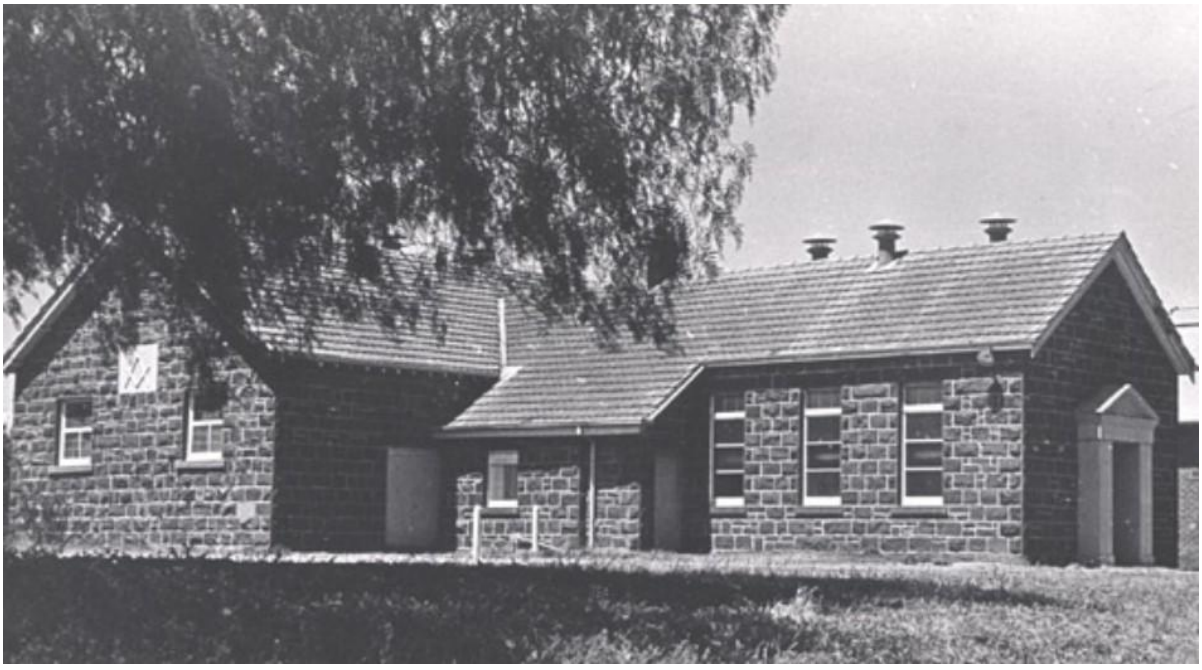


Figure 7. 1985 photograph of the Masonic Centre, looking south. *Source:* James, K. N. ed. 1985. *Werribee – The first one hundred Years.* Werribee: The Werribee District Historical Society.



Figure 8. 2008 photograph of the Masonic Centre's bluestone hall. *Source:* Strong, Bill. 2008. *20080720_0439 Masonic Centre (First Shire Hall).* Digitised photograph. Flickr (website). https://www.flickr.com/photos/87791108@N00/2688465023/in/dateposted.

Comparative Analysis

The Masonic Centre is comparable to the following places:

Christ Church (HO84)

The Masonic Centre is comparable to Christ Church for its architectural form and expression. Christ Church is an early building constructed of bluestone in the Gothic style. While a more decorative example of the style, Christ Church adopts a gable profile with a projecting bay to one side, with coursing to the bluestone and evenly spaced openings, and is a more architecturally refined example of a bluestone building.

Former Shire Hall (HO110)

The Masonic Centre is comparable to the Former Shire Hall, which was constructed as a successor to the bluestone hall, also in the nineteenth century. Located on a corner site at the centre of town, as the Masonic Centre was originally constructed, it is a marker of civic development and following the departure of the council from the space, was adopted for community use. When comparing the two halls, the Masonic Centre presents as a distinctly earlier building which is of architectural interest for its use of bluestone in a civic building.

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Images



Figure 9. Overview of the Masonic Centre, looking west from Greaves Street South. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 10. Overview of the Masonic Centre, looking southwest at the northern façades of the two halls. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 11. Detail view of the bluestone hall entry doorway on the northern elevation. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 12. Oblique view of the northern elevation of the bluestone hall, looking east. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 13. Overview of central entry and portico, including western elevation of bluestone hall. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 14. Overview of central entry and portico, including eastern elevation of brick hall. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 15. Overview of the red brick hall, looking southeast. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.



Figure 16. The large peppercorn tree located to the northern corner of the site, with the Masonic Centre in the background. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2025.