

The Black Marble of Buchan

A Stone of Great Beauty

Buchan marble came to notice within the construction industry in the early part of the 20th century. James Cameron was Minister for Mines and so understood how to attract notice to the marble from his property. Samples were sent to an international exhibition in Britain and were awarded first prize. By 1910, it was being used with great success in the new State Library Building and the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court. Then at the Panama World Exposition in 1915, Buchan marble was awarded the Gold Medal. Nine hundred tons were shipped to London in 1916 for the construction of Australia House. There was also a shipload sent to Hankow in China where most of the major British offices and warehouses built for the China trade were located.

Probably, it is best known and most acclaimed in the Shrine of Remembrance. The decision to build the shrine was the subject of very considerable controversy over some 10 years, but construction finally commenced with the laying of the Foundation stone by the state governor, Lord Somers, in November 1927.

In overview, the most impressive use was in major public buildings: State Library, Melbourne Town Hall, Magistrate's Court, Melbourne Port Building and the Melbourne offices of the federal government. Several commercial buildings had wonderful displays: Manchester Unity and the ANZ Bank both come readily to mind, but many commercial buildings had little more than a decorated foyer, and perhaps the flight of stairs to the first floor.

There are at least two quite lovely (recent) sculptures, both by Faustas Saduskas. No doubt there is also a significant number of gravestones, but it has been impracticable to search for and catalogue these.

At this stage, the authors have identified 25 surviving Melbourne sites but also 27 sites where the relevant buildings have been demolished or modified in such a way that the marble was removed. We now turn to discuss some of the major sites in more detail.

State Library of Victoria

304-328 Swanston St. and Latrobe St.

Few public buildings have such a complex history as the State Library. First opened in 1856, the library building has been shared at various times with the National Gallery of Victoria, the Industrial and Technological Museum, and the Natural History Museum. These varying accommodation demands have been a major source of changes, while the extent to which the State Library itself has been at the forefront of change in library management and practice has also demanded many changes. So, "Construction of buildings on the library site was almost continuous from 1854 until the construction of the La Trobe Library in the 1960s" (Victorian Heritage Database H1497).

The major appearance of Buchan marble occurred in the redevelopment of the major Swanston St. entrance in 1911-1913. It first appears to the visitor in the panels on the floor of the external portico area. The finest suite of marble decoration comprises a significant part of the main foyer and stairway. Of all the sites, this is probably the one most often seen by visitors and it is certainly very beautifully done. Other areas occur throughout the building in lesser forms of decoration. The most recent additions are the wall panels along the hallway to the La Trobe Library building and two magnificent columns at the main northern entry to that part of building. Overall, the building is a very excellent example of the classical academic tradition and certainly provides for an aesthetic environment which exemplifies the ambience of the library.

Regrettably, “restoration” following the departure of the museum to Carlton Gardens means that the marble display in the main foyer of the former museum has been lost.

The Former Magistrate’s Court

325-343 Swanston St. and Latrobe St.

This building replaced the former Supreme Court. It was designed by architect George B.H. Austin of the Public Works department, who had also been responsible for the previous building on the site since 1888. During 1911-1913. In contrast to the State Library opposite, it has remained almost entirely unchanged. Its French Romanesque style has long been seen as appropriately dignified for a court of law, and in this case, the continuous use of this site as the base of the Victorian Legal System may be said to be an icon of continuity in the legal processes of the state.

The Buchan Marble pillars in the foyer contrast with the general context and provide an interest and truly aesthetic character.

The building was closed down in 1994 and transferred to the RMIT University (Building 20).

Commonwealth Government Offices

Building 4, Treasury Place

This building is one of four located along Treasury Place. It was built in 1912-1914 to the design of architect John Smith Murdoch. Prior to the construction of Canberra, it provided the primary office site of the federal government. Today it provides the Melbourne office of the Prime Minister and other senior ministers.

The four office buildings together provide a graceful and often admired oversight of the Treasury Gardens. This one is, however, the only one with the foyer decorated in Buchan Marble.

Australia House, London

Strand and Aldwych, London.

The responsibility for design of the building was determined by a architectural competition which resulted in the appointment of Scots Architects A. Marshal Mackenzie and Son. The panel of judges included Bertram Mackennal, John Longstaff, George Lambert, Fred Leist and Arthur Streeton. The reported “we are united in the opinion that this building will be a lasting monument to the importance of the (Australian) Commonwealth and a splendid addition to the architecture of London.”

King George V laid the foundation stone in July 1913 and work began in 1923, but was delayed by the World War, so completion and the official opening, again by the monarch only came in August 1918. During that period, some 900 tons of Buchan Marble were shipped to Britain specifically for use in Australia House.

Melbourne Town Hall

Little Collins St., 90-130 Swanston St and Collins St.

The first hall on the site (c.1854) proved to be too small, and its successor, which was the beginning phase of the present building, was erected in 1867. In due course, it became an important meeting site for discussions on Federation. The adjacent council chamber and administrative building was added in 1908. Then in 1925, perhaps fortunately, the major building and the main hall was destroyed by a fire. Stephenson and Meldrum designed the fine building which replaced it. Particular attention was given to the new organ, designed and built by Hill, Norman and Beard from Britain.

From our current perspective, the entry, stairway and upstairs grand foyer provide a magnificent display of Buchan marble which is even more impressive than that of the State Library.

Queen Victoria Market

513 Elizabeth St, Victoria St, Queen St. & Therry St.

Melbourne has always been a market town, and various aspects of market shopping are a popular element of the Melbourne lifestyle. The produce and delicatessen building on the corner of Elizabeth St and Victoria St. has a fine display of black Marble.

Initially, in 1857, the site was used as a livestock and hay market, but in 1867, a formal market reserve was established and a substantial building erected in 1868, which served as the wholesale meat market. However, the wholesale meat trade found the site unsatisfactory and moved to Coventry St., North Melbourne. The building then turned over to be a slaughter house and meat and fish retail market. In 1880, with the realignment of Elizabeth St., the building was extended and the present façade added in 1884. Finally, in 1929, the dairy produce hall, now the Delicatessen Hall, was built with the current stands, each faced with bluestone slabs.

ANZ Bank

376-390 Collins St., extending to 100 Queen St.

It has includes the former ES&A bank offices on the corner, the adjacent former offices of the Melbourne Stock Exchange and more recent buildings along Queen St. This ES&A building commenced construction in 1883 under the direction of architect William Wardell, and is considered as an outstanding example of the Gothic Revival style. Then in 1888-1891, the Stock Exchange building designed by William Pitt was erected. The building was purchased by the ES&A Bank in 1912. It was then taken over by the new ANZ Bank in ????.

The two buildings were integrated and have since undergone various periods of interior reconstruction and change, the major one being in 1923. The Buchan marble was introduced at this time. The building now also houses the ANZ Banking museum.

Similarly, the banking company has undergone a considerable and long evolution:

- 1835: ANZ began in London when The Bank of Australasia was established under Royal Charter
- 1837: The Union Bank of Australia was established as an Anglo-Australian bank
- 1852: The English, Scottish and Australian Bank (ES&A) was established as another Anglo-Australian bank
- 1951: The Bank of Australasia merges with the Union Bank of Australia to form the ANZ Bank
- 1970: In what was then the largest merger in Australian banking history, ANZ merged with the English, Scottish and Australian Bank Limited to form the present organisation, Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited

Bank of New Zealand in Australia

389-399 Collins St.

The original building, designed by Wright, Reed and Beaver, was completed in 1892 then extended in 1903. It commenced as the A.C. Goode House, then became home to the National Mutual Life Association Building and finally was taken over by the Bank of New Zealand in Australia. It has a pleasant use of marble in the foyer and stairs, and in particular, this includes a decorative plaque immediately opposite the entry door.

George Hotel, St Kilda

123-127 Fitzroy St. and 2-10 Grey St., St.Kilda

This is another site which has survived a plethora of changes in both owners and buildings. It appears that the Buchan marble interior panels were added in the early 1930s. One of the interesting facets of its history was that for many years the Cameron family saw it as their favorite Melbourne Hotel.

Shrine of Remembrance

St Kilda Rd., Domain Rd, Dallas Brooks Drive and Birdwood Ave.

Few great buildings have suffered such a long debate as the Shrine. It was proposed in 1918 and in the early 1920s, the government appointed an advisory committee. In August 1921, an executive committee chaired by Sir John Monash, rejected the victory arch which had been recommended, and proposed a monument on the current site. A design competition was launched in March 1922 and in 1923, the design of two ex-servicemen architects, Phillip Hudson and James Wardrop, was accepted. However, this was strongly contested and the argument raged until 1927, but finally, Monash carried the day and the Shrine on its present site was approved. The funding of £250,000 were largely raised within six months by a successful public appeal. Being an engineer by discipline, Monash then assumed oversight of the construction by contractors Vaughan and Lodge. Regrettably, he died prior to its completion. But it was completed and opened on November 11th (Remembrance Day) 1934.

The Remembrance Stone is the central feature of the Shrine – a slab of Buchan Black Marble with the engraved words, GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN. These words are the opening of the biblical verse . . . Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). The stone is so lit by a natural ray of light which illuminates the stone at 11.00 a.m. on the 11th day of November.

The stone is located within the Sanctuary designed to provide “a compelling atmosphere of reverence and remembrance”.

Cameron’s Quarry was contracted to supply marble for the sixteen massive columns of stone within the Sanctuary. The blocks of stone were seventeen feet, six inches in length and 15 inches square, each one weighing a little over ten tons. They were then taken one at a time to the Railway Station at Nowa Nowa, using a horse team and wagon, driven by teenager William (Paddy) Morrison.

Manchester Unity Building

220-226 Collins St. and 91-107 Swanston St.

This was built in 1929-32 under the direction of Marcus Barlow. At that time, it was the tallest and probably most modern office building in Melbourne. Amongst other things, it was the first to use escalators’. There are still a number of shops and offices, but much of the building is now given over to residential apartments.

Entry is through an arcade opening to both Collin St and Swanston St. It is richly decorated with both black and grey marble. In addition to the usual use of marble in the walls, staircase and surrounding the lift entry, the most striking feature is a series of high level pictorial panels each presenting the operating values of the company:

- A World-wide Institution
- Befriending the Widow and Orphans
- Financial Security
- Fire Protection
- Provision for the Bereaved

- Rendering Public Service
- Self-dependence
- Social
- Tending the Sick

Port of Melbourne Building

29-31 Market St. with Trust Restaurant at 305-411 Flinders Lane.

This building was designed by Smith, Ogg and Serpell to accommodate the Port of Melbourne Authority and built in 1929-1931. The State Electricity Commission then took over the property in 1983 until 1987.

It was then converted to apartments but re-developed along the Northern side as *The Trust Restaurant*. The offices had extended use of Buchan Marble, but most of that has been removed. However, there is extensive and attractive use of the marble in the restaurant both on the front of the bar and along the walls.

Anzac House

4-6 Collins St.

Anzac House was built in 1938 for the Victorian Branch of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (popularly known as the RSL). The architect was Stanley Parkes of Oakley and Parkes. Buchan Marble was used in the foyer and stairway. Architecturally, it is of considerable significance, as the form of Oakley and Parkes were famous as innovators of modernist design. But in Anzac House they were committed to produce a dignified building which related to the Collins St setting. Thus, the building successfully integrates the modernist interior with a classic façade.

Other Buildings

Gravestones

There are at least a number of graves with black marble grave stones. One of these is the memorial to the late Frank Moon of Buchan Caves fame and his wife, Sabina.

The Sculptures of Faustas Sadauskas

Buchan Marble has recently come to the forefront again in two striking sculptures by Melbourne artist Faustas Saduskas.

The first, *Beacon*, 2004, is placed in the foreshore park at Black Rock, adjacent to the Clock Tower. Speaking of his work, Sadauskas said :. . . Its marble colour of varying grey hues would be not unlike those colors of some of the native flora still found along the foreshore. By its very bulk and broad mass, the sculpture is meant to create an immediate visual impact to a rapid automotive and cyclist transit public. It is not a flimsy wiry piece designed for ephemeral effect, but rather connotes permanence, the archaic and a sense of being rounded.

The second, *Segmentas*, 2007. stands at the entrance to a major in Ormond Rd.