

1887 Painting of original concept. William Pitt's design for the St Kilda Town Hall 1877 (PPCC sk2253)



C 1910 Postcard featuring the ivy-clad, red-brick façade (PPCC sk1219)



1925 Photograph showing the new portico (PPCC sk0412)

The Changing Shape

Architect William Pitt's great building continues to be a focus for civic affairs and community life in the City of Port Phillip despite the many structural changes made in response to factors such as fire and the expanding role of council.

- 1887 Pitt had a magnificent vision for this Town Hall but unfortunately his grandiose design was never fully completed. Financial constraints limited the design to a plain brick façade without portico or pillars; the proposed 178-foot tower, dome and statues of Neptune and Britannia never eventuated.
- 1890 Erected in the same year that St Kilda became a city, the building was named the St Kilda City Hall in honour of this occasion (see panel 7).
- 1925 The graceful Beaux-Arts style portico was added, with a slate roof, ironwork, leadlight windows and grand Corinthian columns. The foyer was also remodelled. Most significant was the replacement of the original central staircase with the two marble staircases now in place.
- 1957 The red brick façade was finally rendered.
- 1960's Municipal offices fronting Carlisle Street were added in response to the growing community expectations of council.
- 1991 Fire devastated a significant part of the Town Hall (see panel 2).
- 1994 The building reopened revealing the creative design of Melbourne architecture firm, Ashton Raggart McDougall.
- 2008 The new administrative block replaced the municipal offices on Carlisle Street.

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The remains of the stage and the two alcoves which housed the organ viewed from beneath the balcony (PPCC sk0634(12))



A view from inside the Main Hall with the rusted balcony framework still in place (PPCC sk0634.1)

Fire

On 7 April 1991, fire devastated the Town Hall, completely gutting the Main Hall. The stage, the 101 year old organ (see panel 5) and the encircling balconies were destroyed and the adjoining Supper Room (see panel 6) was damaged.

The community rallied behind St Kilda Mayor Melanie Eagle after the fire. Residents' views on the reconstruction were sought through questionnaires. The redeveloped Town Hall, designed by architecture firm Ashton Raggatt McDougall, was completed in 1994.

The renovations deliberately retained traces of the fire, such as charred brick and damaged decorations, and included references to some original features of the building which were destroyed. The stars on the ceiling echo the view of the night sky provided by the original, sliding ceiling panels.





14th Battalion Association returning the Colours to the municipality in 1930 (PPCC sk0048)

The Colours

Above the entrance to the Main Hall are the 1914 Colours presented by the City of St Kilda to the 14th Infantry Battalion; this group became known as 'Jacka's Mob'.



Detail from portrait of Captain Albert Jacka, 1915 (PPCCsk0776)

The 14th Infantry Battalion, consisting of men mainly from St Kilda, Prahran and Bendigo, arrived at Gallipoli on 26 April 1915. Three thousand St Kilda men served in Gallipoli and France during WWI. In 1930, in recognition of this contribution, the Colours were returned to the City of St Kilda for safekeeping.

Albert Jacka joined this battalion as a private in 1914. He was the first Australian to win a Victoria Cross in the First World War and was later a popular St Kilda Mayor. He is believed to have used the Town Hall to store possessions of evicted residents during the Depression.

Members of his family and the community celebrate his life every January with military honours in the St Kilda Cemetery and a reception at the Town Hall.





Drill display by the girls from St Michael's Grammar School in 1924 (PPCC pp0111)



Mayor Tim Costello at the re-opening of the Town Hall in 1994. The glass wall behind the crowd was moved to the exterior of the new wing on Carlisle St which opened in 2008 (PPCC sk2835)



A fencing bout between Italy and Hungary during the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games (Photographer Bruce Howard 1936 - National Library of Australia nla.pic-vn4278496-s98)

Main Hall

'A ball of most unusual splendour' took place in 1890 to celebrate St Kilda becoming a city and the occupation of the new Town Hall. Since that first event, the community has gathered here with passion and energy, sadness and pleasure to participate in events of personal significance and civic pride.

The 1000-seat Main Hall with its polished timber floor and grand organ (see panel 5) has been a favourite setting for music, dance and drama, for lavish dinners, political rallies, formal ceremonies and community action.

Young girls in white dresses made their debut, belles paraded in beauty pageants, couples waltzed at formal Mayoral balls or jived at weekly dances and others sat enraptured by fine musical recitals.

Victorian Governors and Australian Prime Ministers visited. The last and largest of Gough Whitlam's 'It's Time' rallies was held here in 1972 before he was elected and became Prime Minister.

Migrants committed to Australia at citizenship ceremonies and couples committed to each other at wedding celebrations.

Children were brought here to be immunised against polio and other infectious diseases.

In 1997, 500 locals gathered to say 'sorry' to Australia's Indigenous people.

Spectators gathered on the balconies to watch the fencing events of the 1956 Olympics.

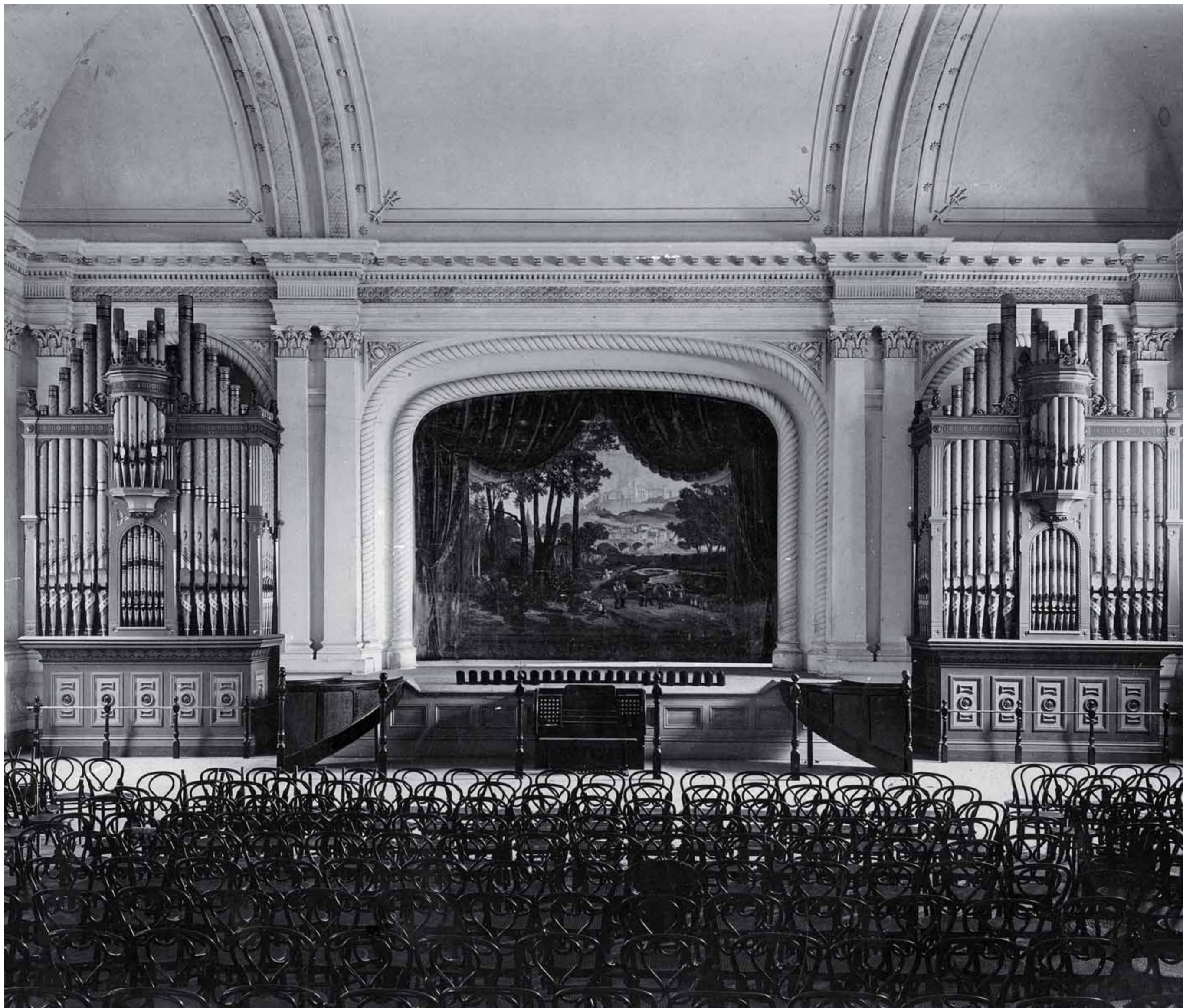
In 1954 a luncheon was held at the Town Hall for Queen Elizabeth II. Four years later, 1000 women resplendent in pearls, hats and floral dresses, joined her mother for morning tea.

The community farewelled troops going off to war and held dinners to welcome the lucky ones home.

During the Depression the unemployed came to collect sugarbags of donated food.

Residents have gathered here to campaign for and against myriad local issues with their Council.

Thousands of events of every imaginable variety have occurred here since that first, unusually splendid ball.



Interior of the Main Hall depicting the organ and stage with elaborately painted backdrop (PPCC sk0599)



A Welcome Home Dinner at the St Kilda Town Hall 1945 (PPCC sk0292)

The Organ

The blackened alcoves now at the end of the Main Hall once housed a magnificent organ. This historic instrument was lost in the 1991 fire that devastated the St Kilda Town Hall.

The organ was built by Fincham and Hobday and installed in 1892 at a total cost of £2000.

During the selection of a site for the current Town Hall, James Mason, an investor, hotelier, philanthropist and former Councillor, offered £1000 towards the purchase of an organ if the current site was chosen. It was suggested that this was not altogether unconnected with Mason's real estate interests.

A City Organist was engaged by Council for many years; one of these was Mr H. J. Inge who retained this position for 35 years until he retired in 1918. Under the patronage of the Council he gave free organ recitals which included fugues, cradle songs and war marches.

Even when not in use the organ had a great presence in the Main Hall.





1940's interior of the Supper Room with a view through to the Main Hall (PPCC sk1273)



St Kilda Town Hall Dinner 1945 (PPCC sk0289)

The Arcade

This arcade marks the site of the huge historic Supper Room damaged by the 1991 fire. Today, this three storey atrium is the link between the original Town Hall and its most recent development.

The Supper Room ran parallel to the Main Hall. It was built in 1938, on the site of an earlier weatherboard building. Many lavish banquets for balls and visiting dignitaries were laid out here adding glamour to these special occasions.

This current arcade was created in 1994 as part of the post-fire reconstruction. It incorporates a number of features which reference historic St Kilda landmarks. The Turkish tower cut-outs are reminiscent of Luna Park, the Sea Baths and the Palais de Danse. Stars set into the terrazzo tiles echo the popular St Moritz ice-skating rink which was also destroyed by fire. The administrative wing adjacent to the arcade was built as part of the 2008 redevelopment.

This part of the building, showing the intersection of the 19th century original with the 20th and 21st century redevelopments, highlights the continually changing shape of the Town Hall.



Group portrait of the St Kilda Councillors 1861-62 with Benjamin Cowderoy seated fourth from left (PPCC sk2243)



The first St Kilda Town Hall and reconstructed courthouse designed and drawn by Sydney W. Smith, Town Surveyor 1859. The Town Hall is the more modest building on the right (PPCC sk2248)

Council & Councillors

Council meetings commenced in this chamber in 1890 coinciding with the proclamation of the City of St Kilda. The chamber and this reception area were refurbished by former St Kilda Mayor and architect, Harry R. Johnson, in 1938.

Council first met in buildings at St Kilda Junction. Their early meetings were held in a room adjoining the Junction Hotel, and later across the road at the police barracks.

The first Town Hall was erected in 1859 at the corner of Barkly and Grey Streets. It was a municipal complex which included the council chamber, police station, court and watch house. Council held their first meeting there on 4 January 1860.

The first Chairman of the Municipality of St Kilda, Benjamin Cowderoy, was one of seven councillors elected as the first council in 1857. He designed the former St Kilda Council crest with its motto 'Aura Favente, Feror - Borne on a favoring breeze'. His portrait hangs near the entrance to the Council Chamber.



Mayor, Cr Frederick Winduss, beside the mayoral chair in the Port Melbourne Council Chamber, served five terms as Mayor in the period 1976-85 (PPCC pm0564.1-2)

This mayoral chair was acquired in late 1930s when the Council Chamber was refurbished. Fred Cook designed the new furnishings and is likely to have designed this important focal piece of furniture as well.



Mayor, Cr Doris Condon, in the South Melbourne mayoral chair. She served as Mayor in 1969-70, the second woman to hold this position (PPCC sm1194)

The South Melbourne mayoral chair was probably made for the new South Melbourne Town Hall which opened in 1880. The chair originally had an armorial crest on the top which was removed in 1938 during the remodelling of the Council Chamber.



Mayor, Cr Richard Thomas, seated in the St Kilda mayoral chair, served as Mayor on the St Kilda Council 1976-77 (PPCC sk2315.1-2)

This ornately carved chair was made in 1860, for the Chairman of the Municipality of St Kilda. It was made by Robert Tepper, cabinet maker of North Melbourne. The Municipal crest of St Kilda, designed by Benjamin Cowderoy, the first Chairman of St Kilda, decorates the top of the chair.

Mayoral Chairs

These three chairs belong to the former Cities of St Kilda, Port Melbourne and South Melbourne. Their presence in the Council Chamber is symbolic of the amalgamation of the three former cities in June 1994 to form the City of Port Phillip.

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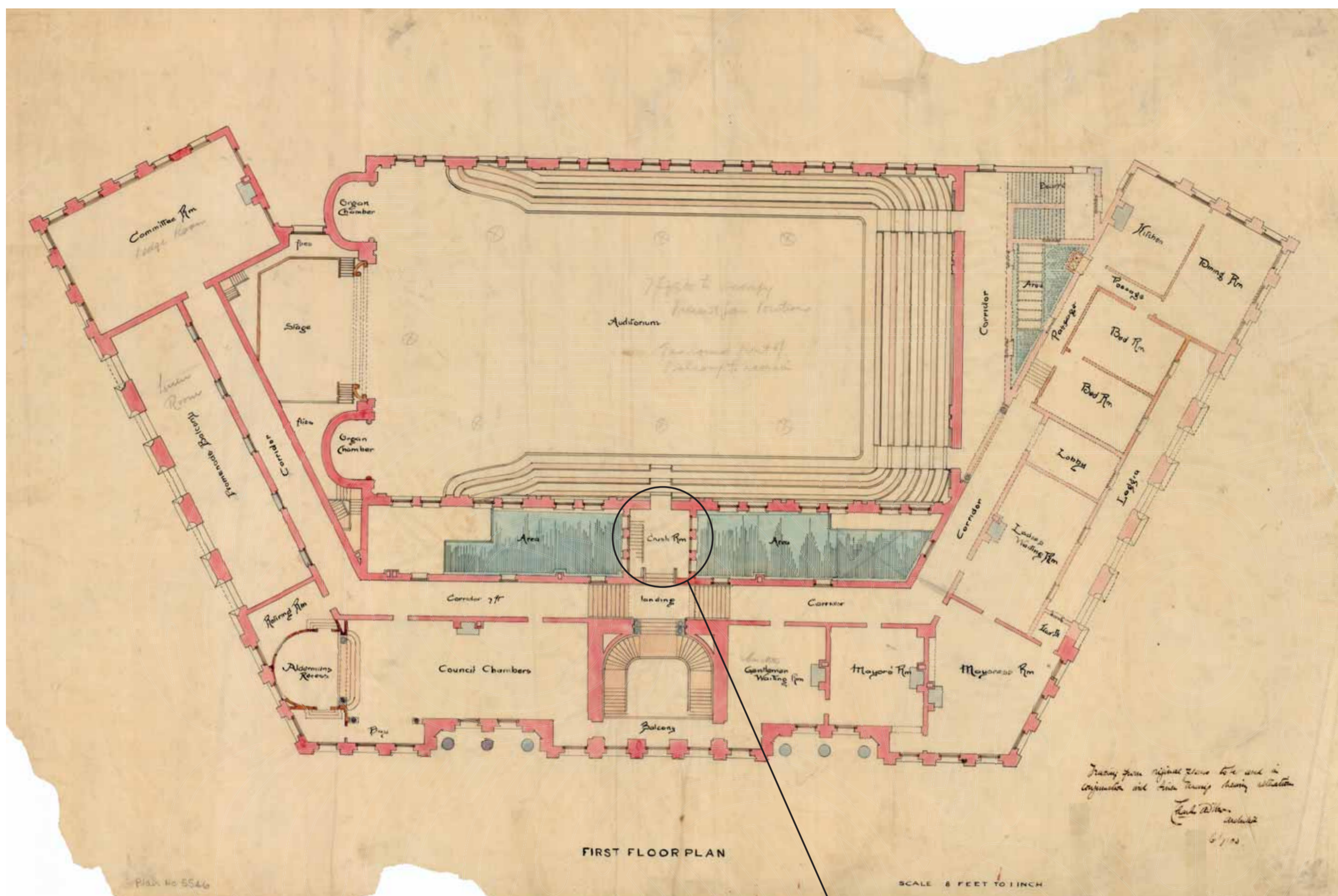
This vaulted decorative ceiling graced the original Foyer below until 1925. See the plan on panel 10 to identify the location above the central stairwell (PPCC pp0116)

St Kilda Room

Until 1925, what is now the St Kilda Room was the high vaulted ceiling of the ground floor foyer below. Redevelopments at this time included the insertion of a lower ceiling in the foyer thus creating a new Mayor's office on the upper level. This was later renamed the St Kilda Room.

Traces of a former arch can be seen in the plasterwork above the door but the huge gasolier that once hung from the ceiling is no longer there. The resulting decor is a striking combination of the original 1890 features with those from the later period.

The heritage furniture in the room is part of the Port Phillip City Collection.



Plan showing the first floor layout of the St Kilda Town Hall and the location of the Crush Room 1903 (PPCC sk2820)

Crush Room

Crush Room

This small waiting area was originally the 'Crush Room' where people gathered before entering the balconies of the Main Hall. The doorway to the balcony was closed off when the balconies were destroyed by fire in 1991 but its recessed outline is still evident in the wall opposite the St Kilda Room door.

The name, Crush Room, comes from the theatre in which it was usually a large, lavishly-decorated room where audiences would promenade or converse during the intermissions. The inclusion of this space probably reflects architect William Pitt's (see panel 1) previous project; in 1886-87 he designed Princess Theatre which also featured Melbourne's first sliding ceiling.

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