

# Media Fact Sheet

## CITY OF SYDNEY

Tuesday 24 April 2007

### Sydney Town Hall history

Sydney Town Hall has stood for more than a century as the major public and civic building in the city of Sydney. It was built in two stages between 1869 and 1889 to an extravagant scale and style during a boom period in Sydney's history.

The Town Hall dominated Sydney's commercial heart when it was built, and retains some of that dominance today, despite being surrounded by high rise buildings.

The building is considered to have very high heritage significance being the heart of the commercial district and originally designed to be a symbol of the wealth and status of the city.

The main hall of Sydney Town Hall (Centennial Hall) was seen as symbolic of the aspirations and potential of a young and dynamic nation. It was planned to be the biggest in the world measuring 166 feet in length, 85 feet in breadth and 14,110 feet in area. Sydney was the largest hall with Preston and Glasgow halls second and third and Melbourne Town Hall ninth. Adelaide Town Hall was at the bottom of the list.

Sydney Town Hall is of exceptional heritage significance to Sydney and Australia in part because of its continued use as a Town Hall, performance venue and civic heart. It is a well known landmark and meeting point and has had numerous visitors ranging from the Royal family to local community and school groups, and internationally acclaimed artists and performers.

The first stage of building included the Council offices and the small hall, or vestibule. Staff and aldermen moved into the half completed building in 1874 after Council was given notice to quit its administrative building in York Street. The actual date of completion of the building is uncertain.

The vestibule was officially opened in 1880, the clock tower was completed in 1881, and the tender to install the clock was let in 1884. In 1883, with Council employees well and truly entrenched in the new offices and attention being focused on the second stage of the building (the main hall), the Council resolved to spend nearly £11,000 to complete the first stage.

City Architect David McBeath began drawing up plans for the second stage of Town Hall – completing the main hall - in 1878. But he did not stay long, resigning at the end of 1880.

Thomas Sapsford was appointed City Architect to oversee the completion of the Main Hall, but with closer scrutiny from the aldermen. Once Sapsford's plans were approved in 1883, there were many years of building ahead of him.

Tragically, Sapsford's death at the end of 1886 came before he had fulfilled his dream to complete the Town Hall. George McRae was appointed City Architect



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and took over the final stages of construction. The Main Hall was finally opened on 27 November 1889.

The finishing touches to the Town Hall were completed in the late nineteenth century. The Grand Organ was unveiled in 1890 and a porte-cochère was constructed in 1892. The latter came down in 1934 and the original entranceway with wide steps was reinstated.

Various buildings were constructed behind the Town Hall to accommodate staff throughout the twentieth century. The current office tower, Town Hall House, was opened in 1977. It is the main administrative centre for the City of Sydney.

**For details, interviews and high resolution images contact:**  
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[CD reference: 1st\\_stage\\_complete.jpg](#)

This image shows the first stage of the Sydney Town Hall complete, c.1885. The first stage of building included the Council offices and the small hall, or vestibule. Plans were already underway to build the main hall. (image: City of Sydney Archives)

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CD reference: Porte\_cochere.jpg

In 1892 the steps to the Town Hall were removed and a 'porte-cochère' constructed in their place, making the entrance more inviting to those wealthy enough to arrive in carriages. (image: City of Sydney Archives)



CD reference: demolition.jpg

The construction of the Town Hall underground railway station in the early 1930s resulted in significant building and landscaping changes. The porte-cochère began to crack and had to be propped during the duration of railway construction. Scaffolding began to creep upwards as concerns mounted about the stability of the clock tower. In 1934 the fence around the Town Hall was removed and the porte-cochère was demolished. (image: City of Sydney Archives)

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CD reference: [demolition2.jpg](#)

The construction of the Town Hall underground railway station in the early 1930s resulted in significant building and landscaping changes. The portico began to crack and had to be propped during the duration of railway construction. Scaffolding began to creep upwards as concerns mounted about the stability of the clock tower. In 1934 the fence around the Town Hall was removed and the portico was demolished. (image: City of Sydney Archives)



CD reference: [Steps\\_new.jpg](#)

Town Hall on 22 October 1934 showing the newly constructed steps. The wide flight of steps restored the entrance to its grand entrance-way form as originally designed. (image: City of Sydney Archives)

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