Supreme Court of Victoria

Stone Restoration.

Following the establishment of the Supreme Court of Victoria on January 6th, 1852, the need was created for the Supreme Court Building, William Street, Melbourne.

A committee of Supreme Court judges first of all deliberated upon the matter until a public competition was held and won by architects Alfred Smith and Arthur E. Johnson with a design reputedly derived from the Four Courts, Dublin. Johnson apparently was in the enviable position of having been one of the assessors of the competition.

The tender of Pearson and Downie was accepted in 1877 (£239,000) and thus commenced seven years of construction, until the first sittings were held in February, 1884. A later addition was the statue of Justice (unblindfolded), which was carved by Emanuel Semper and later replaced, in bronze, by Mr Ray Ewers.

The Supreme Court is Classified by the National Trust of Australia (Vic).

Acknowledgements:

The Supreme Court of Victoria,
The Hawthorn Press (1976)
The following is a brief account, provided by the Public Works Department of Victoria, of the stone restoration at the Supreme Court.

SUPREME COURT - MELBOURNE

The Supreme Court in William Street, Melbourne, was built in Tasmanian Sandstone on a Malmsbury Bluestone base. Maintenance to stonework was done in 1960 when some blocks of stone to the curved colonnade and on the base of the Library dome had deteriorated and had to be removed and replaced with Gosford stone, which is a reasonable colour match as the Tasmanian stone was not then available.

Preservation work on the external street elevations is now in progress and the work is being carried out by the stonemasons in the Construction Group of the Public Works Department which has twelve stonemasons, including four who have recently completed their apprenticeship and another four apprentices in training. Balusters, copes, sills and cornices etc; which have deteriorated or been damaged have been entirely removed and replaced with new carved blocks, to match existing details, in Tasmanian sandstone which is now available.
The cleaning and repairs of the stonework on this project are very slow, partly because work must be suspended when courts are sitting, and partly because the work is being done by hand with large amounts of water (no chemicals whatsoever) which is used to soften up the surface grime and then hand rubbed with a carborundum stone which removed the dirt without damaging the surface of the stone.

About the same time the original stone statue of Justice which was located over the main William Street entrance had deteriorated and was considered beyond repair. In 1967, the stone statue was dismantled and was replaced by a smaller version in bronze. An experiment with a commercial cleaning system using various mixes of water and sand under pressure in an unobtrusive area was not successful as the result was a very pitted, uneven and patchy surface which was highly undesirable and would have been expensive.