Tuesday 6 June 2017

GLADESVILLE CLOCK TOWER HERITAGE RESTORATION

Work has begun on the restoration of the c1941 heritage-listed Gladesville Clock Tower.

Situated on a traffic island at the intersection of Wharf and Victoria Roads, Gladesville, the monument, also known as the Sheridan Memorial Clock, was designed by Council engineers in 1940 and built in 1941 in the Inter-War Functionalist Style. It commemorates Alderman James Sheridan, who was serving in public office at the time of his death.

City of Ryde Mayor, Clr Bill Pickering, said: "The clock tower is of historical and architectural significance as an importance piece of civic infrastructure from the Inter-War period of the mid-20th century.

"It is a great example of how each generation contributes to the constantly evolving environment of our town centres and preserving heritage items and integrating them with new developments celebrates the role they've played in our past and present."

The restoration works include:
- Replacement of the corroded steel lintels
- Replacement of significantly damaged bricks
- Removal of the redundant lighting elements
- Repairs to the original concrete base
- New landscaping to the traffic island

Council's Heritage Advisor, Michael Edwards, said researching the history and construction of the tower was fascinating.   "What began as a straight forward conservation to fix cracks around the access hatch and replacing some bricks turned into a much larger project requiring specialist skills and material.

"We took a careful approach to save as much of the original fabric as possible and to ensure the work had the least impact to the clock tower."

It was initially thought that sourcing replacement bricks was going to be one of the biggest challenges of the restoration. However, a near perfect match was located through a specialist brickyard in Taree (Lincoln Brickworks) who have been around since 1852 and still manufacture bricks in the traditional methods.

Here are some interesting discoveries:

1. The clock tower does not appear to have ever been built to its original specifications. Council will reconstruct the top above the clock faces as per the original design. This will reinstate the 'purity' of the design as originally envisaged by Council Engineer in 1940/1941.

2. The Heritage Team discovered the name 'Dick' and the date of 19/4/69 etched into the cement capping on the top.

3. Glass 'cats eyes' are embedded into the face of the concrete base in the shape of directional arrows.

4. The clocktower sits back from Victoria Road, partly because of the widening of the southern side of Victoria Road during the late 1930s, but also because it was intended originally as a way to assist in the direction and management of traffic. The buses of the 1940s would swing around the clocktower before heading back towards Hunters Hill.

5. It is the only known civic clocktower in NSW to commemorate an Alderman of Council, making it quite unique and rare.

6. Inexplicably, the clock stopped ticking at 10.01am on 31 May 2017 after the scaffolding was erected around the tower in preparation for restoration.

If you would like to learn more about the history of Gladesville, Council is conducting a Gladesville Urban Walking Tour on June 25. For information go to www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/whatson

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