

Amphitheatre for the Messiah

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Jack Eldridge, President of Mosman Historical Society, describes the amphitheater

Perhaps the most interesting incident in the spiritual history of Australia was the building of a stone temple to accommodate audiences for the second coming of Christ.

The whole idea was begun by the "Order of the Eastern Star," a world-wide religious organization presided over by Dr. Annie Besant and Bishop C. W. Leadbeater. Apparently thinking Krishnamurti was the Messiah, these theosophists set to work on a giant amphitheater which would hold his audiences. The building was of Roman architectural design, open to the sky. With its tiers of circling concrete seats for an auditorium rising high above the stage, making it like an arena, it soon gained the title from the general public of "The Amphitheatre."

Despite the absence of any protection from weather conditions, its acoustic properties were perfect at all times. Apparently, as the story goes, the Messiah was to enter the harbor at Sydney Heads and walk directly on the water towards the amphitheater waiting for him. Adherents paid anything from £5 to £100 for the permanent right to a seat. Of course, Krishnamurti finally resigned from the order, leaving them truly "high and dry." The Order of the Eastern Star, for want of fulfillment, gradually disbanded in Australia after its establishment in 1924-5, Vaudeville took over. Humphrey Bishop used the temple for a while in his local entertainment, but after a run of bad weather it was closed. The temple was demolished and in its place a large block of flats was erected.

Apparently neither Bishop Leadbeater nor the money for the proposed seats were ever heard of again. The bishop "disappeared" to America. There are still reminders, however, of the Order from the present radio station "2 GB" in New South Wales. The Order had set up its own radio station (the second in Australia) in the grounds of a large mansion at Clifton Gardens called "The Manor." Here the bishop and his staff resided.

The call number "2 GB" was in memory of one of its patron saints, Giordano Bruno (shortened to "2 GB"). The station, like the temple, was later sold to commercial interests. However, the station number has not been altered. Still in the Mosmon District Local Historical Collection is the original marble foundation stone inscribed:

This stone was laid by
The very illustrious brother
C.W. LEADBEATER 33
on 11th May 1925
to Dedicate
This Co-Masonic Temple
To the Service of the
GREAT WHITE LODGE

And so, what was the hope for the beginning of a golden era crumbled into dust. Australia still waits, her gates open, for the "revealing of the sons of God." (St. Paul in Rom. 8: 19) As I passed by the scene on a recent cruise I thought it significant that the stewardess should point out this most historical landmark. We are amazed that this glorious moment should now be fulfilled, in a manner so unexpected.