
Former Oriental Building



B4284 Tomasetti House

Location

277 - 279 Flinders Lane,, MELBOURNE VIC 3000 - Property No B4284

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Regional

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 24, 2008

The former Oriental building is an extension and refacing of a bluestone warehouse, built in 1853 for William Degraives', flour-milling and merchant businesses. At five storeys, it was one of the largest buildings in the commercial area of Melbourne at the time, and was the hub of Degraives activities for 20 years. He went on to become a successful business man, eventually entering Parliament in the 1860s, and having a nearby street (Degraives Street) named after him.

In 1899. the warehouse was renamed the Oriental Building , and between 1905 and 1907, floors were added, and a new facade constructed to the designs of prolific commercial architects H W & F B Tompkins, giving the building the appearance it has today. In later years it became known as the Tomasetti Building.

The former Oriental Building is a tall, narrow, seven level building (including a half basement) with laneways on each side, located in a part of Flinders Lane that is characterised by such buildings, mostly dating from the first decades of the 20th century.

The facade is divided vertically into three bays, with a large base section, a vertical central section, and an attic

floor. The most distinctive elements are the row of three massive horse-shoe arches of the ground floor, which give it an Arabic (or indeed Oriental) flavour, further emphasised by the banding of render and red brick in the four major vertical piers of the facade and their octagonal terminating turrets. The central bay has an inset bay window form over three floors and the side bays are divided into two tall red brick piers topped by a pair of horseshoe arches. The massive squat columns of the ground floor, supporting the main arches are also notable, as is the use of Art Nouveau foliation at the capitals, also found at the bottom of the piers and the attic floor, where there is another central horseshoe arch.

The first four floors of the wall on the east side of the building are constructed of rough bluestone, most probably dating from the construction of the Degraes warehouse of 1853.

How is it significant? The former Oriental Building is significant for aesthetic/architectural and historic reasons at a Regional level.

Why is it significant? Architecturally, the former Oriental building is notable as one of the most distinctive and unusual of the Edwardian era 'tall-arched, red-brick' buildings in the city area. . The horseshoe arches and render banding of the facade give it a unique and delightful Arabic character, overlaid on the typically vertical and narrow red-brick facade, which also features Art Nouveau foliation to some decorative details. The 'tall-arched, red-brick' buildings, mainly found in the Melbourne city area, are a unique Victorian variation of the American Romanesque Revival combined with Queen Anne or Art Nouveau decorative details, making them important as a group on a National basis.

Historically, the remnants of the Degraes warehouse are important, as they provide evidence of one of the largest commercial buildings in Melbourne at a very early period in its history, built for one of the most notable and long-lasting business names.

Classified: 09/02/1978.

Revised: 17/05/2004

Architect/Designer Tompkins, HW & FB,
Other Names Tomasetti Building, Degraes Warehouse,
Hermes Number 64930
Property Number

Physical Description 1

DESCRIPTION:

The former Oriental Building is one of the most unusual and distinctive of the 'tall-arched, red-brick' buildings constructed in Melbourne between 1900-1916. It is highly modelled, divided into three bays, with a large base section, a vertical central section, and an attic floor. The most distinctive elements is the row of three massive horse-shoe arches of the ground floor, which give it an Arabic (or indeed Oriental) flavour, further emphasised by the banding of render and red brick in the four major vertical piers of the facade, and their octagonal terminating turrets. The massive squat columns of the ground floor, supporting the arches are also notable, as is the use of Art Nouveau foliation at the capitals, also found at the bottom of the piers and the attic floor, where there is another central horseshoe arch. The use of a recessed bay window form in the central bay of the facade gives even more animation to the already rich modelling.

The first four floors of the wall on the east side of the building, visible down a narrow laneway, is constructed of rough bluestone, and most probably dates from the construction of the original building on the site, the Degraes warehouse of 1853. The wall on the west side is also visible down another narrow laneway, and has been rendered, but projecting bluestone quoins are visible on the windows of the first two floors.

Typically for Flinders Lane warehouses, there is a half basement, and a set of steps in the westernmost bay leading to the raised 'ground' floor.

Intactness

The facade appears remarkably intact, while the interiors, including lobbies and lifts, have been substantially altered over the years. The building has recently been vacant, and it has been leased to new businesses.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>