

Victorian Heritage Database Report
FORMER FOURTH VICTORIA BUILDING



Location:

241-245 COLLINS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H1542

Listing Authority: VHR

Heritage Overlay Number: HO591

Heritage Inventory Citation

The following description is from the National Trust nomination: The 1888 brick facade along Manchester lane still survives, and is in marked contrast to the remodelled Collins Street facade. The Collins street facade is rendered; it was originally white but is now painted pink. The tiles on the first floor level are green glazed terracotta, as are the vertical elements above this, the medallions higher on the facade, and the original lions' heads, which are now missing.

CONTEXT

The Fourth Victoria Building is an important element in the Block precinct, which lies in the prestigious part of Collins Street between Swanston and Elizabeth Street. It is surrounded by a mixture of buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and later, but buildings from the early twentieth century are particularly notable in this locality. Next door at 247 Collins Street is Newspaper House, which was originally part of the same pair of nineteenth century brick warehouses as the Fourth Victoria, and which had a new sandstone horizontal Moderne facade (with a colourful mural by Napier Waller across the first floor) added in 1932-3 to designs by Stephenson & Meldrum. Both the Fourth Victoria Building and Newspaper house preserve the height and fenestration patterns of the original warehouses, and form an impressive and significant pair. With the group of early modernist buildings opposite, including Kodak House by Oakley & Parkes (1934-5), at 252 Collins; Lyric House (1929-30) by A & K Henderson at 250 Collins Street; and the Manchester Unity Building by Marcus Barlow (1929-32) at 91 Swanston Street; and with the Tomkins brothers Centreway Building (1911-12) nearby at 259-63 Collins Street, it forms a particularly fine group of early twentieth century buildings.

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The Fourth Victoria Building was originally a four storey brick warehouse and office building, built in 1884 and remodelled in 1912 by architect Robert Haddon for the Fourth Victoria Permanent Property Building and Investment Society who owned the building from 1886 to 1971. Two more storeys were added to the building and the Collins Street facade was rendered with white cement and a series of whimsical decorative elements added. Haddon's treatment of this facade reflected his interest in the Arts and Crafts and movement, in nature, and in the latest architectural movements in Europe, and it is an early landmark of the modern movement in Victoria.

The six storey facade of the Fourth Victoria Building differed significantly from other contemporary commercial facades in its austerity and originality. Above the ground floor shop front and awning the first floor facade is covered with a panel of green glazed tiles, originally with the name of the building in large letters above arched windows, surmounted by a stylised wrought iron balcony. The facade above this was of plain white render pierced by windows without architraves. Haddon considered that developing uniquely Australian forms and motifs was important, but in the design of this facade he used decorative elements such as the lion motif and Art Nouveau curvilinear forms. Above the fifth level were two large majolica medallions, originally containing green lions' heads, with trunk-like majolica stems running down the facade. Beneath a simple parapet a row of cement projections casts an indented shadow along the plain wall face, an effect Haddon described as aesthetically necessary to the form of the building.

The interior was also remodelled in 1912, and the lift cage from this period still exists. The remodelling at this time in the stairwell, lift core and the installation of the large windows brought light and space into the centre of

the building. All these internal changes were part of the building's modernisation. The firm of Wunderlich Ltd, Victoria's major supplier of architectural terracotta and pressed metal architectural features, particularly ceilings, which were so characteristic of the Edwardian period, was a supplier to the construction, and the first major tenant. Interior features from this period survive, including the architect's green and white colour scheme, the white marble treads on the stairs, extensive use of green glazed tiles, pressed metal ceilings and the Wunderlich showroom with samples of Wunderlich pressed metal designs.

Tenants in the building before and after the 1912 remodelling included the Melbourne Bicycle Club, architects G. W. Vanheems and Isidor Beaver, Wunderlich Pty Ltd (on the third floor), and architect Leslie M Perrott in the 1920s.

The facade has been painted pink and the lions' heads, which gave meaning to the form of the decoration and also proclaimed the purpose of the building, have been removed as has the wrought iron balcony.

How is it significant?

The former Fourth Victoria Building is of aesthetic, architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The former Fourth Victoria Building has architectural significance as a stylistically unique commercial facade, characteristic of its renowned architect and his idiosyncratic design technique, and his influence in turn from British Free Style architecture and the Viennese Secession. In the opinion of Robin Boyd, the building is a landmark of the modern movement in architecture in Victoria. It was a very early, perhaps the only, commercial facade in Victoria to incorporate the simple white surface which was important in early twentieth century European modernism. Although the facade now lacks the two famous lions' heads of green glazed terracotta, its Art Nouveau elements, plain parapet and lushly tiled first floor level is remarkable for its contrast with contemporary commercial facades. The dripping majolica stems, stylised wrought iron balustrading and projections at the cornice line provide a Secessionist character to the building.

The building has aesthetic significance for its interior features which includes extensive use of green glazed tiles and pressed metal ceilings. The former Wunderlich showroom features a unique showcase of Wunderlich pressed metal ceilings in Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles ranging from simple to opulent designs. The original tiled signs on the landing are also noteworthy.

The former Fourth Victoria Building is of historical significance for its associations with the architect Robert Haddon. Robert Haddon was a highly influential architect, teacher and writer. He was a consulting architect from his office known as the Central Drawing Office and was associated with the work of a number of architects and firms such as G B Leith and Sydney Smith and Ogg of Melbourne and Laird and Barlow of Geelong, and Michael McCabe of Camperdown. He was head of the department of architecture at the Working Men's College (now RMIT) from 1902 and a founding Vice President of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	1884 -
Architect / Designer	Haddon, Robert Joseph
Municipality	MELBOURNE CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	13030
Property number	

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online