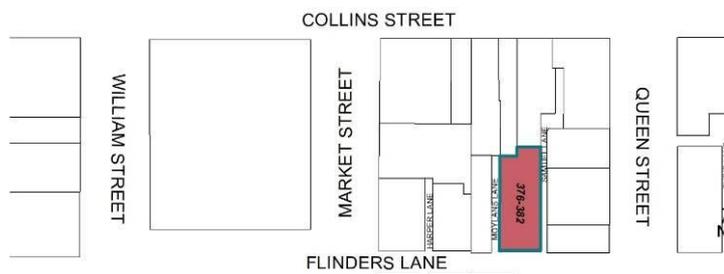


## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Heritage Place:** Former Automatic Telephone Exchange



**PS ref no:** HO1335



### What is significant?

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, 376-378 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, built by the Commonwealth Department of Works in 1957, is significant.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- Original building form and scale;
- Original asymmetrical composition of solid light-coloured face brick form and nonloadbearing curtain wall to its principal (Flinders Lane) façade;
- Vertically proportioned window openings with projecting perimeter frames; and,
- Original street level façade clad in tiles and recessed entry door opening with toplight.

Later alterations are not significant.

### How it is significant?

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at 376-378 Flinders Lane is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

### Why it is significant?

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, opened in 1957 at 376-382 Flinders Lane, is historically significant for the material evidence it provides of the broadening of Commonwealth government powers after World War Two, a shift that resulted in increased construction of

Commonwealth buildings in city centres by the Commonwealth Department of Works. As a large-scale

purpose-built building it demonstrates the growth and changes in telecommunication technology in the period following World War Two. (Criterion A)

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, is significant as a highly intact example of postwar multi-storey development in central Melbourne, utilising the Post-War Modernist style that characterised this new wave of development. These buildings represented the new modernism in their modular, industrial Bauhaus-inspired aesthetic incorporating features such as consistent access to daylight and open floor plans to meet new standards for commercial office accommodation. The presence of stylistic features characteristic of the interwar Functionalist style demonstrates the building's lengthy planning and design phase as a result of delays to construction that were typical of early postwar construction. (Criterion D)

The building is also representative of the modern purpose-built telephone exchange buildings, designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works in the early postwar period to accommodate growth in telecommunications as well as accommodating an expanded workforce. The internal technical requirements of these telephone exchange buildings are evident in the variations between high floor to ceiling heights across different levels. (Criterion D)

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange is aesthetically significant as a substantial, refined and highly intact example of a lightweight aluminium curtain wall Post-War Modernist style multi-storey building. The principal façade to Flinders Lane exhibits an unusual asymmetrical combination of a solid modernist form of light-coloured face brick, with an offset projecting curtain wall which extends from the first to the fifth floors. The building also demonstrates characteristics of the interwar Functionalist style, including the use of light-coloured face brick punctuated by vertically proportioned window openings with projecting perimeter frames. Overall, it is a well-executed design by the Commonwealth Department of Works, who were responsible for many high quality public buildings during the interwar and early postwar periods. (Criterion E)

### **Primary source**

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Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)