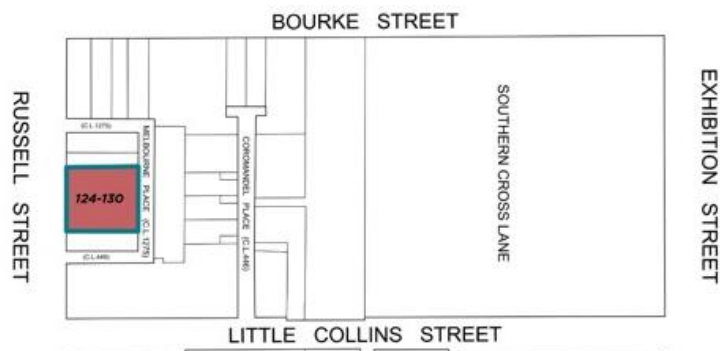


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Melbourne Theosophical Society (former Russell House)



PS ref no: HO1261



What is significant?

Russell House at 124-130 Russell Street, Melbourne, built in 1923 as a car showroom and offices and used from 1972 as the office of the Melbourne Theosophical Society.

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

- The building's original external form, materials and detailing;
- The building's relatively high level of integrity to its original design;
- The original size and pattern of fenestration;
- The pedimented parapet, spandrels, columns and rendered geometric shapes;
- The round solid metal feature with star motif; and early signage; and
- The marble tiles and bronze shopfront window frames at street level.

Later alterations made at ground level are not significant.

How it is significant?

124-130 Russell Street, Melbourne is of local historic, representative, aesthetic and social significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

Russell House at 124-130 Russell Street is historically significant for its demonstration of car sales in the early years of motoring in Victoria. With car ownership concentrated in Melbourne in the 1920s, motor garages represent an important use for a small number of buildings in the central city.

124-130 Russell Street is historically significant for its association with the Melbourne Theosophical Society, which was formed to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. The Society was formed unofficially in Australia in 1890 following its New York formation in 1875, and became a chartered organisation in 1895. Since 1936 the Melbourne Theosophical Society was located at 181-187 Collins Street, then subsequently leased the Athenaeum Hall (188 Collins Street),

and in 1972 purchased Russell House, converting several floors to suit its purposes in 1972. (Criterion A)

As a commercial building designed in the interwar classical style, 124-130 Russell Street is significant for its form, scale and façade detail of the period, and its level of integrity. (Criterion D)

124-130 Russell Street is aesthetically significant for its relatively intact façade. This is evident in the simple rendered geometric patterns to the rendered surfaces including the parapet with circular motifs and a round solid metal feature inscribed with a star motif - the emblem of the Theosophical Society. Aesthetic significance is attributed to the original cantilevered verandah and the wide entry with steps leading from street level and clad with marble tiles and bronze shopfront window frames. (Criterion E)

124-130 Russell Street is of social significance for its long-standing associations with the Melbourne Theosophical Society as its headquarters and the location of its library, bookshop and meeting spaces. 124-130 Russell Street is of social significance as a long-standing meeting place where those interested in theosophy meet, learn and exchange ideas. (Criterion G)

Primary source

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