

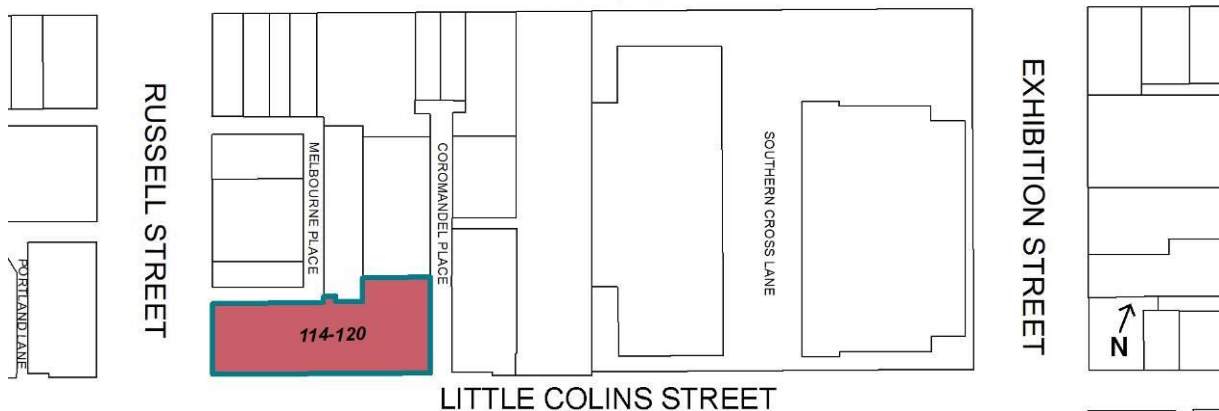
SITE NAME Former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building [Hero Apartments (current name)]

STREET ADDRESS 114-120 Russell Street, Melbourne

PROPERTY ID 108591



BOURKE STREET



SURVEY DATE: October 2018

SURVEY BY: Context

HERITAGE INVENTORY N/A

EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY No

PLACE TYPE Individual Heritage Place

PROPOSED CATEGORY Significant

FORMER GRADE B

DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST: Commonwealth Department of Works (1948-54), Nonda Katsaildis (1999-2001)

BUILDER: Probuild Constructions (1999-2001)

DEVELOPMENT PERIOD: Postwar Period (1945-1975)

DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION: 1948-1954, 1999-2001

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations.	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here
POST WAR THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
2 Governing, administering and policing the city	2.1 Commonwealth government

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Retail and residential
1920s	Telegraphic and telephonic
1960s	Telegraphic and Telephonic

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Extent of overlay: Refer to map

SUMMARY

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, now Hero Apartments, at 114-120 Russell Street Melbourne, was constructed by the Commonwealth government in 1948-54 in the interwar Functionalist style to a design by the Commonwealth Department of Works.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The period from 1945 to 1975 was one of radical transformation for Melbourne; from the low-rise city that still reflected its colonial origins to a bustling international centre of commerce and culture. The surviving buildings from this period are evidence of the evolving economic and social conditions in Melbourne at the time and demonstrate the city's transition from its nineteenth century manufacturing origins to its current banking, office and service industry focus. These buildings reflect the increasing commercial and cultural role of Melbourne in the international context of globalisation and postwar optimism as well as a radically altered economic environment which saw an influx of foreign capital and ideas. Collectively, these buildings represent a transformative period in the life of the city; a period that is categorised by significant change, growth and evolution across all aspects of life – social, political, economic and cultural.

Commonwealth government

In 1948, the Commonwealth Government compulsorily acquired land on either side of Little Lonsdale Street, between Spring and Exhibition streets. The Commonwealth Centre (now demolished) was subsequently constructed on this block of land (with a street address of 11-39 La Trobe Street) over the period 1958 to the early 1960s. Its construction transformed 'the image of the Federal government in central Melbourne into that of a modern corporation' (Lewis et al 1993:223-24, 255).

As Commonwealth powers increased after World War II, Commonwealth buildings in city centres rose in number. Of particular influence was the transfer in 1942 of income tax revenue from the states to the Commonwealth and the resultant construction of buildings for the Taxation Office, including a building in Bourke Street, which opened in 1958. Marsden writes that the Commonwealth government presence, including the establishment after the war of the new Department of Housing and Construction, reinforced Melbourne's continuing pre-eminence as Australia's financial centre, at least until the 1960s.

A telephone exchange and postal hall building was constructed by the Commonwealth government at 114-120 Russell Street in the period 1948-54. In 1956 the building served as a relay station for the broadcasting of newly arrived television. In 1959, the Commonwealth Arbitration Courts opened at 450 Little Bourke Street, and in 1965 the Reserve Bank of Australia opened at 56-64 Collins Street. Telephone exchanges were also constructed by the Commonwealth Department of Works at 376-382 Flinders Lane (opened in 1957) and at 447-453 Lonsdale Street (1969).

SITE HISTORY

The subject building at 114-120 Russell Street was constructed in two distinct phases: the first between 1948-1954 when it was built as the Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building. A second phase of development, spanning 1999 to 2001, saw the exchange and postal building converted to the Hero Apartments tower (Hermes record for '114-120 Russell Street, Melbourne').

Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building: 1948-c1999

The land comprising the subject site is part of Crown Allotments 19 and 17 of Block 10, first purchased in 1837 by Anthony Hordern of Sydney, and Charles Williams of Melbourne (CoMMaps; Badman 1892 & S&Mc 1892). A row of narrow Victorian buildings ranging from one to three storeys in

height and numbered 114-120 Russell Street, and 154-136 Little Collins Street, were built between 1885 and 1890 (MMBW 1018,1895; S&Mc 1885, 1890).

In 1946, the Commonwealth Department of Public Works acquired the subject site, whose buildings it described as some of the oldest and most dilapidated in Melbourne (Commonwealth of Australia 1945-46). The Department of Public Works prepared plans for the Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building in the same year (Commonwealth of Australia 1945-46).

The Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, opened in 1954, was the first large building constructed in the city after 1940 and, according to the National Trust citation, it was the last to express the solid, masonry architectural traditions that were typical of architecture before World War Two (see Figure 1) (National Trust 2008; *Age* 15 September 1954:2). Carried to the City of Melbourne height limit of 40 metres (132 feet) and divided into nine storeys, the building was one of the tallest in the city at the time of its completion (see Figure 2) (*Age* 15 September 1954:2).



Figure 1. photograph of the Russell Street Telephone Exchange and Postal Building in 1956 (Source: Sievers 1956, SLV: accession no: H99.50/299 copyright)



Figure 2. Aerial view of the Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, Russell Street, Melbourne, Victoria 1954-60. (Source: Charles Pratt and Airspy 1954-56, SLV copyright)

Construction was slow and expensive; taking six and a half years and costing £1 million, over double the initial estimates (*Age* 15 September 1954:2). On completion of construction, the design was described as belonging to a 'past-era' and the cost to taxpayers was lamented (*Age* 15 September 1954:2).

Associated with the building was a 1600 feet telephone cable tunnel from Flinders Lane to Bourke Street (*Age* 15 September 1954:2). Bendigo miners cut the tunnel that descended 30 feet below Russell Street (see Figure 3). A Federal Parliamentary Accounts Committee inquiring into the cost of the building in 1953 found that the inflated price was in part due to changing labour conditions following the war, including a marginal increase in the basic wage; as well as the shortage of local building materials and, consequently, the increased cost of imported materials, including the cement

used in the building, imported at an increased cost of 204%, and much of the steel which was also purchased at an inflated price (*Age* 15 September 1954:2).

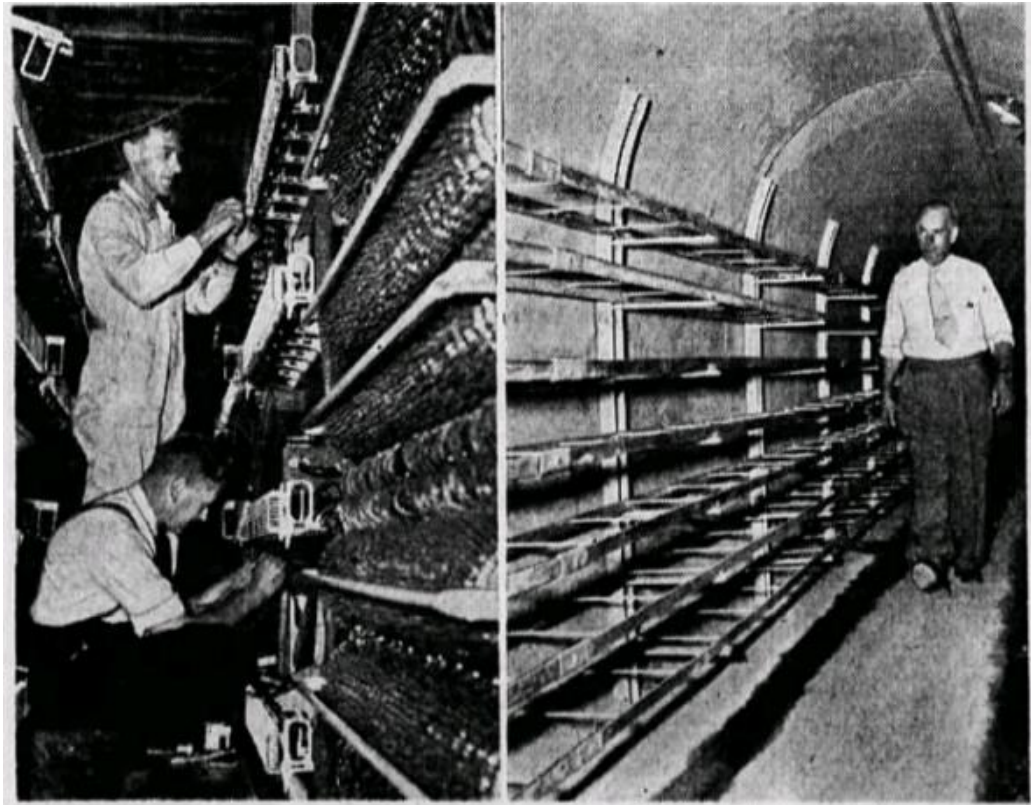


Figure 3. Photograph showing underground tunnels with telephone wires installed upon completion of the Exchange building's construction. (Source: *Age* 31 March 1954:5)

The automatic exchange was constructed to house 20,000 telephone lines (*Age* 27 March 1954:11).

Use of the Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building was distributed across the building as follows:

- The ground floor was used as a postal hall.
- The basement, first, second and third floors were fitted with automatic telephone equipment.
- The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh floors were subdivided, using terracotta block partitions, into departmental office space.
- The eighth floor comprised a cafeteria (Commonwealth of Australia 1945-46).

The postal hall was fitted with an elaborate interior with an Italian Modernist influence, and featured a striped floor, metal grill work, stainless steel telephone booths and substantial pink granite stylised Doric columns (Hero Apartments 2018). Sculptors S J Hammond and G H Allan designed the low-bas relief sculpture on the western elevation of the building, fronting Russell Street and a 300kg timepiece affixed to the exterior of the building in 1954 (see Figure 4). The subject building also reputedly contained the first air-conditioned postal hall in Australia (*Age* 8 September 1955:4; VHD 2008)



Figure 4. Extract from photograph showing the 6cwt (approximately 300kg) timepiece being installed at Russell Street Exchange building in 1954. (Source: Age 23 July 1954:8)

After the initial changeover in November 1953, 3000 telephone lines were progressively moved in 1954-1955 from the Central Exchange on Lonsdale Street (installed in 1911) to Russell Street (*Age* 27 March 1954:11; Commonwealth of Australia 1945-46). In 1956 the building served as a relay station for the newly arrived television services.

Constructed during a period of architectural and economic stagnation in Victoria, Miles Lewis maintains that the former Telephone Exchange and Postal Building was one of 'the last vestiges of the mannered metropolitan architecture of the 1930s' (Lewis et al 1993:224). By 1955 there were 48 major building projects either recently finished or being erected in Melbourne, including the first glass curtain walled building in the city at 100 Collins Street, which represented the strikingly different style of Modernism (*Age* 8 September 1955:4; VHD 2008).

The building continued to function as a postal building and telephone exchange until c1998, when it was offered for sale by tender(see Figure 5) (*Age* 9 May 1998:105).

From May to July 1999, the Russell Street Telephone Exchange building was used as a major exhibition venue during the first Melbourne International Biennial (*Age* 14 May 1999:48).



Figure 5. Photograph from 1998, showing the building shortly before the sale. (Age 9 May 1998:105)

Hero Apartments: 1999-2001

Between 1999 and 2001 the building was converted into a residential tower. Nonda Katsilidis, then practising as Nation Fender Katsalidis, was the lead architect of the six-storey addition and apartment conversion. Probuild Constructions carried out the works (FK 2006). According to Fender Katsalidis, the six-storey roof top addition was designed to counterpoint the Telephone Exchange building's 1940s cubic geometry, with the addition expressed in modern vernacular, 'accentuated by a materials' palette predominated by Corten steel and galvanised iron'. The architects described the additions as a 'dramatic and richly detailed skyline sculpture [that]...celebrates the here and now, while re-validating the integrity of the site's architectural past' (FK 2006).

The tower presently contains 112 residential properties, one business, eight retail shops and four food and drink outlets (CoMMaps).

Commonwealth Department of Works, designer

The Commonwealth Department of Works was established in 1901 to look after the creation of public works in the newly federated nation. Although the agency has operated under different titles in its history – it was known as the Department of Works from 1952-73 – it is commonly referred to as the Commonwealth Department of Works (CDW) to distinguish it from state-based agencies. The Department was responsible for the design, construction, alteration and maintenance of Commonwealth buildings and other engineering works. Its offices were located in Melbourne until 1929, when they were transferred to Canberra. There was a period of intensive works carried out by the CDW during and immediately after World War Two, as the Department managed the building of essential infrastructure as well as significant postwar planning (Smith 2006). By the early 1970s, the activities of the CDW were slowly declining; its functions were transferred to the Department of Housing & Construction in 1978; then the Department of Transport and Construction in 1982 and from

1987, it was known as Australian Construction Services. The vestiges of the CDW were sold off to an engineering firm in 1997 (Willis 2012).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at 114-120 Russell Street was originally a nine-storey building designed in the interwar Functionalist style and opened in 1954 to the 40 metre (132 foot) height limit then in force in central Melbourne. Although it was constructed after 1945, the building has a strong horizontal emphasis and other characteristics typical of the interwar Functionalist style; however, it also demonstrates a number of eclectic and innovative features that are more derivative than characteristic of the style.

The subject site is located at the corner of Russell and Little Collins Street. To the north of the property is Melbourne Place. The building has a narrow frontage to Russell Street, but is on a very deep block that extends a considerable distance along Little Collins Street to the east.

The building structure is of reinforced concrete post and slab construction. The original façades to Russell Street and Little Collins Street are constructed in light coloured non-loadbearing brickwork laid in stretcher bond. Both elevations are heavily articulated with projecting windows and other elements, and the perimeter framing for these windows is of glazed terracotta (or faience), rather than concrete or rendered brick as is usually the case. Most of the projecting window modules are in repetitive square or vertically proportioned modules rather than strong horizontal forms linking multiple window panels usually associated with the interwar Functionalist style. These more typical interwar Functionalist forms are present, but are limited to the first and second floors on both elevations, as well as the top level below the projecting roof cornice. The first floor horizontal panel on Russell Street frames an artwork in the 'Surrealist' style that has been placed over the original first floor bay of windows (refer figure 2).

In general, the windows appear to be original steel (or possibly aluminium) framed windows with some opening sashes as the building predates the widespread use of air conditioning. The building features a large and dramatic recessed entry space on the Russell Street frontage, surmounted by a lintel clad in glazed terracotta and supported on three circular columns clad in granite. Adjacent to the entry is also a bass relief sculpture attached to the wall at ground level which is a common element of a high-quality building of this period and intended to be enjoyed by the public.

Between 1999 and 2001 the building was converted to an apartment complex, including the addition of six additional storeys above the original roof and other alterations within the original structure, including the insertion of balconies, to the design of architects Nation Fender Katsalidis.

The additional storeys are primarily of metal and glass, separated from and floating above the original building with a deep undercroft. There are two large vertical fins crossing the floors of the extension on Little Collins Street, which terminate above the roof of the extension with an 'Art Deco' flourish. A number of original windows have been removed to create balconies, however this does not disrupt the rhythm of the elevation despite the glazing line being moved back. Two new vertically proportioned windows have been inserted at the third and fourth floor levels to the Russell Street façade, and are surrounded by an overscaled 'bar code' motif. Overall, the contrast between the form and detail of the original building and the additions, and the design and material quality of both, results in an interesting and complimentary architectural composition.

INTEGRITY

The original nine-storey building is largely intact with the original face brickwork, projecting steel framed windows with projecting glazed terracotta faience frames, glazed terracotta lintel to the entry supported on three granite clad circular columns and bas relief sculpture still evident.

Alterations and additions completed in 1999-2001 include the addition of six storeys above the original roof line, projecting balconies to the Little Collins Street elevation, the removal of a number of windows along Little Collins Street to create recessed balconies and the addition of two windows to the Russell Street elevation with 'bar code' decorative panel.

Although the 1999-2001 alterations and additions to the building have had some impact on the authenticity and integrity of the earlier building designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works, the original building remains clearly legible as a high quality, if somewhat eclectic, example of the interwar Functionalist style and its architectural qualities have not been overwhelmed by the additional forms. Therefore, despite the alterations, overall the building is of high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

After the end of the World War Two, building activities in the central city slowly revived during the early 1950s. Structural steel and reinforced concrete framing became popular building materials in interwar period and continued to be used extensively in postwar Melbourne construction, inspired by Chicagoan architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Departing from load-bearing brick walls, these new building methods allowed windows to become larger and more prominent on facades, whilst also facilitating increased building heights.

In the 1930s and 1940s new lower scale buildings such as factories and other modern service facilities such as car showrooms often utilised the interwar Functionalist style, emphasising a modern aesthetic and characterised by its progressive image using 'streamlined' horizontal spandrels and extensive horizontal bands of glazing. However, in the period prior to and following World War Two, the style was also used for some high-rise commercial buildings, including the Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works.

The following examples are comparable with the former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, although their construction date and scale varies. The images and descriptions below are provided by CoM Maps unless stated otherwise, with images dating from c2000 or later.

Batman Exchange, 376-382 Flinders Lane, 1956-57 (Recommended as individually significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

Designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works, the Batman Exchange has an unusual asymmetrical treatment of the façade with a combination brick masonry with a glass curtain wall sections.



Figure 6. 376-382 Flinders Lane, built in 1956. (Source: Context 2018)

Lonsdale Exchange Building, 447-453 Lonsdale Street, 1969 (Recommended as individually significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

The Lonsdale Exchange Building at 447-453 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne was built in 1969 by P D C Construction to a design by the Commonwealth Department of Public Works. The 15-storey building, built in the Post-War Modernist and Brutalist styles, replaced an earlier telephone exchange on the site.



Figure 7. 447-453 Lonsdale Street, built in 1969.

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at is an example of a substantial multi-storey building designed broadly in the interwar Functionalist style, and completed during the postwar years in 1954. It has the strong horizontal emphasis of expressed façade elements and windows, and other characteristics typical of the style, but also demonstrates a number of eclectic and innovative features that are more derivative than typical of the style, making it difficult to compare with other examples.

Nevertheless, some comparison can be drawn with other examples of postwar telephone exchanges in the City of Melbourne, also designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works, including the

Lonsdale Exchange Building, the former Batman Exchange (both recommended as individually significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review), and the Telstra City West Exchange Building at 436 Little Bourke Street (HO1054). The former Batman Exchange is particularly comparable, as a high quality building from the period that shares some of the characteristics of the Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building. The two buildings share a similar scale, a façade of light coloured non-loadbearing brickwork articulated with projecting windows, two repetitive top levels, and vertically-proportioned modules rather than strong horizontal forms linking multiple window panels that is usually associated with the interwar Functionalist style. While the main glazing element for the Flinders Lane building has expanded to a large multi-level expanse of windows constructed as a curtain wall that anticipates the dominant curtain wall facades of the later Post-War Modernist style, the expressed glazed curtain wall element is framed by a projecting masonry frame that is characteristic of the interwar Functionalist style.

As a type, the three examples are representative of postwar public works and are good examples of the technical and utilitarian application of design for Commonwealth communication services. These are all refined examples of early postwar Melbourne buildings that demonstrate some key aspects of the Post-War Modernist style as well as some other styles (including Brutalist style, and the interwar Functionalist style, for the subject building), while incorporating features that express their utilitarian interior functions and a major design aesthetic. The Telstra City West Exchange Building at 436 Little Bourke Street (HO1054) is comparable as a purpose built, government designed exchange but is distinguished by its architectural style and period of construction. It is the only telephone exchange currently included in the City of Melbourne Heritage Overlay.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓	<p>CRITERION A Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION B Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).</p>
	<p>CRITERION C Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION D Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION E Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION F Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)</p>
	<p>CRITERION G Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the</p>

significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

CRITERION H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

REFERENCES

- Contextual History references contained within *City of Melbourne Hoddle Grid Heritage Review: Postwar Thematic Environmental History 1945-1975*
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PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985** D

**Central City Heritage
Review 1993** B

**Review of Heritage
overlay listings in the
CBD 2002** Ungraded

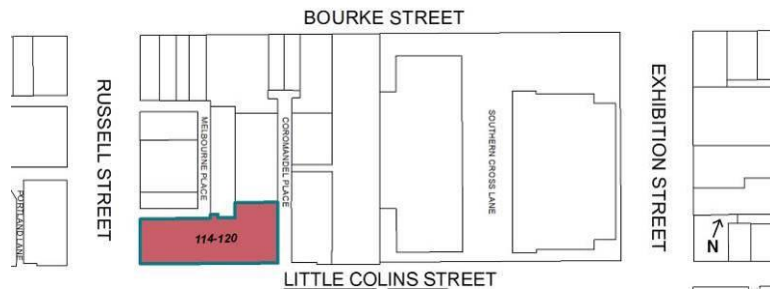
**Central City Heritage
Review 2011** Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building



PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at 114-120 Russell Street, Melbourne, originally constructed as a nine-storey telephone exchange and postal hall in 1948-54 is significant.

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

- Original building form and scale;
- Original pattern of fenestration, including projecting glazed terracotta (faience) clad horizontal and vertical frames to window openings and horizontal bands of glazing;
- Recessed entry on the Russell Street frontage including a faience-clad lintel supported by circular columns clad in granite;
- Original steel/aluminium frame windows; and
- Bas relief sculpture to the Russell Street façade at the ground level.

Later alterations are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at 114-120 Russell Street is of historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Russell Street Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, opened in 1954, is historically significant for the evidence it provides of the broadening of Commonwealth powers after World War Two, a shift that resulted in increased construction of Commonwealth buildings in city centres including Melbourne. The former Russell Street Telephone Exchange and Postal Building is historically significant as one of the first large buildings constructed in the city after World War Two, and is the last to express the solid masonry, architectural traditions typical of the era prior to World War Two. The building also reputedly contained the first air-conditioned postal hall in Australia. (Criterion A)

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building is significant as a largely intact example of a substantial public building in central Melbourne built to the 40 metre (132 foot) height limit then in force. The interwar Functionalist style adopted for the building was popular during the interwar and early postwar periods, often for low rise industrial buildings, schools and institutional buildings, for its modern, progressive aesthetic. Designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works, which was responsible for a number of high quality major public buildings during the period (such as the telephone exchange building at 376-382 Flinders Lane), the building demonstrates a commitment to the high-quality architectural design for major public buildings by the Commonwealth Department of Works. (Criterion D)

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building has several unique features that contribute to its aesthetic significance. Although built following World War Two, the building exhibits elements of the interwar Functionalist style that are characteristic of a pre-World War Two modernist character. This includes its large and dramatic recessed entry space on the Russell Street frontage, surmounted by glazed terracotta lintel and supported on three circular granite columns adjacent to a bass relief sculpture attached to the facade. (Criterion E)

Primary source

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

