

SITE NAME Former Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board Building

STREET ADDRESS 616-622 Little Collins Street Melbourne

PROPERTY ID 105946



SURVEY DATE: May 2017

SURVEY BY: Context Pty Ltd

HERITAGE INVENTORY H7822-1581

EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY No

PLACE TYPE Individual Heritage Place

PROPOSED CATEGORY Significant

FORMER GRADE C

DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST: A G Monsborough

BUILDER: Not known

DEVELOPMENT PERIOD: Interwar Period (c.1919-c.1940)

DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION: 1937
1938-39 (extensions)

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
HISTORIC THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
6 Creating a functioning city	6.7 Transport
	OTHER SUB-THEMES
3 Shaping the urban landscape	3.2 Expressing an architectural style

LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE	
Archaeological block no: 33	Inventory no: 581
Character of Occupation: Governmental, Commercial	
Site occupied by Colonial Police Magistrate & Administrator of Settlement, William Lonsdale.	
1837 & 1843 Hoddle	
1840 Russell	Complex of buildings including Officers Quarters. Some buildings apparently sited partially under Godfrey Street.
1850 Proeschel	
1855 Kearney	
1866 Cox	
1880 Panorama	
1888 Mahlstedt	Three buildings of one and two storeys to Little Collins Street
1905/6 Mahlstedt	Two buildings, one of four storeys; also three buildings to Little Collins St, including Cooper S Downie.
THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Blacksmiths
1920s	Offices, Public transport, Power
1960s	Offices, Public transport, Power

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

A large, striking building built in 1937 and extended in 1938-39, for the Melbourne Metropolitan Tramways Board. Designed by architect Alan Gordon Monsborough, the building combines elements of the moderne, stripped classical and art deco architecture.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Creating a functioning city

Transport

The earliest trams in Melbourne were horse-drawn trams, which operated in the 1860s and 1870s; these were replaced in 1885 by the cable tram system. Melbourne's tramways extended across the central city and carried passengers to outlying suburbs, including Richmond, Northcote and Kew. In the 1880s Melbourne had one of the largest cable tram networks in the world. Electric trams commenced operations in 1906 and cable trams continued to operate until 1940 (Context 2012:55).

Gary Vines, in his *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*, writes that the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB)

was formed in 1919, as part of a rationalisation of suburban public transport in Melbourne under the State government. The MMTB took over operation of the cable system and the various municipal [tram] trusts, resulting in a wide range of vehicle types and some differences in operation systems...

The MMTB [subsequently] undertook a significant modernisation of the system, progressively converting the cable trams to electric traction, constructing new depots, electricity substations and both extensions to the existing lines, and entirely new routes...

In 1983 the MMTB was amalgamated with the Victorian Railways suburban services to become the Metropolitan Transit Authority, with "The Met" as its trading name (Vines 2011: 23-31).

Shaping the urban landscape

Expressing an architectural style

The interwar period brought with it a surge in tall building construction in the central city, made possible by the use of structural steel and reinforced concrete framing. In response, a height limit was imposed by the City Council in 1916, dictated by the limitations on firefighting at that time. A maximum height of 40 metres was dictated for steel and concrete buildings, a limit that was not broken until the 1950s. Commercial buildings in the 1920s were mainly of the commercial palazzo style, as exemplified by Harry Norris's Nicholas Building in Swanston Street (1925). The style was an early attempt at creating a style suitable for the tall building. It was divided into a base, shaft and cornice, much like a Renaissance palazzo. The scale, however, was greatly enlarged, with the shaft stretching up to 10 storeys. By the 1930s, the soaring height of the new office towers was embraced and the vertical thrust emphasised in the commercial gothic style and the jazz moderne. Landmark examples include, respectively, Marcus Barlow's Manchester Unity Building (1929-32) and the Tompkins Bros' Myer Emporium in Bourke Street (1933) (Context 2012:19-20).

SITE HISTORY

The site at 616-622 Little Collins Street was occupied in 1840 by Captain William Lonsdale, first Police Magistrate at Port Phillip in 1836-40. After receiving instructions from London, Governor Richard Bourke dispatched an official party under Lonsdale to take charge of the early settlement at Melbourne (Shaw 2008).

In 1840, the complex of buildings at what was to become known as 616-622 Little Collins Street included officers' quarters, with some buildings apparently sited partially under Godfrey Street (Fels, Lavelle & Mider 1993).

By 1888, there were three buildings of single-storey and two-storeys fronting Little Collins Street. By 1905, two buildings, one one-storey and another four-storey, were on the site; another three buildings fronted Little Collins Street, including premises owned by Cooper S Downie (Fels, Lavelle & Mider 1993).

The Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB) built its administrative offices at 616-622 Little Collins Street in 1937. The site was located at the rear of the former Melbourne Tramways and Omnibus Co Ltd (MTOC) building at 673 Bourke Street.

Gary Vines provides this history of the building in his *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*:

With the establishment of the MMTB [in 1919], the cable tram company offices were taken over, as were the various electric tramway trust offices at each depot. However, accommodation was not sufficient and new larger dedicated administrative offices were required. In [1938-39], a new headquarters building was erected in Little Collins Street to house the MMTB, centralising management, administrative and design functions. This was initially an adjunct to the existing offices at which the Board took over from the MTOC.

The MMTB, who owned the adjacent MTOC buildings at 669-677 Bourke Street as a result of their takeover of the cable trams, acquired the block at the rear in 1924. This was previously occupied by two double storey brick buildings, one occupied by a merchant, L. Donnellan, and a motor garage and yard along Godfrey Street. (Vines:2011:199-200).

The building was constructed to a design by the MMTB's architect, A G Monsborough (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Exterior, Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board, 616-622 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, c.1952, by Lyle Fowler (Source:SLV)

The office building at 616-622 Little Collins Street was in use by 1937, with telephone lines installed by May (*Construction and Real Estate Journal NSW* 5 May 1937:7), the secretary's office in operation by October in the same year (*Construction and Real Estate Journal NSW* 20 October 1937:9).

The MMTB extended its headquarters to a design by Monsborough in stages between 1938 and early 1939 (Vines:2011:200).

As mentioned above, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board became the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) in 1983. The MTA remained in occupation of the subject building and the adjoining building at 673 Bourke Street until 31 October 1989. Both buildings were sold by auction on 9 November 1988 (*Age* 29 October 1988:30; *Age* 5 November 1988:246). The auction notice described the building:

The...building, at 616 Little Collins Street, is both larger and newer [than 673 Bourke Street]. It was completed in 1937 and comprises six floors and a basement. It has two lifts, one of which services the basement where there is parking space for 12 vehicles. The land area is about 809 square meters. The two buildings [673 Bourke and 616 Little Collins Street] are interconnected by a concrete walkway (Age 5 November 1988:246).

The subject building was sold in early 1994, and in 1995, was converted to residential apartments with two penthouses built on the roof of the six-storey building (CoMMaps; *Age* 14 January 1996:22).

A G Monsborough, architect

The Melbourne Tramway Museum writes of architect A G Monsborough:

During the massive expansion of Melbourne's electric tramway system during the 1920s and 1930s, Alan Gordon Monsborough was Architect of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board. He produced a huge variety of work during his tenure, ranging from signal boxes and substations to tram depots and workshops. His distinctive architectural style has left a mark on Melbourne's streetscapes that persists to the current day.

During his most productive period in the mid-1920s, Monsborough primarily used a stripped Greek Revival style well adapted to industrial settings, particularly for buildings such as tram depots and the bigger substations. His use of columns in the Camberwell Depot and Preston Workshops administration buildings is particularly evocative of Greek Revival.

His most well-known building is the Chalet at Wattle Park. However, unlike his industrial buildings for the M&MTB, the Chalet was built in an English domestic style making economic use of recovered materials from demolished cable tram engine houses. This more rustic approach was well suited to the park environment. Other Monsborough buildings in Wattle Park followed the same design motif, which he first used on the small Deepdene substation (1926).

His last major work was the former headquarters building of the M&MTB, constructed at 616 Little Collins Street. Not completed until after his death, it is a rather subdued example of late 1930s Moderne architectural style, lacking the confidence of his earlier Greek

Revival work. Erected at a cost of £57,000, it served as the headquarters of the Board until it was subsumed into the Metropolitan Transit Authority in 1983.

Not surprisingly for such a prolific architect of public buildings, much of his work has been recognised as being of lasting significance to the Melbourne built environment, and has been placed on the Victorian Heritage Register (Jones 2014).

SITE DESCRIPTION

Gary Vines provides this description of the building at 616-622 Little Collins Street in his *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*:

The striking six storey building is a combination of styles with a main facade facing Little Collins Street and arranged in three 'palazzi' [blocks] along Godfrey Street. It has elements of Moderne, stripped classical and art deco architecture. The facades are each divided into three bays with the entrance in the centre bay framed by brown marble [sic granite] faux Doric columns. These frame each side of a recessed lobby doorway with rectangle surround in marble [sic granite] veneer with subtle cornice emblazoned with the words "Melbourne Metropolitan Tramways Board" in a gilded font. Each central bay extends vertically with piers and spandrels and the Little Collins facade culminates in a flagpole spire and setbacks roof profile.

Also of note is the detailing to the central enclosed entry porch. A pair of glazed copper doors is set well back from the street, and have triple brass bars across the centre. A horizontal bar etched with a wave pattern separates the doors from a highlight window which is detailed with brass bars and has the street numbers crafted from metal in the same styling. At the street edge, large iron panel gates have similar detailing, with metal rods arranged in a grid pattern. The building retains its original incised signage *Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board* above the main door.

INTEGRITY

Following is an extract from the statement of significance (Biosis 2011):

The building forms part of a well preserved interwar and Victorian streetscape with neighbouring buildings including the Savoy Hotel on Spencer Street, the MTOC and former Mail Exchange which terminates the vista along Godfrey laneway.

In 2010 it was adaptively reused with few exterior modifications and converted for residential use, strata titled and promoted under the name of "Grand City Apartments" (Vines 2011:199).

The Melbourne Metropolitan Tramways Board building has been adapted for use as apartments, retaining much of its exterior character.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

By the 1930s, the new office towers beyond three or four storeys were embraced and their vertical dimension emphasised by new architectural styles that ranged from the stripped classical to the flamboyant jazz moderne and commercial neo-gothic. (Context 2012:19). Art deco influences, like that of 616-622 Little Collins Street are apparent in a number of office buildings constructed during the late interwar period.

The subject building compares well with the following examples, drawn chiefly from the Central City Heritage Review 2011, being of a similar use, scale, location and creation date. The images and descriptions are provided by CoM Maps unless stated otherwise, with images dating from c2000 or later.

Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building, 225 Bourke Street, 1941 (HO990)

Originally built for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. An 11-storey office building with a mezzanine, basement and open space on the rooftop. Includes ground level retail. A walkway joins 200 Little Collins. Built of steel and reinforced concrete it features a granite facade up to the second floor and sandstone above. Designed by Mr W Henderson the Chief Architect of the Commonwealth Department of Works in a later art deco style and built by Lewis Construction Co Pty Ltd being completed in 1941.



Figure 2. Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building, 225 Bourke Street constructed 1941.

Commercial Assurance Company Ltd, 409-413 Collins Street, 1940 (HO1009)

An eight-storey reinforced concrete office building with two basement levels. Clad in polished granite at the base level and sandstone on the upper levels. Designed by Peck, Kemter & Dalton with Phillip B Hudson in the jazz moderne style. Built for the Commercial Assurance Company Limited in 1940.



Figure 3. 409-413 Collins Street constructed 1940.

Pawson & Co, 141-143 Flinders Lane, 1935 (HO1033)

A seven-storey reinforced concrete former factory and warehouse with a basement. Designed by H W & F B Tompkins in the moderne style and built for Charles and Emma Pawson of the clothing manufacturing company Pawson and Co in 1935. Most recently refurbished in 2006.



Figure 4. 141-143 Flinders Lane constructed 1935.

ACA Building, 118-126 Queen Street, 1936 (HO1069)

A 12-storey brick office building with ground level retail and a basement. Designed by the Sydney firm Hennessy, Hennessy & Co in the jazz moderne style and built by Lewis Construction Company Pty Ltd for the Australasian Catholic Assurance Company in 1936. Of note is the stepped tower and the pink faience made from a manufactured material known as Benedict stone. It was last refurbished in 1997.



Figure 5. ACA Building, 118-126 Queen Street constructed 1936.

SEC Building, 238 Flinders Street, 1932 (Contributory in HO505 Flinders Gate Precinct, Contributory in HO506 Flinders Lane Precinct)

A 14-storey brick and cement rendered office building with basement and ground level retail. Designed by A.R.La Gerche in the art deco style and built in 1932.



Figure 6. Former SEC Building, 238 Flinders Street constructed 1932.

The 1930s were a rich period in the development of office buildings in central Melbourne and 616-622 Little Collins Street is highly comparable in architectural quality and integrity to the above examples on the HO. Its art deco style is comparable to 141-143 Flinders Lane and the former SEC building at 238 Flinders Street. The conversion to apartments has been achieved with a high degree of retention of its external integrity.

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 significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION H Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).</p>

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

City of Melbourne Maps (CoMMaps) 2017, <http://maps.melbourne.vic.gov.au/>, accessed 7 June 2017.

Fels, M, Lavelle S, and Mider, D 1993, 'Archaeological Management Plan', prepared for the City of Melbourne.

Fowler, Lyle c.1952, 'Exterior, Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board', 616-622 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, State Library of Victoria (SLV) Harold Paynting collection. K series, accessed online 27 June 2017.

Jones, Russell 2014, *Tramway architect: Alan G. Monsborough*, Melbourne Tram Museum, <http://www.hawthorntramdepot.org.au/papers/monsborough.htm>, accessed 23 May 2017.

Shaw, A G L 2008, 'Foundation and early settlement' in *eMelbourne*, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00602b.htm>, accessed 26 June 2017.

Vines, Gary (Biosis) 2011, *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*, prepared for Heritage Victoria.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Central Activities District Conservation Study 1985	C
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Central City Heritage Study 1993	C
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Review of Heritage overlay listings in the CBD 2002	Ungraded
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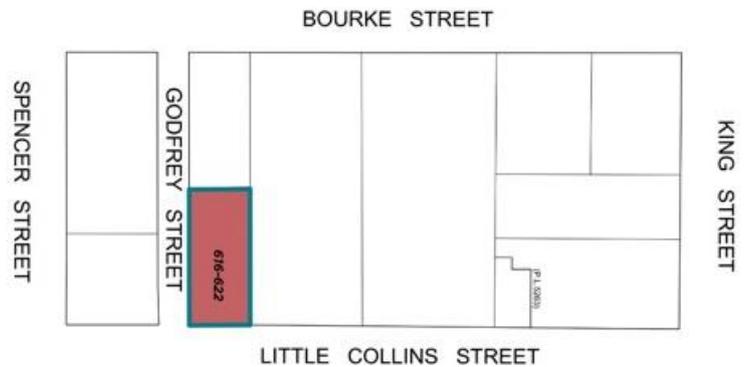
Central City Heritage Review 2011	Ungraded
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board Building



PS ref no: Interim HO1280



What is significant?

616-622 Little Collins Street, built in 1937 and extended in 1938-39 for the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works.

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

- The building’s original external form, materials and detailing;
- The building’s high level of integrity to its original design;
- The Doric columns; vertical piers, spandrels, and flagpole spire;
- The recessed lobby doorway, surround, cornice, copper doors; and
- The etched bronze signage, emblazoned lettering, and iron panel gates.

Later alterations are not significant.

How it is significant?

616-622 Little Collins Street is of local historic, aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The site of 616-622 Little Collins Street is historically significant as the location of the 1840 camp of Captain William Lonsdale, the first Police Magistrate of the Port Phillip district. (Criterion A)

Built in 1937 and extended in 1938 and early 1939, the building at 616-622 Little Collins Street is historically significant for its association with the administration of tramways in the City of Melbourne

from 1937 to 1983. Formed in 1919, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB) ran the entire tram network until it was subsumed into the Metropolitan Transit Authority in 1983. 616-622 Little Collins Street is historically significant for its use as the headquarters of the MMTB, housing centralised management, administrative and design functions. (Criterion A)

The building at 616-622 Little Collins St is an intact and striking example of a large public utility building. Extending for three blocks along Godfrey Street, it combines elements of the moderne, stripped classical and art deco architecture. Features include a squared entry framed by brown granite faux Doric columns which sits below a cornice with the words 'Melbourne Metropolitan Tramways Board' in a gilded font; vertical bands of piers inset with regular window and spandrel panels to the front facade, a setback roof profile with flagpole spire, brass entry doors and decorative metal panel gates. (Criterion E)

The building at 616-622 Little Collins Street is significant as the last work of prominent MMTB architect, Alan Gordon Monsborough. During the 1920s and 1930s Monsborough was noted for his adaptation of the Greek revival style for industrial settings, particularly for buildings such as tram depots and substations. (Criterion H)

Primary source

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