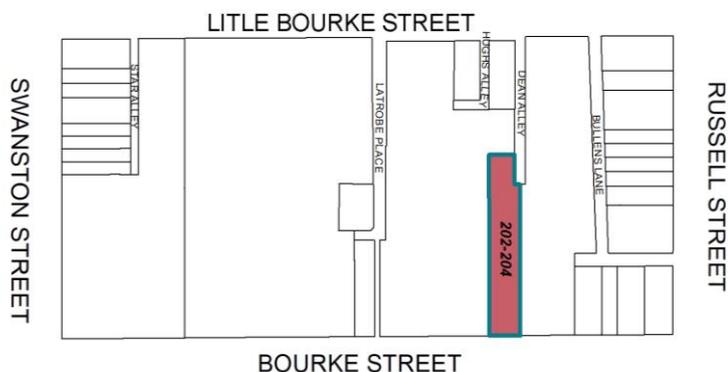


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd



PS ref no: HO1304



What is significant?

The Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd building (former) at 202-204 Little Bourke Street, Melbourne, a four-storey department store built in 1935 and added to in 1937.

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

- The original building form and scale and 1937 addition;
- The original symmetrical façade geometry and fenestration, including recessed spandrels; projecting mullions and rooftop fins, articulated parapet and flagpole; and
- The original steel windows at the upper levels.

Later alterations made to the street level facade, including the awning, are not significant.

How it is significant?

202-204 Bourke Street, Melbourne, is of local historic and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Sharpe Bros building at 202-204 Bourke Street is historically significant for the evidence it provides of an important phase in Melbourne's retail history: the rise in popularity of the department store from the 1920s in the central city. In particular, 202-204 Bourke Street demonstrates the 1930s development of retailing in the area east of the traditional retail centre between Swanston and

Elizabeth streets (today known as Bourke Street Mall). This section of Bourke Street between Swanston and Russell streets traditionally played a major role in Melbourne's social and leisure pursuits. Former businesses in that block were quickly replaced in the 1930s with clothing retailers and chain department stores, to accommodate growing demand for retail stores in central Melbourne, that was stimulated by increasing car ownership and widespread distribution of shopping catalogues. Built in 1935 to a modern design by architects H W & F B Tompkins, replacing a former wax museum and theatre, 202-204 Bourke Street represents the changed character of the area during the interwar period. (Criteria A)

202-204 Bourke Street is also of historical significance for its association with the successful retail business Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd from 1935 to 1963. The Sharpe brothers, Woolf and Maurice, began their retail drapery business in a small shop in the Gippsland town of Sale in 1905. The business prospered with an aggressive newspaper advertising policy and free mail order catalogues. By 1926, the brothers had moved their enterprise to a leased shop at 188 Bourke Street. In January 1935, the Sharpe Bros department store opened in the new three-storey brick building at 202-204 Bourke Street with considerably extended mail order department for country customers. A fourth floor was added in 1937, and, in 1954, after 20 years of leasing the building, Sharpe Bros purchased the property and upgraded the premises in 1956. (Criterion A)

202-204 Bourke Street belongs to a class of places: 'interwar commercial buildings'. It is representative of the small-scale wave of development in central Melbourne during the later interwar period that replaced the lower-scale buildings dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. (Criteria A and D)

202-204 Bourke Street is significant as a modestly scaled and restrained but largely intact example of a Moderne style building, an extremely popular style in the later interwar period. Such buildings often utilised the engineering benefits of steel and concrete frame structures to maximise window areas and to provide flexibility for external articulation and decoration, and the dynamic and streamlined aesthetic of the Moderne style. The building was designed by the eminent firm of Melbourne architects H W & F B Tompkins, who designed a number of other Melbourne buildings in the Moderne style during the same period. The design and details demonstrate characteristics typical of the Moderne style such as the symmetry, strong vertical emphasis with projecting mullions terminating in fins above the deep articulated parapet and has a high degree of integrity. It retains these characteristic features, including all of its original steel framed windows, which have been replaced in many other examples. (Criterion D)

Primary source

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