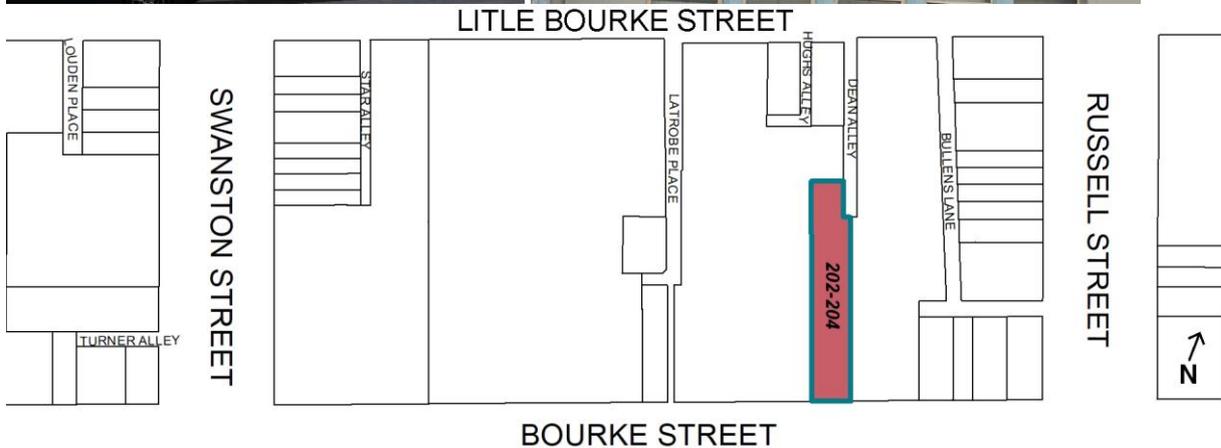


SITE NAME	Former Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd
STREET ADDRESS	202-204 Bourke Street Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	101203



SURVEY DATE: October 2018		SURVEY BY: Context	
HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	H W & F B Tompkins	FORMER GRADE	C
		BUILDER:	A F Deague
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Interwar Period (c1919-c1940)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1935 1937 (top floor added)

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, Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here.
HISTORIC THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
5 Building a commercial city	5.4 Developing a retail centre
	OTHER SUB-THEMES
3 Shaping the urban landscape	3.2 Expressing an architectural style

LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE	
Archaeological block no: 30	Inventory no: Inventory not provided.
THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Manufacturing, Museum
1920s	Retail, Theatres and cinemas
1960s	Retail

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

202-204 Bourke Street is a four-storey interwar commercial building built in 1935 in the interwar Moderne style to a design by Melbourne architects H W & F B Tompkins. It functioned as the successful department store of Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd from 1935 to 1963 and continued operating as a department store until c1970.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Building a commercial city

Developing a retail centre

Department stores offered customers a wide range of goods, organised into 'departments', under the one roof. In Melbourne, department store Buckley and Nunn, which opened in 1854, established Bourke Street as the preferred retail strip. Russian immigrant Sidney Myer bought a block in Bourke Street in 1911, where he established his successful Myer emporium (Context 2012:43).

To the east of the Bourke Street retail centre, the section of Bourke Street between Russell and Swanston streets played a major role in Melbourne's social and leisure pursuits from the late-nineteenth century. The Theatre Royal, St Georges Hall, Melbourne Coffee Palace, and Kreitmayer's wax museum, all on the northern side of Bourke Street, attracted visitors. Multiple billiard rooms, cafés, restaurants and hotels were also located in the same strip. By the mid-1920s, three picture theatres opened in the same block (Mahlstedt Map section 1, no 22, 1888; section 1, no 7, 1925).

After 1920, chain department stores grew rapidly, opening branches or new stores in central Melbourne. Department stores elevated 'fashion, drapery and furnishings to a level of luxury and range which differentiated it from the everyday or rural emporium' (Young and Spearritt 2008). With increasing car ownership and widespread distribution of shopping catalogues, by the 1920s department stores attracted shoppers from both the suburbs and rural areas, consolidating the central Melbourne area as the state's preferred retail destination.

To accommodate growing demand for retail stores in central Melbourne, by the 1930s, former businesses in the block east of Bourke Street mall were quickly replaced with clothing retailers and chain department stores. Designed by architect Harry Norris, a new six-storey building was built for the drapers Foy & Gibson at the corner of Swanston and Bourke streets, and an eight-storey building was built in 1932-35 to a design by architect Marcus Barlow at the corner of Russell and Bourke streets, for successful Gippsland merchant Norman Sharpe's drapery emporium (Butler 2011:61; S&M 1933-38; Young & Spearritt 2008).

Shaping the urban landscape

Expressing an architectural style

The interwar period brought with it a jump 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 Melbourne City Council in 1916, dictated by the limitations on fire-fighting at that time. A maximum height of 40 metres (132 feet) was introduced for steel and concrete buildings, a limit that was not broken until the 1950s. Architects experimented with a range of styles to express the increased height in buildings.

Some styles adapted the classical styles from earlier periods. 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 ten storeys.

Other styles were more closely associated with the modern movement and expressed a more dynamic and streamlined aesthetic. Emphasis was placed on the horizontal or vertical composition of

a building to accentuate certain qualities of the building. In styles such as the Commercial Gothic style and the Jazz Moderne, vertical fins and ribs were used to accentuate the height of buildings. Landmark examples include, respectively, Marcus Barlow's Manchester Unity Building, Collins Street (1929-32) and the Tompkins Bros' Myer Emporium in Bourke Street (1933). (Context 2012:19-20). The Moderne style typically expressed the horizontal plane with continuous bands of steel framed windows and masonry spandrels running across the full width of a façade, and often returning around a curved corner. A landmark example is Harry A Norris' Mitchell House at 352-362 Lonsdale Street (1937).

SITE HISTORY

The land at 202-204 Bourke Street, Melbourne, is part of Crown Allotment 7, Block 22, purchased by George Chisholm in September 1837 (DCLS c1839). By the 1870s, the site was addressed as 99-101 Bourke Street East, and occupied by a pair of two-storey buildings to Bourke Street and a single-storey structure at the rear. In 1888, the Bourke Street buildings housed the London and American Tailoring Co (99 Bourke Street East) and Melbourne's sole waxworks factory (101 Bourke Street East) (Mahlstedt Map section 1, no 22, 1888). Maximilian Ludwig (Max) Kreitmayer operated the waxworks from the early 1870s, which became one of Bourke Street's well-known entertainment venues featuring a range of theatrical programs including vaudeville and magicians (Colligan 2005). Kreitmayer died in 1906, and the business was continued by his widow Mrs H M Kreitmayer until the early 1930s, later incorporating a picture theatre, the Star Picture Theatre, in the building by the 1920s (Mahlstedt Map section 1, no 7, 1910 & 1925; S&Mc 1933; Colligan 2005). In the early 1930s, the Mack Furnishing Company occupied the premises (S&Mc 1933; *Argus* 30 May 1934:5).

In May 1934, solicitors Madden, Butler, Elder & Graham acquired, on behalf of the merchants Richard Allen & Sons Pty Ltd, three buildings on the northern side of Bourke Street formerly owned by Hoyts Theatres Ltd. The site with a total frontage of 30 metres (100 feet) included 202-204 Bourke Street and adjoined two interconnected buildings at 206 (Sharpe Bros Drapers) and 208-212 (Hoyts Theatres Ltd, formerly Strand Picture Theatre) Bourke Street. Although no plans were announced, it was anticipated that a department store would be erected (*Argus* 30 May 1934:5; *Herald* 29 May 1934:1; Mahlstedt Map section 1, no 7, 1925; S&Mc 1933).

In October 1934, Shape Bros Pty Ltd, then located at 206-208 Bourke Street and 188 Bourke Street, confirmed plans to erect a new three-storey department store on the narrow allotment measuring 33 by 200 feet at 202-204 Bourke Street, which was still in possession of Richard Allen & Sons (RB 1936; *Weekly Times* 13 October 1934:17).

In 1905, the Sharpe brothers, Woolf and Maurice, opened a small shop in the Gippsland town of Sale. The retail drapery 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, Melbourne, and other family members, Norman and Cecil Sharpe, became engaged in the Melbourne enterprise. By 1935, Norman Sharpe established an eight-storey drapery emporium designed in interwar Moderne style which he named Norman's Corner Store, at the northwest corner of Bourke and Russell streets. The *Gippsland Times* called the family's success 'a real romance of Australian enterprise and courage' (*Gippsland Times* 9 September 1954:3).

The architects H W & F B Tompkins were appointed to design the new Moderne style building at 202-204 Bourke Street (Figure 1), and the builder was A F Deague from North Carlton. The estimated

total cost for the construction of the brick shop and warehouse was £10,000 (*Weekly Times* 13 October 1934:17; 19 January 1935:23).



Figure 1. Illustration prepared by H W & F B Tompkins for the Sharpe Bros' new premises at 202-204 Bourke Street. (Source: *Weekly Times* 19 January 1935:23)

The building featured a passenger lift and extensive floor space with a frontage of 33 feet and a depth of 153 feet, with a modern display window, on either side of the corridor-like lobby, occupying a further 32 feet of depth. A range of goods was available in the new department store, including clothing, underwear, corsets and Manchester. The firm also announced a considerable extension of its mail order department to service the needs of country customers (*Weekly Times* 19 January 1935:23).

In January 1935, the Sharpe Bros department store opened in the new three-storey brick building at 202-204 Bourke Street, only a short distance (a few buildings) away from the Moderne style Norman Sharpe's Corner Store (*Herald* 2 February 1935:11).

A fourth floor was added in 1937, at a cost of £3300 (MBAI 19007; RB 1939). The verticality of the original design was further amplified with the new addition, with the exterior vertical fins extended to the full upper section from the first to third levels (Figure 1).

In 1954, after 20 years of leasing the building, Sharpe Bros purchased the subject property for £185,000 (RB 1955; *Age* 3 July 1954:3).

In 1956, the premises underwent various upgrades, including changes to the shop front, and the installation of a ventilation system and a false ceiling in the ground floor. The total cost for the 1956 building works was £10,383 (MBAI 30267; 30380; 30379 & 30634).

Sharpe Bros traded at the subject building for 28 years, until 1963. In June 1963, a two-day auction was held at the premises to sell all shop fittings, furniture and machinery, including cash registers and typewriters (*Age* 8 June 1963:34)

In 1963, the property was acquired by Waltons Ltd. At that time, Waltons Ltd operated department store and retail drapery chain brands such as Waltons Store and Treadways Pty Ltd. From the mid-1930s, Treadways had been connected with the adjoining building at 206-218 Bourke Street. It was one of their four stores in Victoria (*Age* 29 March 1963:6). In 1965, Waltons owned both buildings at 202-204 and 206-218 Bourke Street, trading as Treadways at 202-204 (Figure 2) and as Waltons Store at 206-218 (RB 1965).

In 1969, coinciding with the closure of Treadways after thirty years of trade in Bourke Street, the subject property was sold by Waltons Ltd to Katies Ltd, then one of Australia's largest chains of women's fashion brands. In 1969, a major alteration to the building (details unknown) for Katies Ltd was carried out at a cost of \$100,000, followed by several substantial alterations to ground and first floor levels throughout the 1970s (MBAI 41844; 47220; 48174 & 49494). In 1974, 202-204 Bourke Street was shared by Katies Ltd and the former proprietor Waltons Ltd, the latter of which rented the two upper levels for their use as offices (RB 1975).

Between 1965 and 1974, the Sands & McDougall street directory listed the subject building as part of the adjoining property at 194-200 Bourke Street, which became known as Mid City Cinema, but this may be an error, as the properties were owned by different proprietors during the same period, and the conjoined use is not evidenced by the City of Melbourne rate books (S&Mc 1965-1974; RB 1965-1974).



Figure 2. Exterior of 202-204 Bourke Street in 1969, then occupied by Treadways. (Source: *Age* 12 June 1969:13)

According to the Mahlstedt Fire Survey plan published in 1948 (see Figure 4), which was amended in the early 1960s, the shop at 202-204 Bourke Street was interconnected with the Waltons Store at 206-218 Bourke Street, and had a rear access from Dean Alley (Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 7, 1948). Access to upper levels on the principal elevation was added post-1960s (not shown in the Mahlstedt plan last amended c1960).

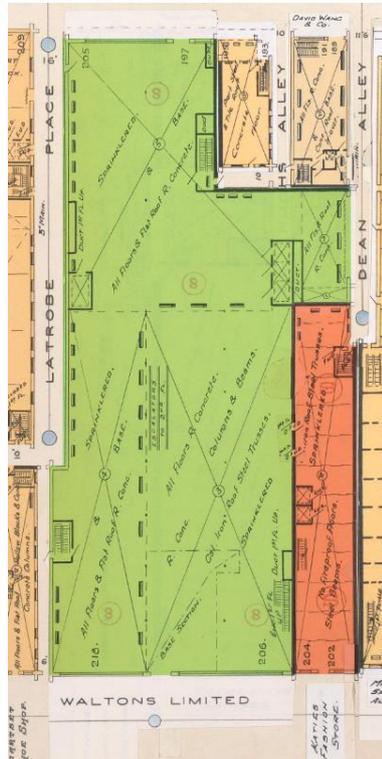


Figure 3. Detail from a 1948 (amended during the 1960s) Mahlstedt plan shows the shop at 202-204 Bourke Street (shaded in red) in the late 1960s. Note the openings on the western elevation of the subject property, which allowed accessed to 206-218 Bourke Street (shaded in green). (Source: Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 7, 1948)

In 1981, further alterations to the building were carried out for \$70,000. Around the mid-1980s, the formerly co-joined premises at 202-204 and 206-218 Bourke Street may have been disconnected, with the latter being extensively redeveloped as the 'Village Cinema City' by the Village Theatre group (MBAI 54433; Age 15 February 1984:4). In 1988, the subject building was refurbished for \$320,000, and in 1989, a new shop fit-out was installed on the ground and first floors at the cost of \$150,000 (MBAI).

The property was converted to a police station in 2019 (CoMMaps).

H W & F B Tompkins, architects

The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture contains the following entry for architects H W & F B Tompkins:

H. W. & F.B. TOMPKINS, architects were established in 1898 when the brothers won a design competition for the Commercial Travellers Association CTA Clubhouse, 190 Flinders Street, Melbourne. Henry Harry William (1865-1959) and Frank Beauchamp

Tompkins (c1867-1952) were born in England and educated in South Africa. They migrated to Australia with their parents in 1886. Harry became an assistant architect to Richard Speight Jnr and Frank worked with a number of architects including Evander Mclver and Nahum Barnet. By the mid-1890s Harry had entered a partnership, forming Speight & Tompkins of 493 Collins Street, Melbourne. He left the partnership in 1896 to take up a position in the Western Australia Public Works Department, but was retrenched in 1898 and returned to Melbourne and formed the partnership of H.W. & F.B. Tompkins (Beeston 2012:707-708).

The competition win established the firm and by the early 20th century, H.W. & F. B. Tompkins was a leading commercial firm. Their commercial work up to WWII reflects the three influences popular at the time: the Romanesque style popularised by such architects as H.H. Richardson in the United States during the late 19th century; the Baroque Revival of the early 20th century, popular in Chicago and San Francisco after 1908; and the Moderne or interwar functionalist style of the 1930s. Both Harry and Frank travelled to the United States and Europe, studying the latest trends in design and construction technology. They were the first architects in Melbourne to implement modern methods of steel frame construction and reinforced concrete in the Centre Way, Collins Street 1911 and the new Commercial Travellers' Association Clubhouse and Commerce House, 318-324 Flinders Street (1912). In 1913, the firm's association with Sidney Myer began with a warehouse building in Bourke Street, the first of many Myer commissions (Beeston 2012:707-708).

Harry Tompkins and Sidney Myer travelled in the United States visiting department stores, including the Emporium in San Francisco, which is reputedly the influence for the Myer Emporium in Bourke Street, Melbourne (Beeston 2012:707-708).

Harry Tompkins, the public face of the firm, was a prominent member of the RVIA; he was a council member (1905-), vice-president (1913) and president (1914-16). Harry was also president of the Federal Council of the AIA (1918-19) and mayor of Kew, the suburb in which he lived, for the same period (Beeston 2012:707-708).

The firm is one of the longest surviving in Victoria. In the 1950s it became Tompkins & Shaw when P.M. Shaw entered the partnership and then Tompkins, Shaw & Evans when Stan Evans joined. In 2003 it was acquired by Michael Davies Associates, forming a new firm, Tompkins MDA Group (Beeston 2012:707-708).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject site is located on the north side of Bourke Street between Swanston and Russell streets. The building at 202-204 Bourke Street is a four-storey, narrow fronted commercial building with elements representative of the interwar Moderne style. The building demonstrates the symmetry, strong vertical emphasis with projecting mullions terminating in fins above the Art Deco parapet and other characteristics typical of the style.

The façade to Bourke Street is painted render, over brick masonry structure. The detailed elements are precast concrete or overpainted glazed terracotta. The façade is punctuated by five equal width vertical panels of glazing separated by narrow mullions that terminate in finials projecting above the

deep, stepped and articulated parapet. There is a solid vertical panel at each end of the façade. A centrally located flagpole, a feature of the original, is still in place, fixed to the rear of the parapet.

The original steel framed multi-paned windows survive at the upper three levels, with each module comprising two fixed and two opening rectangular sashes, all of which are an identical size with horizontal emphasis.

The ground floor has been altered with a contemporary shopfront. Above the ground floor is a cantilevered box awning.

INTEGRITY

The building above street level is largely intact incorporating details from the 1937 elevation with very few changes visible to original or early fabric. The building retains the original glazing pattern and frames, vertical finials and a deep stepped Art Deco parapet with original or early flagpole. The upper level was added two years after the building's construction in 1935, extending the vertical finials and creating the current parapet. The building also retains its original built form and scale, and evidence of its original materials, with a highly intact façade above ground level. At street level the shop fronts have been replaced over time. Overall, the building is of a high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Structural steel and reinforced concrete framing became popular building materials in interwar Melbourne, inspired by Chicagoan architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Departing from load-bearing brick walls, many examples employed these new building methods that allowed windows to become larger and more prominent on façades, while also facilitating increased building heights.

The interwar department store and commercial buildings in Melbourne often utilised the Commercial Palazzo, Chicagoesque or Moderne styles, as seen in landmark examples and other office/retail buildings around the city. Art Deco elements of the Moderne style are characterised by strong verticality or horizontality of the design, and the use of non-historic ornaments.

The following examples in Melbourne are comparable with 202-204 Bourke Street, being of a similar use, scale, location and/or creation date. The images and descriptions are adapted from CoM Maps unless stated otherwise, with images dated c2000 or later.

Former Patersons Pty Ltd, 152-158 Bourke Street, 1934 (Interim HO1266 – Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

The former Patersons Pty Ltd Building was built in 1934 for the Paterson family as a furniture retailing outlet. The building was designed by architect Arthur W Purnell and is a fine example of a Moderne façade from the interwar period.



Figure 4. Former Patersons Pty Ltd 152-158 Bourke Street, built in 1934.

Myer Emporium, 314-316 Bourke Street, 1933 (VHR H2100; HO542, Significant in HO509 Post Office Precinct)

Myer Emporium building is a seven-storey rendered concrete department store with basement, designed by H W & F B Tompkins and built by C Langford in 1933. The Bourke St Mall store was first opened in 1911 and continues to trade today as the flagship in the Myer department store chain.



Figure 5. Myer Emporium, 314-316 Bourke Street, built in 1933.

Akira House, 18 Queen Street, 1937 (VHR H0397; HO729)

Akira House is a 10-storey reinforced concrete former office building. It features a striking facade of black, green and grey terracotta faience tiles. Designed by James H Wardrop in the Jazz Moderne style, it was built by Swanson Bros in 1937 at a cost £11,000. Originally of six storeys a further four were added when the building was refurbished, subdivided and converted to apartments in 1998.



Figure 6. 18 Queen Street, built in 1927.

Norman's Corner Store, 180-182 Bourke Street, 1935 (HO1000)

The former Norman's Corner Store is an eight-storey brick office building with basement and ground level retail. Formerly a three-storey warehouse it was purchased by Mr Norman Sharpe from the clothier Leopold Leber in 1932 for £38,000. The current eight-storey building was built in 1935 to a Jazz Moderne style design by Marcus Barlow. It was subdivided into 23 commercial units in 2003.



Figure 7. Norman's Corner Stores, 180-182 Bourke, built in 1935.

Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd, 188 Bourke Street, 1937 (Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

188 Bourke Street is a three-storey interwar commercial building designed in 1937 in the interwar Moderne style, with Art Deco elements, by Melbourne architects H W & F B Tompkins. It was occupied by frock sellers Rockman's Showrooms from 1937 to the 1960s. Rockman's established a chain of department stores across regional Victoria and New South Wales.



Figure 8. 188 Bourke Street, built in 1937.

The former Sharpe Brothers building at 202-204 Bourke Street is largely intact to its 1935 and 1937 configuration. The building is a good representative example of a 1930s Moderne style retail building. In comparison to some of the larger scale examples currently on the City of Melbourne's Heritage Overlay (HO), it is more limited in the extent to which it demonstrates these characteristics. Designed by the same architects H W & F B Tompkins a few years earlier, the Myer Emporium at 314-316 Bourke Street (VHR H2100; HO542) is one of the best examples of this style of architecture in the central city area. Demonstrating a restrained use of the style, the subject building exhibits similar elements that are typical of the style such as vertical bays of windows separated by prominent mullions and articulated parapet. Another VHR-listed example Akira House at 18 Queen Street (VHR H0397; HO729) also represents similar architectural style. Despite its retention of exposed faience tile cladding, Akira House's integrity has decreased by its substantial upper-level additions. Retaining its original form and scale, the subject building has a higher degree of integrity.

It is most closely comparable to the Rockman's Showrooms at 188 Bourke Street (recommended as individually significant in HGHR) for its overall design and basic palette of materials. Similar finned mullion and parapet details are shared by both buildings, but some of the windows to 188 Bourke Street have been replaced, whereas those of 202-204 Bourke Street are original. The two buildings at 188 and 202-204 Bourke Street also share a historical theme as successful department stores, which were established in the 1930s in the block to the east of the traditional retail centre between Swanston and Elizabeth streets (today known as Bourke Street Mall), to accommodate growing demand for retail stores in central Melbourne. The subject building also compares well to other interwar retail buildings Norman's Corner Store at 180-182 Bourke Street (HO1000) or former

Patersons Pty Ltd at 152-158 Bourke Street (Interim HO1266), which are slightly larger in scale.

Overall, 202-204 Bourke Street is a modestly scaled, yet largely intact example of the Moderne style.

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

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PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985**

D

**Central City Heritage
Study 1993**

C

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

Ungraded

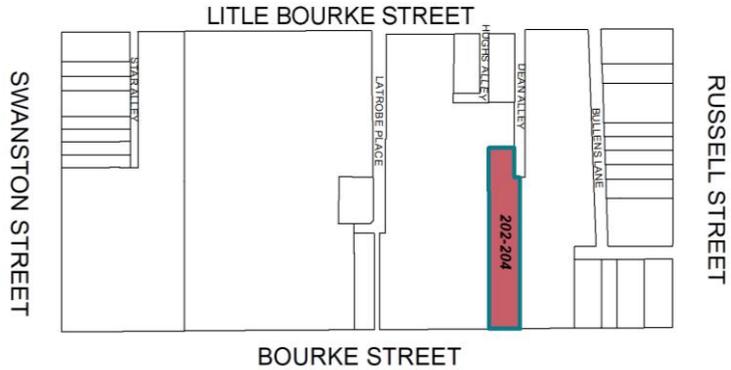
**Central City Heritage
Review 2011**

Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd

PS ref no: HOXXXX



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)

