

# MANCHESTER UNITY BUILDING



MANCHESTER UNITY BUILDING SOHO 2008



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1 manchester unity building collins street melbourne front elevation feb1986



manchester unity building collins street melb view of tower



manchester unity building collins street melb roof building

EXTENT OF DESIGNATION  
(SUMMARY)



h00411 plan h00411

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**Location**

220-226 COLLINS STREET AND 91-107 SWANSTON STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

**Municipality**

MELBOURNE CITY

**Level of significance**

Registered

**Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H0411

**Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO590

**VHR Registration**

September 14, 1977

**Amendment to Registration**

April 11, 2002

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 8, 2000

What is significant?

The Manchester Unity Building was built in 1932 by Walter Cooper Pty Ltd. It was designed by the architect Marcus R Barlow to meet the corporate needs of the Manchester Unity Group, a friendly society with 28,000 members in 1932. The twelve storey building, located prominently on the corner of Collins Street and Swanston Street, has a concrete encased steel structure and is clad with moulded terra cotta faience. The overall effect is one of a modern commercial Gothic style. The structure is crowned with a corner tower of soaring, diminishing buttresses in a style presumed to be inspired by the Chicago Tribune Building, which received worldwide publicity when built in 1927.

Within twelve months of commencement of work the Manchester Unity building was officially opened by the Premier of Victoria. By early May 1932 the sub-basement, basement and ground floors were ready for shopfitters and other finishing trades to move in. The remaining floors were added at the rate of one a week, and by late July 1932 the roof was laid and work started on the tower. Newspapers carried regular reports on the progress of the building, and a trip to the city to watch construction was a regular event for many Melbournians.

The Manchester Unity building was the first in Victoria to have escalators. These provided access to the basement and the first floor directly from the main arcade entrance at Swanston Street. It was also one of the first Victorian buildings with automatic cooling, and rubbish and postal chutes on every floor. Australia's largest diesel generator, located in the sub-basement, provided an emergency power supply. Of the original lifts, two of the three have been converted to automatic operation but the beautiful inlaid timber and panelled interiors to the lift cars have been retained.

The exterior facade is clad in biscuit coloured terra cotta faience. The faience is intricately moulded to produce continuous narrow columns and shafts rising up the facade, serving to emphasise the verticality of the building. The bulk of the building extends to 40.2metres, which was the height limit for central Melbourne at the time. Prominence is given to the corner by the tower, which soars above the main bulk. Towers were permitted to break the city's height limit as long as they did not contain occupiable rooms.

Internally there is extensive use of various Australian marbles as cladding to the walls. The ground floor lobby ceiling and cornices have high-relief depictions of Aborigines, Australian flora and fauna as well as transport, building and primary industries. Cornice plaster panels in the corridors of all the floors carry depictions of the friendly society's role in welfare provision.

Located on the eleventh floor are the former offices and boardroom of Manchester Unity. They walls are decorated with sliced timber veneer panelling. The boardroom table was constructed in situ and is nearly six metres long. The top is finished with a rosewood veneer and rosewood inlay border, and a moulded and carved edge. Twelve monogrammed leather chairs also survive. It is likely that the table and chairs were also designed by Marcus Barlow's office, part of the total design of the building.

How is it significant?

The Manchester Unity Building is of architectural, historical, social, aesthetic and technical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Manchester Unity Building is architecturally significant as one of the tallest building in Melbourne when it was completed in 1932. The architectural styling, with its soaring vertical emphasis, was a daring break from the conservative palazzo architecture of the 1920s, which was typified by large and dominant cornices. The styling

was complemented by the fashionable cladding material of glazed terra cotta faience. The modern commercial Gothic style of the Manchester Unity Building stands in contrast to the ecclesiastical Gothic of nearby St Paul's Cathedral. The building is architecturally significant as the greatest achievement of noted architect Marcus Barlow.

The Manchester Unity Building is historically significant as the initiative that convinced Melbournians that the building slump caused by the Depression was almost over, such was the grand scale of the project and the speed at which building progressed. The fast building programme was controlled by the use of a works progress schedule, an innovation to the local building industry at the time.

The Manchester Unity Building is socially significant as a landmark in both positioning and scale. It challenges, for scale and presence, the Melbourne Town Hall located opposite.

The Manchester Unity Building is technically significant for the surviving original Otis-Waygood escalator between the ground floor lobby and mezzanine. The Manchester Unity Building was the first in Victoria to have escalators installed.

The Manchester Unity Building is aesthetically significant for its intact interiors. The intricate plaster panel cornices and ceilings, the use of marble, and the inlays to the lift cars and sliced timber veneers in the boardroom all display a high standard of artistic workmanship that is without par for a building of this period. The boardroom table and chairs are historically and aesthetically significant. The survival of a boardroom table of this scale and grandeur from this period, complete with chairs, is unusual in Victoria. They formed part of the total design for the building.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

**General Conditions:** 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering

such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

Exterior:

\* Minor repairs and maintenance which replace like with like.

\* Removal of any extraneous items such as air conditioners, pipe work, ducting, wiring, antennae, aerials etc, and making good.

Interior public spaces, common areas and corridors:

\* Minor repairs and maintenance that replace like with like.

Tenancy units on floor levels two to ten:

\* All interior alterations, including decorative changes, refits and changes to internal layout are permit exempt. However, any changes to location of unit doorways leading out to corridors will require a permit.

\* Installation of locks and associated security devices to entrances of units are permit exempt. Existing doorknobs with the Manchester Unity logo, and any original glass in doors are to be retained and consequently require a permit to be removed.

Signage Policy:

All signage produced in accordance with Signage Criteria Manchester Unity Building produced by Manchester Unity Building (undated), a copy of which is held by the Executive Director, is permit exempt.

Construction dates	1932,
Architect/Designer	Barlow, Marcus,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Hermes Number	728
Property Number	

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## History

History of Place:

The Manchester Unity IOOF purchased the property at the north- west corner of Collins and Swanston Street in 1928. Previously known by Melbournians as Stewart Dawson's Corner, it was a popular meeting place rivalled only by the entrance to Flinders Street Station. Site works commenced at midnight of the 1st January, 1932. Eleven months and twelve days later the building was officially opened by the Premier of Victoria. By early May 1932 the sub-basement, basement and ground floors were ready for shopfitters and other finishing trades to move in. The other floors and the roof were added at the rate of one a week, and by late July the roof was laid and work started on the 78 ft. tower. This incredible rate of construction was achieved by the builder W. E. Cooper Pty. Ltd. by employing twice the normal number of building workers who worked shifts, night and day. The building programme was controlled by the use of a works progress schedule. This was an innovation to the local building industry. Newspapers carried regular reports the progress of the building, and a trip to the city to watch construction was a regular event for many Melbournians.

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The city height limit of 132 feet (40.2metres) was introduced in 1916 and between 1922 and 1933 seventeen new buildings challenged the limit, including the Capitol Building, Temple Court, Nicholas Building, Myers, Hotel Alexander, the T&G Building, Coles, the AMP Society, SEC headquarters and the Manchester Unity Building. In 1922-23, after a well-publicised architectural competition, the Chicago Tribune newspaper built the winning design by Raymon Hood - a tower topped by a 'Gothic' lantern and ringed by 'Gothic' buttresses. The case for skyscraper Gothic was simple: Gothic cathedrals soared, skyscrapers soared, therefore Gothic was the

appropriate style. Taking a cue from the 1913 Woolworth Building in New York, several Australian buildings used architectural terra cotta faience as a facing material. It was especially popular during the 1930s when it enabled designers to choose from a wide range of colours. The versatile material enabled complex Gothic shapes to be mass-produced from moulds.

(Apperly, Irving and Reynolds, Identifying Australian Architecture, p.192)

## Plaque Citation

The buttressed tower of this modern commercial Gothic building ensured it was the tallest building in Melbourne when completed in 1932. Designed by Marcus Barlow, it contained the first escalator installed in Victoria.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended in that the Heritage Register Number 411 in the category described as a Heritage place is now described as :

Manchester Unity Building, 220-226 Collins Street, Melbourne, Melbourne City Council.

### EXTENT:

1. All the building known as Manchester Unity Building, being marked B1 on plan 602994 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the following specified objects: Boardroom table and twelve boardroom leather chairs located in the former boardroom on 11th Floor.
3. All the land marked L1 on Plan 602994 held by the Executive Director.

Dated 11 April 2002

RAY TONKIN  
Executive Director

[Victoria Government Gazette G 15 11 April 2002 p.671]

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*