

# NICHOLAS BUILDING



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Front  
Facade\_13 Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Cathedral  
Arcade 01\_5 Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Cathedral  
Arcade 02\_5 Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Cathedral  
Arcade 03\_5 Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Front  
Facade Detail\_13 Feb  
2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_First  
Floor Interior\_13 Feb  
2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Hallway\_1  
Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Lift\_13  
Feb 2007\_mz



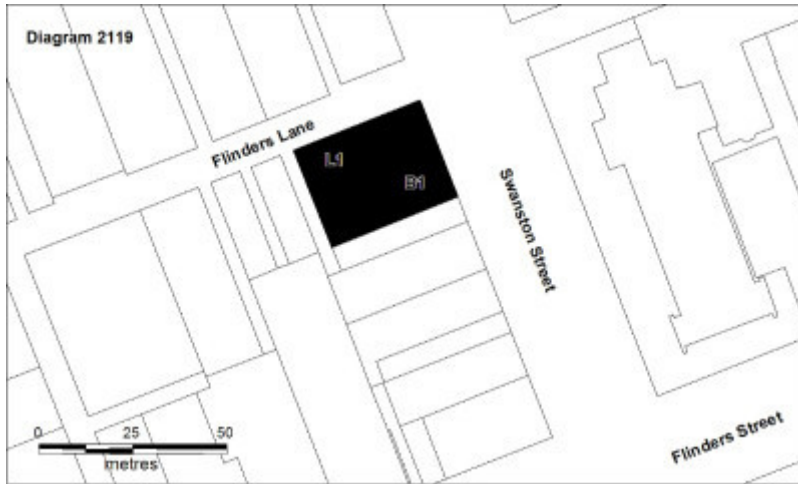
Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Directory  
Board\_13 Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Letter  
Chute\_3 Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas  
Building\_Melbourne\_Plaque\_5  
Feb 2007\_mz



Nicholas Building\_Melbourne\_Plan\_13 April 2007\_mz

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## Location

31-41 SWANSTON STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2119

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO745

## VHR Registration

November 1, 2007

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 4, 2007

## **What is Significant?**

The Nicholas Building at the corner of Swanston Street and Flinders Lane, Melbourne was designed by architect Harry Norris and constructed by Nicholas Buildings Pty Ltd in 1925-26. It does not appear that the Nicholas company ever occupied the building, rather it was built as a speculative office building development.

The building contains nine floors and was designed to terminate at the 132 ft (40.3 metres) height limit in force in the City of Melbourne from 1916 until 1957. A consistent skyline was established in Melbourne as a result of this height limit. Influenced by the design of commercial buildings in America, the Nicholas Building adopts a Renaissance palazzo form with mannered Greek revival styling in its facade treatment. The two main facades feature an implied piano nobile, containing two floors with a Doric colonnade, and heavy corniced attic storey above. Between these two levels, the mass of the facade is dominated by giant Ionic pilasters which divide the upper facades into bays and provide verticality to the composition.

The Nicholas Building is a hybrid structure with a steel frame adopted for the basement and first three floors, and reinforced concrete for the upper floors. Economic considerations influenced this decision, with maximum floor area achieved at the favourable lower levels, and a cheaper construction method, and subsequent reduced floor area, used for the upper floors. Grey terracotta faience, manufactured as 'Granitex' by Wunderlich, was used to clad the exterior of the building, selected for the longevity of the material and ease of maintenance.

The basement, ground, and first floor were designed as retail spaces and the interior includes a glazed leadlight barrel vaulted arcade at ground level, Cathedral Arcade, providing a link between Swanston Street and Flinders Lane. The shop fronts, particularly at first floor level, remain largely intact and few major structural alterations have been made to the internal fabric of the building. An addition was made to the ground floor of the building in 1939. The Coles retail company occupied the ground floor and basement until 1967.

Planned around a central light well, the top six floors are utilitarian, comprising of an outer ring of studio spaces around the building's perimeter and second tier of studio spaces that back onto two sides of the light well. The light well is enclosed on a third side by the lift and stair core and is open to the corridor that encircles the floor between the two rows of studio spaces on its fourth wall. The corridor spaces are relatively spartan, with cream tiled walls, linoleum floors and varnished timber joinery to the doors and windows. Other features throughout the building include letter chutes and directory boards made by Brooks Robinson shopfitters on all floors and the manually operated passenger lifts.

Of interest are the remnant signs and elements of decoration throughout the building indicating the building's diverse range of activities and occupants. Initially the building was home to businesses that included those associated with the Flinders Lane garment trade, commercial artists, medical practitioners and architects. Harry Norris maintained his architectural office at the Nicholas Building until 1955. The building continues to house some of these activities, particularly those associated with fashion, but it has more recently housed studios and exhibition spaces for numerous artists.

## **How is it Significant?**

The Nicholas Building is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

## **Why is it Significant?**

The Nicholas Building is of architectural significance as an outstanding and imposing example of the grand commercial palazzo of the 1920s. It is an important example of the work of Harry Norris, one of the leading commercial architects in Melbourne between the wars. Norris was perhaps one of the greatest exponents of faience in Melbourne, and his extensive use of innovative Wunderlich terracotta tiles to clad the facades at the Nicholas Building is of special significance.

The Nicholas Building is of architectural significance for its largely intact interiors which provide excellent examples of 1920s shop and office decoration. Of particular note is the street level arcade, with dome and fanlights, reportedly the only remaining example of lead-light roofed and fan-lighted arcade in Melbourne. The shop fronts, particularly at first floor level, are largely intact and also of great importance.

The Nicholas Building is of historical significance for its associations with the wealthy businessman, Alfred Nicholas, co-founder of the Nicholas Company which developed the famous Aspro formula. Harry Norris also designed Burnham Beeches, Sassafras, 1930-33 (VHR H0868) for Alfred Nicholas.

The Nicholas Building is of historical and architectural significance as a reminder of a mid-rise scale of the CBD before the 1950s when only decorative towers went above the 132 foot height limit. It is one of at least 30 outstanding 'limit-height' buildings built while it was in force between 1916 and 1957, some examples included in the Victorian Heritage Register include the Capitol House, 1924 (VHR H0471); Myer Emporium, 1933 (VHR H2100); and the Port Authority Building, 1929-30 (VHR H0965).

## 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 works 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 works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

### Regular Site Maintenance :

The following site maintenance works are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995: a) regular site maintenance provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the maintenance of an item to retain its conditions

or operation without the removal of or damage to the existing fabric or the introduction of new materials; c) cleaning including the removal of surface deposits, organic growths, or graffiti by the use of low pressure water and natural detergents and mild brushing and scrubbing; d) repairs, conservation and maintenance to plaques, memorials, roads and paths, fences and gates and drainage and irrigation. e) the replacement of existing services such as cabling, plumbing, wiring and fire services that uses existing routes, conduits or voids, and does not involve damage to or the removal of significant fabric. Note: Surface patina which has developed on the fabric may be an important part of the item's significance and if so needs to be preserved during maintenance and cleaning. Note: Any new materials used for repair must not exacerbate the decay of existing fabric due to chemical incompatibility, obscure existing fabric or limit access to existing fabric for future maintenance. Repair must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements.

### **Public Safety and Security :**

The following public safety and security activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) public safety and security activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the erection of temporary security fencing, scaffolding, hoardings or surveillance systems to prevent unauthorised access or secure public safety which will not adversely affect significant fabric of the place including archaeological features; c) development including emergency stabilisation necessary to secure safety where a site feature has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and represents a safety risk to its users or the public. Note: Urgent or emergency site works are to be undertaken by an appropriately qualified specialist such as a structural engineer, or other heritage professional. **Minor Works :**

Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

\* Any works within the individual office space on floors 4 to 9 that do not require the removal of any original fitting, fixture or joinery element and which has no permanent impact on the original fabric or structure of the building is permit exempt.

Construction dates	1925,
Architect/Designer	Norris, Harry A,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	2764
Property Number	

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### **Plaque Citation**

Architect Harry Norris designed this grand commercial palazzo which was built in 1925-26. This Greek Revival building, clad with Wunderlich terracotta faience tiles, has a long association with fashion and the arts.

### **Extent of Registration**

1. All of the structure shown as B1 on Diagram 2119 held by the Executive Director known as the Nicholas Building.
2. All of the land shown L1 on Diagram 2119 held by the Executive Director being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 4426 Folio 042.

*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/>*