

## FORMER MCPHERSONS BUILDING



FORMER MCPHERSONS  
BUILDING SOHE 2008



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former mcphersons building  
collins street melbourne front  
elevation



former mcphersons building  
collins street melbourne front  
view jul1988



former mcphersons building  
collins street melbourne rear  
view



h00942 plan h0942

**Location**

546-566 COLLINS STREET AND 27 FRANCIS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

**Municipality**

MELBOURNE CITY

**Level of significance**

Registered

**Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H0942

**Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO614

**VHR Registration**

August 20, 1982

**Amendment to Registration**

May 13, 1993

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 9, 2000

'What is significant?

The Former McPherson's Building was designed by Stuart P. Calder, and Reid and Pearson (architects in conjunction), and built in 1935-6, as a warehouse, office and showroom for the hardware empire headed by Sir William McPherson. It is a four storey (plus basement) reinforced concrete structure with a column-free facade featuring alternating broad horizontal bands of glazing (originally Vitrolite) and light brown faience along the full 160 feet of its length. The horizontal emphasis is punctuated by a stair tower at the western end, which projects above the roof line to give access to the flat roof which originally had a tennis court.

How is it significant?

The Former McPherson's Building is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Former McPherson's Building is of architectural significance as an extraordinary example of the streamlined moderne style in Melbourne, helping to introduce a whole new style of architectural expression in this city. This style was derived from European architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Bauhaus School, and emphasised clean lines, functionalism and a detachment from previous styles. These characteristics are easily recognised in the streamlined horizontal banding, large glassed areas of the facade, and choice of building materials of the Former McPherson's Building, which has been likened to Erich Mendelsohn's Schocken Department Store of 1927 in Stuttgart. These materials: glass, stainless steel, faience and concrete, reflected an interest in more dynamic materials and a move away from traditional, stultifying wood and plaster and brick and render construction techniques, and constitute a major and innovative use of such materials in Melbourne. Of particular note was the employment of reinforced concrete to achieve an uncluttered, column-free facade. The emphasis on functionalism was translated into the idea of architectural design as integral to merchandising. The striking facade, with its highly visible display areas, reflected the need to catch the eye of passing motorists, as well as pedestrians. The early years of the automobile age were also manifested in the large expanses of glass, which drew on car showroom architecture and were a substantial improvement for retailers on the classical designs that were still popular for inner city buildings into the 1930s.

The Former McPherson's Building is of historical significance because it reflects the growth and diversification of secondary industry in Victoria under the stimulus of population growth, growing credit sources and tariff protection after WW1. The McPherson company was a direct beneficiary of tariff protection, which enabled it to produce manufactured goods without crushing competition from more established industrial nations. The modern, radical style of its new building reflected its dynamic prospects, being erected at perhaps the peak of the company's expansion, not long after the opening of its Perth branch in 1930 gave it a presence in four Australian capital cities.

The Former McPherson's Building is of historical significance for its associations with the company that built it. McPherson's was a prominent manufacturer of hardware in Victoria, and its governing director, William McPherson, was an important figure in political and economic affairs, being premier and treasurer of the State in 1928-9. The Emily McPherson College is another substantial Melbourne building bearing the McPherson name.

### 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](#).

Construction dates	1934,
Architect/Designer	Reid & Pearson,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	MCPHERSON'S BUILDING, MMBW LABORATORIES (AFTER 1975), MACPHERSON'S BUILDING, MACPHERSONS BUILDING,
Hermes Number	741
Property Number	

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## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

Thomas McPherson commenced business in Melbourne in 1860 as a supplier of pig iron to local manufacturers. He established his office in Bourke Street West, close to the foundries in that area and started by selling pig iron imported as ballast in ships.

In 1882 McPherson established a warehouse at 544 Collins Street, and expanded the business to include tools, engineering supplies, steam fittings and machinery.

Thomas McPherson died in 1888 and his sons, William and Edward, took over the business. The firm broadened its interests to the manufacture of nuts and bolts, establishing the Acme Bolt Company in 1900.

In 1912 McPherson's Pty Ltd established a machinery warehouse and showroom at 554-556 Collins Street. In 1934 the firm purchased the property adjoining its machinery warehouse (Chrysler House, 546-552 Collins Street) and in March 1935 announced its intention to construct a new office and show rooms on the site (546-445 Collins Street). The building was completed in 1936 at a cost of 46,930 pounds.

McPherson's established branches in Sydney (1911), Adelaide (1921) and Perth (1930). In 1918 a machine tool

works was set up in Kensington, manufacturing Macson lathes. In 1924, the company started to make pumps and won government contracts to supply dog-spikes for the transcontinental railway between eastern and western Australia (1917) and to supply rivets for the Sydney Harbour Bridge (1929-1932).  
Associated People: Staurt P Calder

## **Extent of Registration**

### AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 967.

The former McPherson's Building 546-566 Collins Street, Melbourne.

(To the extent of:

1. The whole of the building known as the former McPherson's Building; and
2. All of the land marked L-1 on Plan 6033630A endorsed by the Chairperson, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council.)

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G18 13 May 1993 p.1086]

*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/>*