
High St - Cotham Rd Commercial Precinct



HO520 High Street - north side, looking east.jpg



HO520 Precinct extension 2018 (blue shading).jpg

Location

KEW, BOROONDARA CITY

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO520

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Precinct has a predominantly retail and commercial built form character, with the majority of contributory buildings, as well as some individually significant buildings within the precinct boundaries dating from the Victorian and interwar eras, with some more limited Federation and post-WWII development (up to the 1960s). The precinct includes several substantially contiguous building groups along both

the north and south sides of High Street, east of the five ways junction; extends into Cotham Road from the junction with High Street; and breaks up into smaller non-contiguous groups of heritage buildings further east on High Street. The key focal point within the precinct is the (former) public buildings group (post office [VHR 885; HO68], police station and court house [VHR 994; HO69] and war memorial [VHR2035; HO572]) on the landmark triangular site at the junction of High Street and Cotham Road.

The earliest businesses on High Street were established in the 1850s, albeit no buildings appear to survive from this period. As the number of businesses grew, they concentrated in High Street to the east of the five ways road junction, up to the intersection with Cotham Road; this area is now known as 'Kew Junction'. Development in the later decades of the nineteenth century attracted banks, hotels, a variety of merchants, horse-drawn transport services and the Kew spur railway line. This burst in growth culminated in the late 1880s in the construction of the outstanding complex of public buildings (post office, court house and police station) on the prominent and elevated triangular site at the junction of High Street and Cotham Road. Development picked up again in the interwar period, including new buildings constructed on the south side of High Street following the road alignment of

1934. The road works were aimed at improving traffic congestion, a constant problem at Kew Junction from the 1920s, and still being addressed with road widening and realignment in the late 1950s when the five ways junction was altered and opened up.

Significant and contributory buildings are principally two-storey terraces, with ground floor shopfronts (many of which are not original); parapeted first floors which display overall a high level of intactness; and zero setbacks to the main street frontages. There are also some single storey and larger commercial buildings, some of which have strong corner presentations.

The precinct is generally linear in nature with the valued built form typically presenting as a 'wall' of building frontages, and the majority of architectural detailing concentrated in the visible streetscape facades.

How is it significant?

The Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Precinct is of historical, social and architectural significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

The Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Precinct is of local historical and social significance. It has been a commercial centre and a civic and social focus for residents of Kew since the mid-nineteenth century, attracting many prominent public and commercial buildings as well as numerous local businesses established and supported by the community over many decades. The Precinct is also significant for demonstrating several of the principal characteristics of historic retail strips/shopping centres in inner and middle-ring suburbs of Melbourne. These include the comparatively high level of intact and parapeted first floor facades; the generally linear nature of the precinct whereby the valued built form presents as a 'wall' of building frontages; and the concentration of architectural detailing in the streetscape facades.

Architecturally, the Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Precinct is also of local significance. It retains many comparatively intact buildings constructed in the second half of the nineteenth century through to the first half of the twentieth century, including through to the post-WWII period (up to the 1960s), some of which are architecturally distinguished. Architectural styles evident in the precinct include Italianate and Renaissance Revival, Commercial Gothic, Queen Anne, Baroque influenced buildings of the early twentieth century, and a rich collection of interwar buildings displaying Art Deco characteristics. The precinct also has a notable intact collection of interwar (1920s and 1930s) commercial and retail buildings.

Hermes Number 192756

Property Number

Physical Description 1

The Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Precinct has a predominantly retail and commercial built form character. The valued heritage buildings form several substantially contiguous groups along both the north and south sides of High Street, east of the five ways junction; extend into Cotham Road from the junction with High Street; and break up into smaller non-contiguous groups of heritage buildings further east on High Street. The key focal point within the precinct is the very distinguished group of former public buildings concentrated in the post office, police station and court house complex on the landmark triangular site at the junction of High Street and Cotham Road. The significance of this civic group is recognised through their individual inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register and the Heritage Overlay. The five ways junction, although located immediately outside the precinct boundary, is also highly visible from within the precinct.

The majority of buildings are two-storey terraces, with ground floor shopfronts, parapeted first floors, and zero setbacks to the main street frontages. There are also some single storey examples, and larger commercial buildings some of which have corner presentations. Roofs and chimneys are typically not prominent (i.e. not highly visible), and include hipped roof forms, and skillion or single-pitched roofs. Awnings, which have replaced original verandahs in most instances, are principally cantilever types with boxed soffits and standard-depth fascias. The upper (first) floors of the buildings generally have a comparatively high level of intactness, albeit some original unpainted surfaces have been overpainted. Most ground level facades/shopfronts have been altered, although some of long standing remain (of some age if not necessarily original) and are contributory elements; these include those at 137, 141, 158, 160, 172, 174, 192-196, 198, 234-248 High Street.

The built form extends back into the properties, where outbuildings, carparking spaces, etc, are located to the rears, many with ROW rear access. In some cases, the rear yards of the original allotments have also been truncated and presumably subdivided and given over to common or public carparking areas. Some buildings, including in particular on the north side of High Street, also have angled (or cranked) footprints behind their street frontages, following the irregular allotment plans (as can be seen in Figure 9).

As is typical of historic retail strips, the precinct is generally linear in nature with the valued built form presenting as a 'wall' of building frontages. This 'wall', including in views looking up High Street from the west at the five ways junction, has a generally consistent two-storey scale (as can be seen in the images included in this citation). The majority of architectural detailing is also concentrated in the visible streetscape facades, with the precinct therefore deriving much of its heritage character from the building frontages, as opposed to appreciating the three dimensional form of buildings. The exception to this is of course the corner buildings in the precinct, and the public buildings on their triangular central site.

It is also the case that in most instances the rear areas and elements of the graded properties (outbuildings, carparks, etc) tend to be of little or no heritage interest.

Also as is typical with commercial precincts, signage, colourful advertising and shop names are abundant, generally found on the fascias of awnings/verandahs, in windows and on parapets, or attached to first floor facades as detached signs, or screens. In some cases, the latter include whole of facade screens which conceal original walls/fabric beneath, as occurs with two of the terraces at 10-16 Cotham Road.

The majority of built form within the precinct boundaries dates from the Victorian and interwar eras, with some more limited Federation and post-WWII development (up to the 1960s). While this area of Kew was first developed in the late 1850s and 1860s, no individual buildings or built form fabric from this early period, including original timber buildings, have been identified as part of this assessment, although early building components may remain behind existing street frontages or located within property allotments where they are not obvious or discernible in streetscape investigations.

Architectural analysis

Commercial Italianate (terraces)

The oldest buildings in the precinct are predominantly in the adapted Renaissance revival style,³⁸ typical of terraced shops in Melbourne of the 1880s, as at 6-16 Cotham Road, 169-173 High Street or 283-291 High Street. This style and approach to commercial building design was widespread in inner suburban shopping strips, including elsewhere in Boroondara as at Camberwell and Hawthorn. The terraces variously have balustraded or

moulded parapets; elaborate cornices and friezes with a moulding over the central bay; some of the friezes have sculpted festoons or swags; other elements include moulded string courses at the window sills and arch springing points; round or stilted segmental arches over paired upper-storey windows; and squared piers which often support urn or orb finials. Chimneys usually have plain stacks and broad, elaborately sculpted cornices finished in stucco. Classical orders are not normally used in these frontages, although informal Italian Romanesque columns derived from Corinthian support arches are evident in some fronts, as with the triple arcade at 115 High Street.

Free-standing Italianate & Renaissance Revival

Larger Kew Junction buildings such as Inskip and Robertson's splendid National Bank of Australasia (HO67) at 185 High Street (1888) continue this style in ways similar to the larger banks and hotels in Camberwell or Hawthorn. The National Bank building also has clear parallels with the Commercial Bank at the Glenferrie Road-Burwood Road corner (c.1887), the Hawthorn Hotel in Burwood Road (1888), and the Palace Hotel in Burke Road (1887-8). Free-standing Italianate buildings generally display a more extensive set of Renaissance detailing than is seen in commercial terrace buildings. The National Bank building, for example, uses a sculpted stone-fronted base, pilasters on each level, sculpted pediments and spandrels, rusticated stone effects on the lower storey, lugged aedicules around the upper and some ground floor windows, a cartouche frieze with relief consoles, and a full set of orbed finials set above gabled piers. In date this building comes near the close of consistent Renaissance revival usage, and has additional Mannerist³⁹ elements such as scroll pediments and 'quasi' orders, where fragments of floral Corinthian (upper storey) and Doric fluting (ground storey) are spread across each pilaster. The timber window frames are fully sculpted in Renaissance mouldings, a device seen on major city buildings of the time such as Sulman and Power's Ross House in Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

Commercial Gothic

The most conspicuous example of this style in the precinct is 175 High Street, the former ES & A Bank of 1884; it also has parallels with Guyon Purchas' Wilton at 63 Cotham Road, outside the precinct and now the Kew RSL (1886).⁴⁰ The treatment of exposed Hawthorn brick with stucco parapets, courses and arch dressings draws on the earlier Gothic banks of architect William Wardell and others, influences which also appear in Wardell's own (former ES & A Bank of 1885) at the corner of Burke and Riversdale roads, Hawthorn East (Camberwell Junction).⁴¹

Late 19th Century English Queen Anne Revival ('Queen Anne')

In the late 1880s-c.1890, several buildings in the precinct adopted a mode which can be described as 'Queen Anne'. These include the aforementioned police station, court house and post office at the junction of High Street and Cotham Road (1886, 1888). Several other commercial frontages are in this manner, as at 119-127 and 315-319 High Street. The National Bank of Australasia also has several of these touches in amongst its otherwise late Renaissance revivalism. These elements, which are evident across the exteriors of the post office and court house buildings, include vertically exaggerated pediments resembling equilateral triangles; extruded triglyph or flute mouldings; exposed face brick on both storeys (sometimes over-painted here); and small pediments supported on relief consoles. The public buildings also show another characteristic detail of this early free style: exposed face brick chimneys criss-crossed by 'strapwork' and string courses of raised and angled brick headers. This is additionally seen in many surrounding houses and recurs along with a typically early free style frontage, at 315-319 High Street.

While 'Queen Anne' is a term which is often applied to these designs,⁴² the term more accurately refers to London and other British buildings of Queen Anne's time, before 1713. It was later applied to early free style London architecture of the 1860s and 1870s, associated with Norman Shaw, Eden Nesfield and others in a circle influenced by the aesthetic movement, and exploring both open internal planning and the direct expression of materials and internal function. Apart from exposed face brick, fanciful gabling and stuccoed window trim, however, this work differed from the original Queen Anne in most other respects. As Norman Shaw and others worked with free treatments of asymmetrical house design, this term was extended to cover new and reforming architecture outside Britain, as with North America's 1880s Shingle Style and Australian architecture of the Federation period (the late 1880s to c. 1915).⁴³ Bernard Smith and others have also considered this architecture as reflecting a distinct Australian Federation style.⁴⁴

Early 20th Century (1900s-1920s)

Some early twentieth century buildings in the precinct are in a more Classically and Baroque-based mode, as in the shop buildings at 141-143 High Street. Of the latter the rustication, raised flat panels and swags have been influenced by the contemporary revival of 'English Renaissance' (now known as Edwardian Baroque)⁴⁵ common in the 1900s. Ionic was the preferred order in Australia's Baroque Revival of c.1895-1925, but Baroque Mannerism and formal complexity often vied with Greek classical purism in designs from this period, spurred by Greek hero-mythologizing in World War I.⁴⁶ This Classical purist tendency gained ground on the Baroque after c.1914, influenced by architectural shifts in the United States and France.⁴⁷

The next major group of buildings in the precinct in this period is a range of commercial buildings dating from the 1910s-1920s, in both single- and double-storey forms. The single-storey buildings typically have a deep upper parapet, some framed in brick-coursing, covered in stucco, and retaining hints of Art Nouveau or Arts and Crafts influences. Ground floor shop fronts may also retain tile detailing, window framing, top lights over doors, and also clerestory windows above the awning to draw in natural light. Examples include 145-149, 179-183 High Street and 40-52 Cotham Road.

The two-storey buildings of this period extend the single-storey approach at ground floor level, with generally unadorned first floors. These include 198-202 High Street, overpainted but with corbelled piers and paired windows sitting on heavy bracketed sills; 305-311 and 321-323 High Street. Number 192-196 High Street is similarly plain but with clinker brick colour relief in course lines and window sills to the first floor facade. Somewhat more complex treatments are seen in 113 High Street, which has a recessed balcony and bracketed cornice over a signage panel; 119 High Street, with 'mortarboard'-capped piers and a reversed arch above the awning; the former butcher's at 129-131 High Street, with a broad curving cornice and signage panel in the parapet; 137-139 High Street, with a Serlian window to the recessed balcony and clinker brick accents; 201-203 High Street, with flat projecting panels recalling the Edwardian Baroque; 213-219 High Street, with five scooped or curved brick parapet bays in a plain face brick; and 223-225 High Street, an asymmetrical front with three rusticated piers and non-original windows. Almost all these frontages also have clerestory windows to let in light above the awnings.

Late interwar and immediately post-war (1930s-1950s)

A large number of commercial buildings in the precinct date from this period, when modern 'functional' (unornamented) architecture was being absorbed into Australian practice. The building frontages are marked by continued colouration through the use of courses of clinker, glazed brick and some stucco. Tudor and Old English styles were popular in residential architecture, and this influence was reflected in some commercial buildings, where gables and clinker brick distinguished the street elevations. These include 142-146 and 154-160 High Street which are vaguely Medieval in character and emphasise this with exposed face brick. Number 154-160 High Street extends this with diagonal brickwork treatment, although its windows are modernist double-hung sashes with horizontally emphasised glazing bars.

Other examples from this period are 'parapet' types, generally with a pitched roof behind or possibly a single-pitch roof sloping away from the street. Among the two-storey buildings of this type, 325-333 High Street is unusual in its use of stepped and pent parapet lines. Many have been overpainted and previously relied on varied brick texture and colour for relief. Those that retain unpainted exposed brickwork include the tapestry and clinker brick building at 162-164 High Street, and the cream brick of 254-256 High Street.

1960s & Beyond

Several of the buildings from this later era are typical but nevertheless competent designs for their period. Those which contribute to the precinct include the ANZ Bank building at 176 High Street, and the former Commercial Banking Corporation of Sydney (CBC) bank branch, the (current) Silk Gallery building on the opposite corner at 178 High Street, with its associated single-storey shops to Fenton Way.

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/>