
Smith Street

Location

Smith Street,, COLLINGWOOD VIC 3066 - Property No B7230

Municipality

YARRA CITY

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 30, 2005

What is significant? Smith Street forms the boundary between Fitzroy and Collingwood and was probably Melbourne's most important early suburban road. It was the main route from Melbourne to Heidelberg in the 1840s, and became a prominent local shopping and commercial strip by the 1860s. The coming of the cable tram along Smith Street in the 1880s stimulated further growth, and in the late nineteenth century it was the most heavily built-up shopping street outside the city itself. In the early twentieth century, it became second to Chapel Street Prahran, with its numerous large emporia, and became the furniture retailing centre for the northern and eastern suburbs. It includes a number of important commercial buildings from late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, several of which have associations with enterprises that have had a significant role in the broader history of manufacturing, retailing and commerce in Victoria. It differed from other major shopping strips in Melbourne in the particularly close association between manufacturing and retailing, the scale of its late nineteenth century enterprises, and also the emphasis on furniture, factories, warehouses and shops. Smith Street became identified with businesses such as Foy & Gibson's and Ackman's, which combined the sale of clothing, furniture and other goods with their manufacture on a large scale. These companies had extensive factories and warehouses behind their shops in Smith Street, of which the Foy & Gibson buildings along Oxford Street and Wellington Street are a most impressive reminder. The G J Coles stores also originated in Smith Street. Smith Street declined after WWII. Its emporia and factories closed, and many buildings were demolished or their upper floors abandoned. Many were eventually converted to office or residential uses. Today Smith Street remains an important local shopping centre, but is gradually becoming gentrified, following its near neighbour, cafe-lined Brunswick Street.

Smith Street has retained a diverse and mostly intact streetscape of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. A few 1850s shops survive amongst the many large ornate boom period and early twentieth century retail structures. Individual buildings of particular importance are: the Grace Darling Hotel (1854), 114 Smith Street, one of Melbourne's oldest continuously operating hotels; the Former Forester Hall (1868), 64-8 Smith Street; the Former Collingwood Post Office (1891), 174 Smith Street; the Stanford Block of shops (c1880), 119-

129 Smith Street; the former Ackman & Co (1880s), between Hodgson & St David's Street; the former Union Bank (1889), 165-167 Smith Street; the Victoria Buildings (1888-9), 193-207 Smith Street; the former Paterson's furniture store (1911), 173-181 Smith Street; and the former Foy & Gibson Ladies' Store (1911) at 145-163 Smith Street.

How is it significant? Smith Street is significant for architectural, historic and social reasons at a State level. Why is it significant? Smith Street in Fitzroy and Collingwood is historically significant as one of the most important examples of the shopping strips that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries along Melbourne's cable tram routes. In the late nineteenth century, it was the most heavily built-up and popular shopping strip in Melbourne, rivalled only by the CBD itself. It is historically significant as the home of Foy & Gibson's, one of the most important retailers in early twentieth century Melbourne, and of G J Coles. It is also significant for its association with the large scale retail enterprises, particularly Foy & Gibson's and Ackman's, which developed vast manufacturing and warehouses directly behind their stores in Smith Street and in surrounding streets, building on the industrial base and working class population of Fitzroy and Collingwood. Smith Street is architecturally significant as a substantially intact late nineteenth and early twentieth century retail and commercial streetscape, punctuated by a unique collection of large three and four storey shops and emporia. Smith Street is socially significant as a well-known focus for furniture retailing in Melbourne from the 1880s to the 1940s, and for local shopping in Collingwood and Fitzroy from the 1850s until the present day.

Classified: 08/09/2004

Other Names Eastern Road,

Hermes Number 71563

Property Number

Physical Description 1

Smith Street between Victoria Street and Johnston Street is mostly lined with retail and commercial buildings, mostly of two storeys, with a few of three and four storeys. There are several elaborate examples of late nineteenth century boom style buildings, and some large early twentieth century emporia.

The oldest buildings of note is said in the Allom Lovell study to include the pair of shops at no 293-5 [these numbers are incorrect, more likely to be 261A-263A] (1852-3), a two-storey building with a facade of a combination of bluestone, face brick and render. The oldest hotel in the street is the two storey Grace Darling Hotel (1854), built as a working men's hotel, at no 144, on the corner of Peel Street. It is of rusticated bluestone with sandstone dressings, and is one of the few remaining Melbourne buildings of this type.

The Forester's Hall (1868), no 64-68 is a two storey rendered brick and bluestone building with a wide parapet and a central segmental pediment on which the name and date are written. It had two two-storey shops and offices on the Smith Street facade, either side of a central arched entrance, now all amalgamated as foyer / bar spaces. Behind this there was a hall with a musicians' gallery with elaborate plaster decoration and cedar fittings, still largely intact.

Smith Street has a number of Victorian-era buildings that give the precinct a somewhat flamboyant architectural character. These include the former Collingwood Post Office at no 174 (built in 1868, the ornate facade added in 1891-2), a two storey rendered building in a rather baroque version of the Renaissance Revival style, designed by John Marsden of the Public Works Department. It has a two storey recessed loggia and a prominent mansard roofed clock tower, a balustraded parapet, and three projecting bays topped with broken pediments (segmental pediments on the end bays and a triangular one over the centre bay). Others include the three storey red brick and render shop at no 284, with unusual large horseshoe motifs on the rendered parapet; and the eight identical ornate Italianate shops at no 298-312. Of particular note is the three storey Victoria Buildings (1888-9), no 193-207 Smith Street, designed by Norman Hitchcock for John Woods. The original scheme for this building proposed four projecting domed pavilions capped with unusual flag holders. Although this scheme was never fully realised, much of the elaborate unpainted rendered Corinthian facade remains. The Stanford Block, nos 119-129, a row of shops of two and three storeys that was originally part of the Ackman retail empire, has a similarly exuberant

stucco facade.

There are two former bank buildings of particular note. The former National of Australasia, no 171 (1872), is a two storey building in a relatively austere Renaissance Revival style typical of its architect Leonard Terry, with a bluestone plinth, a banded ground floor of rusticated freestone with arched windows, and a first floor of smooth ashlar with architraves surrounding the arched windows. The former Union of Australia (1889-90), no 165-167 Smith Street, designed by Inskip & Robertson, is a two storey rendered brick building with a balustraded parapet, in a more ornamental Renaissance Revival style and with eclectic architectural motifs typical of its period. It is unusual in that the manager's residence, with an even more ornate facade, adjoined the bank to the south, rather than being above the ground floor banking chamber, as was the norm at the time

There are several remnants of the large manufacturing and retailing concerns once common in the street. Foy & Gibson remnants survive at 132, and more impressively, the four storey former ladies' store at no 145-163 on the other side of the street, with its original verandahs; the tunnel connecting these is also said to survive. Others are the blind two and three storey facades of the former Ackman's stores between Hodgson and St David Streets, and the four storey early twentieth century Paterson's building at 173-181 Smith Street. Also of note are the former Coles store at no 172, the former Moran & Cato building at 279 Smith Street, the Albion Hotel at 314 Smith Street, and the shops at 299-303 Smith Street. The former Coles store at no 172 was remodelled as a symmetrical rendered Art Deco building. Distinctive features of the Moderne style are the steel framed windows and the subtly incised horizontal bands. Internally a number of features remain, including cornices, metal ceiling gratings and light fittings.

Most shops in the street now have modern shopfronts and verandahs.

Intactness

Much of Smith Street is relatively intact, with many shops surviving from the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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/>