

# NUM PON SOON SOCIETY BUILDING



NUM PON SOON SOCIETY BUILDING SOHO 2008



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1 num pon soon little bourke street melbourne front view



num pon soon little bourke street melbourne detail parapet



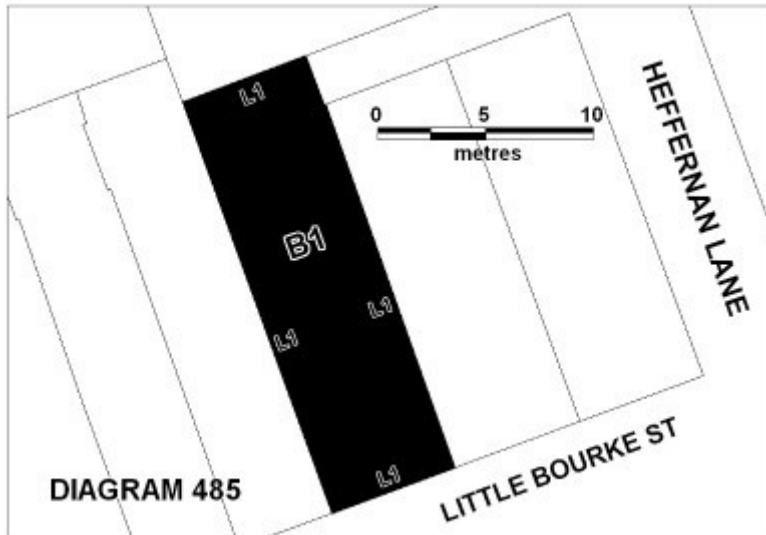
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h00485 num pon soon plan

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### Location

200-202 LITTLE BOURKE STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

### Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0485

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO693

### VHR Registration

February 24, 1981

### Amendment to Registration

April 10, 2008

### Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 15, 2000

What is significant?

Num Pon Soon Society Building is a two storey stuccoed brick building built in 1861 to the design of notable architects Knight and Kerr. It was built as a clubhouse for the Sam Yup Society ("three district" society) which later became known as the Num Pon Soon Society. The society, one of the earliest district associations established in Victoria, helped miners and others from the Num Hoi, Pon Yu and Soon Duc districts in the Guangdong province of China. The clubhouse was built through donations from members of the society with assistance from Lowe Kong Meng, successful merchant and leading member of the Chinese community. Lowe Kong Meng was not a native of the Num Pon Soon districts, but he played a major role in a number of Chinese organisations and, with his knowledge of English and his standing in the wider Melbourne community, he organised the building of the society's clubhouse as well as assisting in legal and financial matters.

Many Chinese came to Victoria during the gold rushes of the 1850s, large numbers of whom were young men from the Canton Delta area of the southern province of Guangdong. Economic hardship and political upheaval forced many to emigrate and provide for family back in China. Many hoped to return home. District, clan and trade associations played an important role for expatriate Chinese, providing accommodation, places of worship, meeting places and other facilities and support.

The ground floor of the Num Pon Soon building sits on a basalt stone plinth and was originally an open Doric colonnade but has been subsequently enclosed. The architrave has evolute spiral mouldings. The upper storey balustraded loggia has fluted columns and pilasters employing the Corinthian order. Chinese influences include a timber and gild Num Pon Soon panel inscribed with Chinese characters above the first floor central square window featuring a stained glass stylised floral motif and timber framed etched glass "Palace style" lanterns on the balcony. The parapet has a mannerist pediment which includes the name Num Pon Soon.

The ground floor of the building is leased for commercial purposes. It retains its vaulted corrugated iron ceiling. A shrine room is situated at the front of the first floor which includes an altar used to honour ancestors, as well as other ritual objects and furniture. The first floor also includes living, dining and accommodation space. The attic rooms on the second floor of the building were also used for accommodation.

How is it significant?

Num Pon Soon Society Building is of historical, social and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Num Pon Soon Society Building is of historical significance for housing the earliest known surviving Chinese shrine in Australia and possibly the earliest outside of Asia. It also has significance as the earliest surviving Chinese community building in Victoria. It has strong associations with Chinese immigration to Victoria and is a tangible link to the Chinese who came in large numbers to the Victorian goldfields during the second half of the 19th century, and is evidence of their strong presence in Little Bourke Street since that time. The retention of the ancestors' shrine and other artefacts and furniture adds considerably to an understanding of the function of the building as a meeting place and a place of worship for the Num Pon Soon Society. The building and its contents are a physical reminder of the importance of district associations to expatriate Chinese in western countries from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. It is additionally significant for its links to Lowe Kong Meng (1831-1888), one of the most prosperous and successful early Chinese settlers in Melbourne.

Num Pon Soon Society Building is of historical and social significance for its associations with the traditional practices and customs of expatriate Chinese. Its highly intact shrine room provides tangible evidence of the lives and religious and ceremonial practices of the Chinese immigrants. The shrine room continues to play an important cultural, religious and social role for many members of the Chinese community, and Num Pon Soon Society members in particular have a strong attachment to the place.

Num Pon Soon Building is architecturally significant as a distinctive example of a Classical style building with Chinese influences designed by two of the most talented Public Works Department architects, J. G. Knight and

Peter Kerr. The smaller scale of the Num Pon Soon building provides an interesting comparison with Knight and Kerr's major work of the period, Parliament House, the first stages of which were designed in 1856.

## 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 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 authority where applicable.

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.

Exterior:

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

Installation and repairing of damp proofing by either injection method or grout pocket method.

Installation or removal of external fixtures and fittings such as, hot water services and taps.

Interior:

Painting of previously painted walls and ceilings provided that preparation or painting does not remove evidence of any original paint or other decorative scheme.

Installation, removal or replacement of carpets and/or flexible floor coverings.

Installation, removal or replacement of curtain tracks, rods and blinds.

Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of mirrors, paintings and other wall mounted art or religious works or icons.

Demolition or removal of non-original stud/partition walls, suspended ceilings or non-original wall linings (including plasterboard, laminate and Masonite), bathroom partitions and tiling, sanitary fixtures and fittings, kitchen wall tiling and equipment, lights, built-in cupboards, cubicle partitions, computer and office fitout and the like.

Removal or replacement of non-original door and window furniture including, hinges, locks, knobsets and sash lifts.

Installation of stud walls, which are removable.

Refurbishment of existing bathrooms and toilets including removal, installation or replacement of sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, wall and floor coverings.

Removal of tiling or concrete slabs in wet areas provided there is no damage to or alteration of original structure or fabric.

Installation, removal or replacement of ducted, hydronic or concealed radiant type heating provided that the installation does not damage existing skirtings and architraves and that the central plant is concealed.

Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring.

Installation, removal or replacement of electric clocks, public address systems, detectors, alarms, emergency lights, exit signs, luminaires and the like on plaster surfaces.

Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.

Installation of plant within the roof space.

Installation of new fire hydrant services including sprinklers, fire doors and elements affixed to plaster surfaces.

## Policy

The Num Pon Soon Society building has historical and social significance for housing the earliest known surviving Chinese shrine in Australia and for its strong associations with the history of Chinese migration to Victoria. It also has architectural significance as a fine example of a Classical style building by notable architects Knight and Kerr. The purpose of the permit exemptions is to allow works that do not impact on the significance of the place to occur without the need for a permit. Alterations that impact on the significance of the exterior and interior are subject to permit applications.

The ground floor has had alterations relating to its use as a shop/cafe, including the enclosure of the colonnade. Any further alterations should recognise the original design intentions and hierarchy of spaces and significant elements such as the vaulted corrugated iron ceilings and decorative features including the pilasters should be retained.

The first floor, in particular the shrine room, and the staircase and attic rooms on the second floor are highly intact and alterations that impact on the significance of the original form are subject to permit applications. The artefacts and furniture in the shrine room are highly significant and their retention as a collection in situ is encouraged.

Removal of any of the items would be subject to permit application. Any restoration or repairs to the registered items should be carried out by a qualified conservator and only after consultation with Heritage Victoria.

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

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.

#### Exterior:

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

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Refurbishment of existing bathrooms and toilets including removal, installation or replacement of sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, wall and floor coverings.

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Installation, removal or replacement of ducted, hydronic or concealed radiant type heating provided that the installation does not damage existing skirtings and architraves and that the central plant is concealed.

Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring.

Installation, removal or replacement of electric clocks, public address systems, detectors, alarms, emergency lights, exit signs, luminaires and the like on plaster surfaces.

Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.

Installation of plant within the roof space.

Installation of new fire hydrant services including sprinklers, fire doors and elements affixed to plaster surfaces.

Construction dates	1860,
Architect/Designer	Kerr, Peter,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Hermes Number	780
Property Number	

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## History

### Contextual History:

Low Kong Meng came to Melbourne from Mauritius in 1853. Kong Meng was British by birth. He started business as a tea importer in 1854 in Little Bourke Street. Kong Meng represented Chinese insurance companies and other business interests in Australia. He argued against restrictions to Chinese immigration. In 1863 he received the Rank of Mandarin of the Blue Button from the Chinese Emperor.

In 1861 there were approximately 25,000 Chinese on the goldfields. A Chinatown had begun to develop in Little Bourke Street from about 1855, and grew in size as Chinese returned back to Melbourne from the goldfields. Between 1871 and 1911 their numbers declined dramatically to only 4,700.

(Historical and Architectural Development of the Commonwealth Centre Site, Melbourne CBD Area 4, 1979, pp.15-16)

### History of Place:

The land was bought from Thomas Sullivan in February 1859 for 780 pounds. The club house was originally called Sam Yup Club House but had changed its name to Nam Poon Soon by 1918.

(from National Trust notes)

Associated People: Low Kong Meng (1831-1888)

## Plaque Citation

This is the earliest surviving Chinese community building in Victoria, built in 1861 to the design of architects J. G. Knight and Peter Kerr for the Num Pon Soon Society, a Chinese district association.

## Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended in that the Heritage Register Number 485 in the categories described as a Heritage Place and Heritage Object/s is now described as:

Num Pon Soon Society Building  
200-202 Little Bourke Street  
Melbourne  
Melbourne City

EXTENT:

1. All of the building known as the Num Pon Soon Society building marked B1 on Diagram 485 held by the Executive Director.
2. All of the objects specified in the Num Pon Soon Society Collection Inventory, April 2005, held by the Executive Director and all the objects marked in the list of additional items, December 2007, held by the Executive Director.
3. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 485 held by the Executive Director being the land described in Memorial Book 553 No. 160.

Dated 4 April 2008

RAY TONKIN  
Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 15 10 April 2008 707]

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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/>*