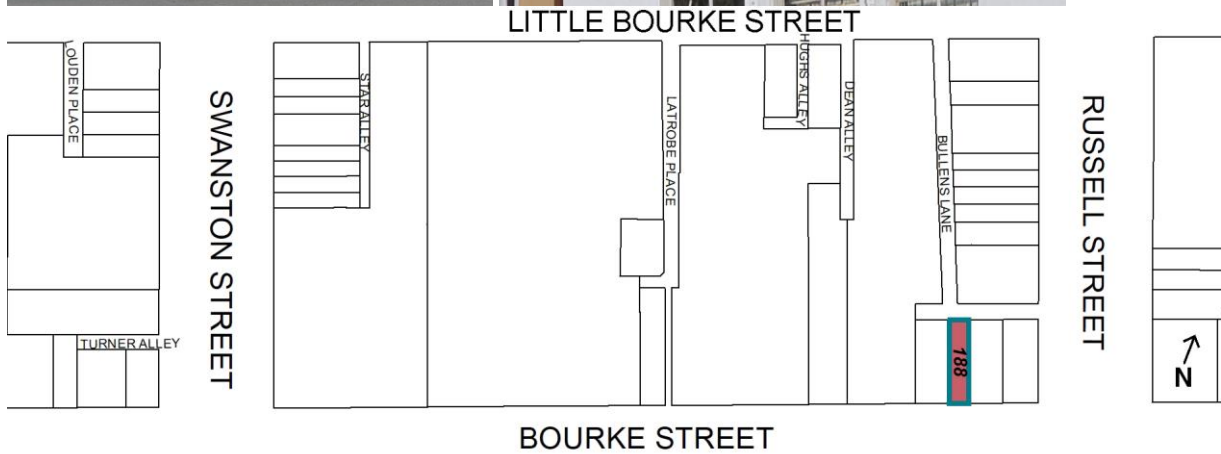


SITE NAME	Former Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd
STREET ADDRESS	188 Bourke Street Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	101206



SURVEY DATE: October 2018		SURVEY BY: Context	
HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	H W & F B Tompkins	FORMER GRADE	C
BUILDER:		BUILDER:	Not known
PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT:	Interwar Period (c1919- c1940)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1937

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations.	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here.
HISTORIC THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
5 Building a commercial city	5.4 Developing a retail centre
	OTHER SUB-THEMES
3 Shaping the urban landscape	3.2 Expressing an architectural style

LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE	
Archaeological block no: 30	Inventory no: Inventory not provided
THEMATIC MAPPING AND LANDUSE	
1890s	Not able to be determined
1920s	Not able to be determined
1960s	Retail

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Extent of overlay: Refer to map

SUMMARY

188 Bourke Street is a three-storey interwar commercial building designed in 1937 in the Art Deco/Jazz Moderne style by Melbourne architects H W & F B Tompkins. It was occupied by clothes retailer Rockman’s Showrooms Pty Ltd from 1937 to the 1960s. First established in 1931 in Melbourne, the firm operated a chain of stores under the name and ‘Best for less’ style of ‘Rockmans’ across Australia in the ensuing years.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Building a commercial city

Developing a retail centre

The department store Buckley and Nunn, which opened in 1854, established Bourke Street as the preferred retail strip in Melbourne. By the 1880s, the central section of Bourke Street became closely associated with the drapery trade. Russian immigrant Sidney Myer bought a block in Bourke Street in 1911, where he established his successful emporium, replacing Robertson & Moffatt and Stephen & Sons. By the 1910s, central Bourke Street thus gained retail ascendancy over other inner-suburban shopping strips in Collingwood and Prahran. (Context 2012:43; May 2008).

After 1920, chain department stores grew rapidly, opening branches or new stores in central Melbourne (Young and Spearritt 2008). To accommodate growing demand for retail stores in central Melbourne, by the 1930s, former businesses in the block east of Bourke Street mall were quickly replaced with clothing retailers and chain stores. Designed by architect Harry Norris, a new six-storey building was built for the drapers Foy & Gibson at the corner of Swanston and Bourke streets, and an eight-storey building was built in 1932-35 to a design by architect Marcus Barlow at the corner of Russell and Bourke streets, for successful Gippsland merchant Norman Sharpe's drapery emporium (Butler 2011:61; Young & Spearritt 2008).

Shaping the urban landscape

Expressing an architectural style

The interwar period brought with it a jump in tall building construction in the central city, made possible by the use of structural steel and reinforced concrete framing. In response, a height limit was imposed by Melbourne City Council in 1916, dictated by the limitations on fire-fighting at that time. A maximum height of 40 metres (132 feet) was introduced for steel and concrete buildings, a limit that was not broken until the 1950s. Architects experimented with a range of styles to express the increased height in buildings.

Some styles adapted the classical styles from earlier periods. Commercial buildings in the 1920s were mainly of the Commercial Palazzo style, as exemplified by Harry Norris's Nicholas Building in Swanston Street (1925). The style was an early attempt at creating a style suitable for the tall building. It was divided into a base, shaft and cornice, much like a Renaissance palazzo. The scale, however, was greatly enlarged, with the shaft stretching up to ten storeys.

Other styles were more closely associated with the modern movement and expressed a more dynamic and streamlined aesthetic. Emphasis was placed on the horizontal or vertical composition of a building to accentuate certain qualities of the building. In styles such as the Commercial Gothic style and the Jazz Moderne, vertical fins and ribs were used to accentuate the height of buildings. Landmark examples of this style include: Marcus Barlow's Manchester Unity Building, Collins Street (1929-32) and the Tompkins Bros' Myer Emporium in Bourke Street (1933). (Context 2012:19-20).

SITE HISTORY

The site at 188 Bourke Street is part of Crown Allotment 8, Block 22, of the City of Melbourne, initially purchased by J H Phelps in September 1837 (DCLS c1839). By 1888, the land was developed with a two-storey shop, occupied by Mason Bros, hatters (Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 22, 1888). Between

c1910 and 1924, the building housed restaurants, Hoffmann's Grill Room, and later Mrs Kitz's tearooms (S&Mc 1924; *Herald* 23 August 1937:11; Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 7, 1910).

The Kitz family still owned the building between the mid-1920s and 1936, during which time Sharpe Bros occupied the premises (S&Mc 1925-1938; RB 1936). Sharp Bros was a retail drapery originally established in Gippsland.

In August 1937, the building at 188 Bourke Street, which the *Herald* described as an 'old city landmark' was demolished to make way for a modern three-storey concrete building. The site had one of the smallest frontages in Bourke Street (*Herald* 23 August 1937:11). The original building plans for 188 Bourke Street prepared by architects H W & F B Tompkins for the owners E B and D W Kitz show the Art Deco-style store with signage reading 'Sharpes' above the ground-floor shopfront (see Figure 1) (PROV VPRS 11201/P1, unit 219). It is possible that the new three-level shop at 188 Bourke Street was originally intended to be tenanted by Sharpe Bros, who eventually moved to a nearby location at 202-204 Bourke Street (also assessed as part of this study).

Following the demolition of part of the former building in 1937, the construction of the new building was delayed for several months due to a legal negotiation for demolition of a 70-year-old party wall that existed at the rear of the site. The wall formed part of one of the oldest houses in the city, which was later extended southward with a two-storey shop fronting Bourke Street. The land occupied by the old party wall was purchased inch by inch at a higher price, in order to fully demolish all of the old structure at 188 Bourke Street. The final site occupied a slightly larger frontage of about 16 feet 6 inches (*Herald* 6 October 1937:22). The architects H W & F B Tompkins provided an amended plan to implement the changes, and adjusted the signage and shopfront designs to suit the newly-designated tenant, Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd, owned by frock sellers Phillip and Norman Rockman, who utilised the building as a retail outlet (see Figure 2).

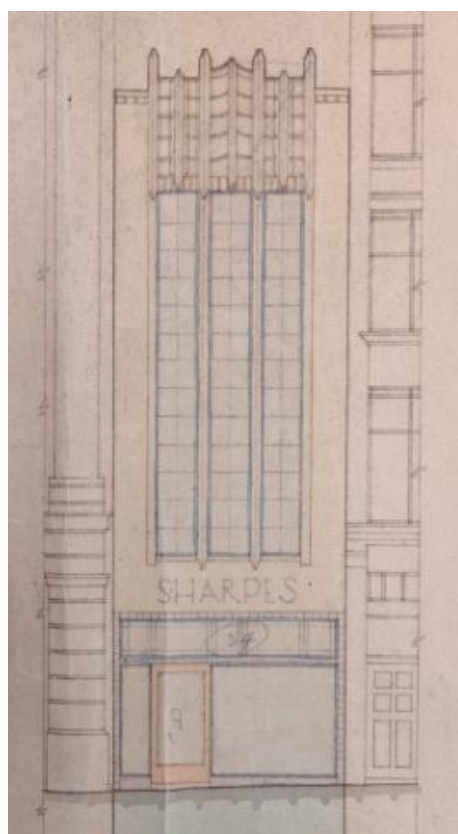


Figure 1. H W & F B Tompkins' drawing for the subject building at 188 Bourke Street, Melbourne, which was to be occupied by Sharpe Bros. (Source: PROV VPRS 11201/P1/382)

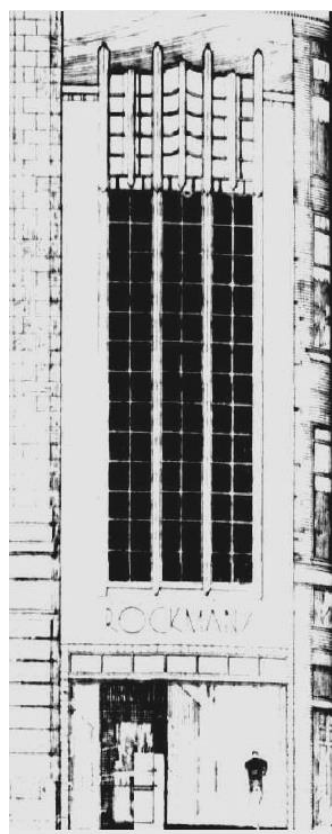


Figure 2. Newspaper illustration showing the amended façade design for Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd. (Source: *Herald* 6 October 1937:22)

The Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd chain of stores was founded by brothers Philip and Norman Rockman who came to Australia from Poland in 1924. Phillip initially made his living by hawking drapery as a travelling salesman. The first Rockman brothers' shop was opened in Collins Street in 1930, with a chain of stores opened across Australia in ensuing years. The company Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd was established in 1931 (*Daily Commercial and Shipping List*, NSW 11 July 1931:4). Carrying out the business under the style of 'Rockmans', the firm sold serviceable, inexpensive dresses, adopting the motto, 'Best for Less', and the store established an extensive mail order system and catalogue. In 1933, the firm had two outlets at 343 Bourke Street and 139-141 Swanston Street. Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd leased the building at 188 Bourke Street in 1937 for use as a retail outlet. Rockman's opened its 58th store in Yallourn in 1953, and by that year, had diversified into home wares. Rockman's continues to operate today (George and Spaul 2016; *Age*, 27 July 1934:13). Norman Rockman's son, Irvin Rockman, was Lord Mayor of the City of Melbourne in the period 1977-79.

The new 1937 brick shop and warehouse building at 188 Bourke Street leased to Rockman's Showrooms comprised three floors and a basement with an electric lift. The verticality of the building was emphasised with strips of windows to the façade. Other notable design features involved a front window display, which was 20 feet in depth, with plate glass shelving, and an original three-toned terrazzo-paved entrance from Bourke Street (*Herald* 6 October 1937:22).

Between 1938 and the early 1960s, the building was occupied by Rockman's Showrooms Pty Ltd, and subsequently tenanted by another dress salon, Magnin Pty Ltd, until the early 1970s (S&Mc

1960; RB 1965 & 1970). The property remained in the ownership of the Kitz family until c1970 (RB 1965 & 1970).

The Mahlstedt Fire Survey plan published in 1948 and amended in the early 1970s shows the three-storey shop at 188 Bourke Street occupied by 'Magnin Fashions' (see Figure 3) (Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 7, 1948).



Figure 3. Detail of the 1948 (amended post-1960s) Mahlstedt plan showing the subject building at 188 Bourke Street. (Source: Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 7, 1948)

In 1976, the ground floor of 188 Bourke Street was altered at a cost of \$4,500, and again in 1978 at a cost of \$6,500 (MBAI). Other known substantial building works included an upgrade carried out in 1986; enclosure of stairs and the installation of a new shopfront in 1987; and the installation of a new shopfront and internal partitions in 1988 (MBAI).

The property today contains a shop and a food and drink outlet (CoMMaps).

H W & F B Tompkins, architects

The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture contains the following entry for architects H W and F B Tompkins:

H. W. & F.B. TOMPKINS, architects were established in 1898 when the brothers won a design competition for the Commercial Travellers Association CTA Clubhouse, 190

Flinders Street, Melbourne. Henry Harry William (1865-1959) and Frank Beauchamp Tompkins (c1867-1952) were born in England and educated in South Africa. They migrated to Australia with their parents in 1886. Harry became an assistant architect to Richard Speight Jnr and Frank worked with a number of architects including Evander McIver and Nahum Barnet. By the mid-1890s Harry had entered a partnership, forming Speight & Tompkins of 493 Collins Street, Melbourne. He left the partnership in 1896 to take up a position in the Western Australia Public Works Department, but was retrenched in 1898 and returned to Melbourne and formed the partnership of H.W. & F.B. Tompkins (Beeston 2012:707-708).

The competition win established the firm and by the early 20th century, H.W. & F. B. Tompkins was a leading commercial firm. Their commercial work up to WWII reflects the three influences popular at the time: the Romanesque style popularised by such architects as H.H. Richardson in the United States during the late 19th century; the Baroque Revival of the early 20th century, popular in Chicago and San Francisco after 1908; and the Moderne or interwar functionalist style of the 1930s. Both Harry and Frank travelled to the United States and Europe, studying the latest trends in design and construction technology. They were the first architects in Melbourne to implement modern methods of steel frame construction and reinforced concrete in the Centre Way, Collins Street 1911 and the new Commercial Travellers' Association Clubhouse and Commerce House, 318-324 Flinders Street (1912). In 1913, the firm's association with Sidney Myer began with a warehouse building in Bourke Street, the first of many Myer commissions (Beeston 2012:707-708).

Harry Tompkins and Sidney Myer travelled in the United States visiting department stores, including the Emporium in San Francisco, which is reputedly the influence for the Myer Emporium in Bourke Street, Melbourne (Beeston 2012:707-708).

Harry Tompkins, the public face of the firm, was a prominent member of the RVIA; he was a council member (1905-), vice-president (1913) and president (1914-16). Harry was also president of the Federal Council of the AIA (1918-19) and mayor of Kew, the suburb in which he lived, for the same period (Beeston 2012:707-708).

The firm is one of the longest surviving in Victoria. In the 1950s it became Tompkins & Shaw when P.M. Shaw entered the partnership and then Tompkins, Shaw & Evans when Stan Evans joined. In 2003 it was acquired by Michael Davies Associates, forming a new firm, Tompkins MDA Group (Beeston 2012:707-708).

SITE DESCRIPTION

188 Bourke Street is a three-storey, narrow fronted building with retail at ground level and basement. Featuring the Art Deco style elements, the building demonstrates the symmetry, strong vertical emphasis with projecting mullions terminating in fins above the parapet and other characteristics typical of the style. The subject site is located on the northern side of Bourke Street near the intersection of Russell and Bourke streets. The building has rear access from Bullens Lane, an L-shaped servicing laneway connecting Little Bourke and Russell streets.

The façade to Bourke Street is painted render, probably over non-loadbearing brickwork, although some of the detailed elements may be either precast concrete or overpainted glazed terracotta. The façade is punctuated by three equal width vertical panels of glazing separated by narrow mullions that terminate in finials projecting above the deep, stepped and articulated Art Deco parapet. There is a solid vertical panel at each end of the façade.

The original steel framed multi-paned windows survive at the second-floor level, although at the first-floor level the original windows have been replaced with single pane glazing to the central and western bays and three aluminum framed awning openable windows set into the eastern bay.

The ground floor has been substantially altered with a contemporary shopfront. Above the ground floor is a cantilevered box awning.

INTEGRITY

The building is largely intact above the ground floor with some changes visible to original or early significant fabric. The building retains evidence of key characteristics of its Jazz Moderne style, including its vertical openings terminating in the stepped Art Deco style parapet. The original steel framed multi-paned windows survive at the second-floor level. The building's integrity is slightly diminished by the partial removal of original steel windows at the ground and first floor level. Overall the building is has relatively high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Structural steel and reinforced concrete framing became popular building materials in interwar Melbourne, inspired by Chicagoan architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Departing from load-bearing brick walls, many examples employed these new building methods that allowed windows to become larger and more prominent on façades, while also facilitating increased building heights.

The interwar department store or commercial buildings in Melbourne often utilised the Commercial Palazzo, Chicagoesque or Art Deco/Jazz Moderne styles. Popularly known as Art Deco, the Jazz Moderne style is characterised as the embodiment of dynamic progress and faith in modern technology represented with the use of strong vertical and/or horizontal motion, and non-historic ornaments.

The following examples are comparable with 188 Bourke Street, being of a similar use, scale, location and/or creation date. The images and descriptions are provided by CoM Maps unless stated otherwise.

Former Patersons Pty Ltd, 152-158 Bourke Street, 1934 (Interim HO1266 – Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

The former Patersons Pty Ltd Building was built for the Paterson family as a furniture retailing outlet. The building was designed by architect Arthur W Purnell and is a fine example of a Moderne façade from the Inter-war period.



Figure 4. Former Patersons Pty Ltd 152-158 Bourke Street, built in 1934.

Norman's Corner Store, 180-182 Bourke Street, 1935 (HO1000)

An eight-storey brick office building with basement and ground level retail. Formerly a three-storey warehouse, in 1935 the building was completely rebuilt with the addition of five extra storeys. The reconstruction was designed by Marcus Barlow in the Jazz Moderne style. It was subdivided into 23 commercial units in 2003.



Figure 5. Norman's Corner Stores, 180-182 Bourke Street, built in 1935.

Akira House, 18 Queen Street, 1927 (VHR H0397, HO729)

A ten-storey reinforced concrete former office building. It features a striking facade of black, green and grey terracotta faience tiles and was designed by James H Wardrop in the Jazz Moderne style. It was built by Swanson Bros in 1937 at a cost £11,000. Originally six storeys, a further four were added when the building was refurbished, subdivided and converted to apartments in 1998.



Figure 6. 18 Queen Street, built in 1927.

Former Alexanders Building, 88 Elizabeth Street, 1928 & 1933 (Significant in HO502 The Block Precinct)

A three-storey brick retail building with a faience tile-clad facade and a mezzanine. Built for the pipe and smoking requisites retailer Alexanders Proprietary Limited in 1928, and the façade was renovated in 1933 (Age 19 September 1933:14)



Figure 7. Elizabeth Street, built in 1928.

Former Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd, 202-204 Bourke Street, 1934 (Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

202-204 Bourke Street is a four-storey interwar commercial building built in 1935 in the Art Deco/Jazz Moderne style to a design by Melbourne architects H W & F B Tompkins. It functioned as the department store of Sharpe Bros Pty Ltd from 1935 to 1963 and continued its use as a department store until c1970.



Figure 8. 202-204 Bourke Street, built in 1934.

The former Rockman's Showroom at 188 Bourke Street is a largely intact example of the 1930s commercial building with Art Deco style elements. It demonstrates more finely detailed and modestly-scaled commercial development in central Melbourne, representing the 1930s' rapid expansion in the area to the east of Bourke Street retail centre, led by clothing retailers and chain stores.

The building is substantially in its original 1937 configuration and can be most closely compared to the former Sharpe Brothers building at 202-204 Bourke Street (recommended as significant in Hoddle Grid Heritage Review) or 88 Elizabeth Street (Significant in HO502 The Block Precinct) for its overall design with vertical bays of windows separated by prominent mullions. With its articulated parapet and basic palette of materials 202-204 Bourke Street is a highly similar example. With its Jazz Moderne style detailing 188 Bourke Street also shares some architectural similarities with other larger scale buildings such as 18 Queen Street (HO729), 152-158 Bourke Street, 1934 (Interim HO1266) and Norman's Corner Store, 180-182 Bourke Street, 1935 (HO1000).

Historically, the two buildings at 188 and 202-204 Bourke Street also share a history as successful retail stores established in the 1930s in Bourke Street between Swanston and Russell streets, with long associations with their initial store tenants.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓	<p>CRITERION A Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION B Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).</p>
	<p>CRITERION C Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION D Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).</p>
	<p>CRITERION E Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION F Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)</p>
	<p>CRITERION G Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION H Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

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PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985**

D

**Central City Heritage
Study 1993**

C

**Review of Heritage
overlay listings in the
CBD 2002**

Ungraded

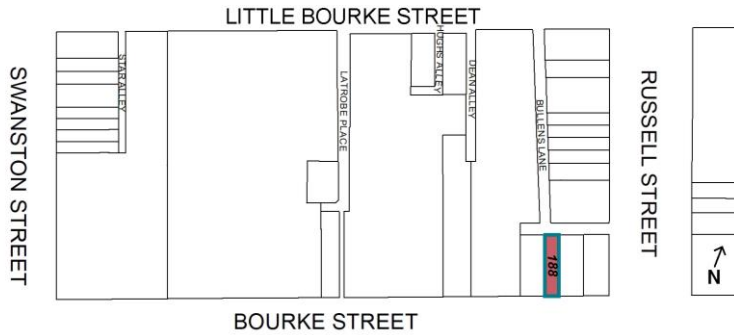
**Central City Heritage
Review 2011**

Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Rockman’s Showrooms Pty Ltd

PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The former Rockman’s Showroom at 188 Little Bourke Street, Melbourne, a three-storey retail building constructed in 1937 is significant.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- Original building form and scale;
- Original symmetrical façade geometry and fenestration, including vertical glazed panels, projecting mullions and rooftop fins and articulated parapet; and
- Original steel windows at the second-floor level.

The awning and alterations at the street-level shopfront and replacement aluminium frame windows at the first level are not significant.

How it is significant?

188 Bourke Street, Melbourne, is of local historical and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Rockman’s Showrooms Pty Ltd building at 188 Bourke Street is historically significant for the evidence it provides of an important phase in Melbourne’s retail history; the rise in popularity of the chain

store retailers from the 1920s in the central city. To accommodate growing demand for retail stores in central Melbourne, by the 1930s, former businesses in the block east of Bourke Street mall were quickly replaced with clothing retailers and chain stores. Designed in 1937 by architects H W & F B Tompkins and occupied by frock sellers Rockman's Showrooms, who established a chain of fashion stores across regional Victoria and New South Wales, it is representative of the wave of smaller-scale commercial development in central Melbourne during the later interwar period that replaced the low scale masonry buildings dating from the late 19th and early 20th century. (Criteria A and D)

188 Bourke Street is architecturally significant as a finely detailed, modestly-scaled example of a Jazz Moderne commercial building in central Melbourne. Jazz Moderne was an extremely popular style in the later interwar period. Such buildings utilised the engineering benefits of steel and concrete frame structures to maximise window areas and to provide flexibility for external articulation and decoration, and the dynamic and streamlined aesthetic of Art Deco detailing. The building is also notable as a work of the eminent firm of Melbourne architects H W & F B Tompkins, who designed a number of other Melbourne buildings in the Jazz Moderne style during the same period. (Criterion D)

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)

