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# Chapel Street Historic Area

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## Location

Chapel Street, between Dandenong Road and Toorak Road,, PRAHRAN VIC 3181 - Property No B7144

## Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

## Level of significance

National

## Heritage Listing

National Trust

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 2, 2008

What is significant? Chapel Street is one of the most important shopping strips in Victoria. Most of its buildings date from one of three periods: its initial surge of development in the 1860s; the 1880s and 1890s after the development of the cable tram routes in Chapel Street and its cross streets; or from the emporium development stage of 1900-15.

Although Chapel Street began as a local shopping centre, by the time of World War I it rivalled Melbourne's Central Business District in importance. It became the premier shopping street south of the Yarra, its only suburban rival being Smith Street, north of the Yarra. Its large emporia were without rival elsewhere in the suburbs and no other area of Melbourne so clearly demonstrates the pre World War I retail boom. The immense size of the emporia between High Street and Commercial Road is an intact and evocative reminder of this phase of Melbourne's development, and form an outstanding streetscape.

Chapel Street has played an important role in the commercial and social life of the area over the years, serving a changing, diverse and cosmopolitan population, such as the artisans, the working classes and middle classes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, migrants, especially after the Second World War, and artists and students from the 1970s. In recent years Chapel Street has developed a reputation as a prestigious shopping strip, popular with discerning shoppers and tourists. It is renowned as a stylish, prestigious shopping precinct attracting many clients: locals, casuals and tourists alike.

Chapel Street is a remarkably intact commercial strip of mainly late nineteenth and early twentieth century shops. Individual buildings of note in the precinct include the Prahran Town Hall, some shops from the 1850s to 1860s (for example numbers 24-26, 92, and 302), the Prahran Arcade (number 282-84), and the former CBA Bank (number 340-44). Among its most impressive buildings are the early twentieth century shopping emporia, a building type more usually associated with the central city shopping district. These emporia are all located between Commercial Road and High Street, and include the Big Store (number 303), Osment Buildings (number 197-207), Love and Lewis (number 321-23), the Colosseum (number 233), and Read's Stores (number 325). South of High Street and north of Commercial Road the streetscape scale is similar to that of other Melbourne

suburban shopping strips. South of High Street development pressures in the later twentieth century have been less, and several notable early twentieth century shopfronts have survived.

How is it significant? Chapel Street is significant for architectural, historical and social reasons. The section between Commercial Road and High Street is significant at a National level, the sections between Commercial Road and Toorak Road, and High Street and Dandenong Road, are significant at a State level.

Why is it significant? Chapel Street is architecturally significant for its intact streetscape of nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings, particularly its concentration of boom period shops and its large, early twentieth century shopping emporia usually more closely associated with the central city shopping area. These emporia are architecturally significant for the large range of styles used, and the unusual application of these to such large-scale facades.

Chapel Street is historically significant as one of the most impressive of the shopping strips that developed along Melbourne's cable tram routes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a reflection of the importance of the public transport networks that developed in Melbourne in the second half of the nineteenth century in the growth of the suburban shopping strips. Its large early twentieth century shopping emporia clearly demonstrate the pre World War I retail boom. It is significant as a reflection of the changing shopping habits of Melbourne people between the mid nineteenth century and the present day.

Chapel Street is socially significant as a one of Melbourne's favourite shopping, recreational and entertainment areas for over a century. It was the most important suburban shopping centre in Melbourne in the early twentieth century, and has again become a fashionable shopping strip, for locals as well as for tourists, and is also a favourite restaurant, cafe and bar strip.

Classified: 08/09/2004

See also: B0589, B0556, B0557, B4155, B5508, B6865, B6867, & B6868.

Hermes Number 66407

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

The character of Chapel Street changes considerably between Toorak Road and Dandenong Road.

A few buildings in Chapel Street survive from the 1850s and 1860s. No 24-26 is a rare survivor of the single-storey buildings timber buildings once common along the street. Other single storey shops surviving from the nineteenth century, are nos 224-6, 304 and 444-8 Chapel Street. The two-storey shop at 302 Chapel Street (on the north-east corner of Walker Street) is an example of the more solid, but still unpretentious buildings that replaced these early buildings. It is a two-storey building in a simple Classical style, probably of brick, with an unpainted render finish. It had a shop on the ground floor, the owner's residence above, and a yard at the rear, and is an illustration of how the more substantial shops of that early period would have appeared. At 92 Chapel Street is the former shop of J P Pfeil, one of the best-known of the early bakers. 'J P Pfeil, Established 1858' is written on the upper facade.

Another rare early building, and the only church surviving in the central section of Chapel Street, is the 1850s former Baptist Church (now Bridie O'Reilly's) at 462 Chapel Street, a single storey rendered Classical building, pedimented and with two arched coloured windows on the front facade.

Another most important survivor from this early period is the system of streets and lanes leading away from Chapel Street to the new residential subdivisions on both sides.

The buildings of the 1880s were larger and usually more ornate. Speculators often amalgamated several adjacent blocks and built terraces of shops for rent, such as the six shops at 328-38 Chapel Street, the three shops at 340-44 Chapel Street, the six shops of Holywell's Terrace (1886) at 196-206 Chapel Street, and the four shops of Ruddock's Buildings (c1889) at 210-16 Chapel Street. Although these terraces might consist of separate shops at the ground level, the design of their upper facades was often treated as single symmetrical composition, often with a pediment over the central section of the parapet, as seen on the eight shops making up Conways

Buildings (1890), beginning at 415 Chapel Street.

The Prahran Arcade (282-84 Chapel Street), erected in 1889-90, is a particularly ornate Boom period building. The Prahran architect George W McMullen designed the building for Mrs Elizabeth Delaney and the builder was James McMullen. At the same time as the building was constructed, a row of houses in Arcade Street (to the east behind the main arcade) was also developed by the same proprietor. Both the first and second floors comprise arcaded balconies and the central mass of the symmetrical facade features a large arch and pediment over. The ornate facade has opulent stucco decoration. The interior is equally impressive. Wrought iron trusses with decorative spandrels support a glazed roof and shops line the sides of the arcade. When opened in July 1890, the Arcade buildings were considered one of the most important buildings in the city, and it is a notable example of arcade architecture.

Although the majority of the late nineteenth century buildings in Chapel Street are in a classical style, there are a few notable buildings in other styles, such as the three shops making up the Olde Court (1895), in the Queen Anne style at no 265-7 Chapel Street. This was built in 1896 for the drapers and mercers, Brown, Corke and Company. The two-storey corner building is Gothic in character with a high-pitched gable roof, clustered piers and horseshoe arched headed window openings.

The large emporia are concentrated on the west side of Chapel Street between High Street and Commercial Road and establish the unique character of this part of the street. One of the first was the Big Store, 303 Chapel Street, which opened in 1902, and was immediately successful under the management of John Maclellan, the nephew of Gibson, of Smith Street's Foy and Gibson stores. The Chapel and Wattle Street facades of the Big Store are elaborately conceived and massive in scale. Pilasters and vertical strips of windows alleviate the horizontality of the composition, which results from the lines of rustication, string courses and parapet line of the building. Arched window heads and pediments emphasize the monumental nature of the edifice.

Many of the emporia, such as Moore's and The Big Store, used an Edwardian Free Style, sometimes with American Romanesque influence, such as on the Love and Lewis building. The firm of drapers, Love and Lewis, first occupied premises in Prahran in 1897, and in 1913 replaced their original three-storey premises with a larger five-storey building. Distinctive lettering appears in the spandrels, which alternate with strips of windows and provide the horizontal emphasis to the building. Offsetting this are vertical piers, emphasised by red and cream striped brickwork and crowned with exaggerated pairs of consoles. The top floor of the building features arched window openings with terracotta patterned panels to the spandrels.

Adelaide businessman Charles Moore built his five-storey store, the most dominant of the large emporia along Chapel Street, at the corner of Commercial Road in 1914. The design by the architects Sydney Smith and Ogg was never fully completed. The building has two circular corner bays capped by domes that stand on elaborate drums. The main facade (only partially completed along Chapel Street) has massive Corinthian columns supported by pedestals, and banded piers at the corners, which support a heavy cornice and a balustraded parapet. Large areas of glass light the interiors. There are huge oval windows on the first floor, and an arched opening over the main Commercial Road entrance. The twin domes are especially prominent elements. The intact verandah is particularly ornate and notable.

The Osment Buildings at 197-207 Chapel Street were erected in 1910-11 by the descendants of Henry Osment, who once owned the Prahran Telegraph, and was a local councillor from 1887 to 1898 and Mayor of Prahran in 1888-89. It has a three-storey, symmetrical facade of red brick and cement render. Flanking bays contain oriel bay windows with sinuously curved parapets and prominent arches over. The arched openings are accentuated by exaggerated voussoirs. Small Ionic columns of green faience divide the facade and a central, decorated pediment contains the name 'Osment Buildings' in relief lettering.

The Colosseum building was designed by HW and FB Tompkins for Mrs Treadway and built by Clements Langford after fire destroyed the previous building in January 1914. It has an imposing facade dominated by a row of giant-order Ionic columns, and with oversized classical motifs such as Ionic pilasters and columns, garlands, bosses and balustrading. It is one of the earliest of the Beaux-Arts- inspired giant-order neo-classical buildings which became popular in Melbourne in the 1920s (only the 1913 Spencer Street Mail Exchange is earlier).

The emporium area ends at High Street, with the former Maples store, another large building, which has been

rather unfortunately altered.

Another prominent building in this part of Chapel Street is the Town Hall complex, which was built between 1860 and 1915. It includes the original Town Hall and offices of 1861, the enhanced clock tower of 1863 and the Post Office, Police Station and Library of 1878, by architects Crouch and Wilson. These are in a restrained Italianate style, in contrast to the 1888 boom period additions by Charles D'Ebro. The clock tower is a prominent local landmark. Major renovations took place in the early 1980s.

While the larger stores usually adopted an impressive Edwardian Free Style, the smaller buildings of the time were often influenced by art nouveau, for example at numbers 184, 242-4, 259-61, 280, 353 and 403-13.

North of Commercial Road development remained on a lower scale, mostly two storeys with a few buildings of three storeys. Several buildings are notable, including 353 Chapel Street, with fanciful stucco decoration and window form; Conways Buildings, an 1890 terrace of eight shops, still with their original verandahs; the group of shops north of Barry Street, built in 1910, with high decorative gables; the group of seven shops built in 1888 south of Fitzgerald Street of face brick with stucco dressings, with arched windows and decorative cast iron balconettes; 464 Chapel, built in 1891, a two storey building with an interesting central entrance and arched fanlights on the first floor; and in marked contrast to all of these, a 1980s post-modern building at 371-3 Chapel Street. Also of note is the Jam Factory, now converted to an entertainment and shopping venue.

Chapel Street south of High Street has few individually distinguished buildings but has a coherent streetscape character. Its buildings are also on a smaller scale than those in the Commercial Road to High Street area. Most buildings are of one or two-storeys, and as this area was slower to be re-developed than the part further north, it has retained more of its early shopfronts. The design and construction of shopfronts was a specialised trade at the time, and the maker's name was usually noted on a small plate placed below the shop window. Early shopfronts in this part of Chapel Street include those at nos 60, 72, 133, and 244, all by Thomas Duff & Bros, the major Melbourne manufacturer. Nos 16-18 and 30-32 are by Silverwood & Beck, no 70 is by Emerson, and at no 66 is an unusual surviving corner display cabinet by Brooks Robinson & Co. No 30-34 also have plates with the shopfront makers name, but in this case the name is difficult to decipher (possibly Morrow).

The most impressive of the early shopfronts is that of Rosenberg's shoe store at no 65, which has a walk through window. Few of these now survive in Melbourne. Rosenberg's is one of the Chapel Street shops with a long history. It was set up before WWI and is now a Melbourne institution as a specialist in women's shoes in larger sizes.

Another Chapel Street store with a long history is Patersons' Cakes, which was established in 1916.

## **Intactness**

The section of Chapel Street between High Street and Dandenong Road forms a remarkably intact streetscape of commercial buildings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Above the ground floor level the majority of the facades have retained their original decorative features. In some cases Victorian facades have been 'modernised' during the last few decades by stripping them of their nineteenth century decorative elements, such as at numbers 255, 257, 345 and 363.

Most of the ground floor shops-fronts have been modernised, but some nineteenth century shops were modernised in the early twentieth century, and have preserved the lead-light shop-fronts from this period. The best surviving shopfronts are in the section of Chapel Street south of High Street.

Most of the original verandahs have been replaced with cantilevered awnings. However the eight shops of the Conways Buildings, 415 Chapel Street (1890), have retained their original metal verandahs and cast iron columns. A few original awnings survive, notably on Pran Central, and possibly also on Tye's store, 318-326 Chapel Street.

*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.*

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