

# RIALTO BUILDING



RIALTO BUILDING SOHE  
2008



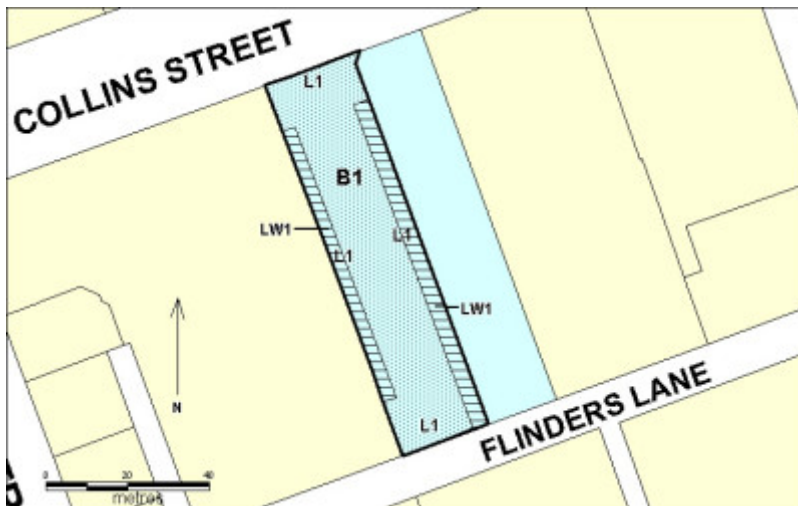
1 rialto collins street h41  
may2000



rialto building melb courtyard



rialto building melb taberet-  
entrance



rialto h41 extent may2000

## Location

497-503 COLLINS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0041

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO904

## VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

## Amendment to Registration

August 17, 2000

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 2, 2000

What is significant?

The Rialto Building, 497-503 Collins Street, was designed by the prominent Victorian architect William Pitt for businessman Patrick McCaughan. It was built by contractors Comely and Guillam between 1890 and 1891. The large complex, principally built in face red tuck-pointed brick, has facades to Collins Street, the Rialto Plaza, Flinders Lane and to the redeveloped rear section of the Winfield building to the east. The five storey Collins Street facade forms a screen to the major section of the building at the rear, a six storey arcade of small warehouses. The Collins Street facade is a distinctive version of the Venetian Gothic palazzo style. This polychromatic facade, with a diverse range of decorative materials including cement, ceramic tiles and pressed zinc, forms an integral part of the Rialto precinct, a highly significant group of five late Victorian buildings. Pitt's version of the Gothic was inspired by the style of the Gothic palazzo mercantile exchanges of Venice.

The long east facade is now incorporated into an atrium, and faces the new Winfield Building finished in a sympathetic style on the opposite side. The pointed arch motif of the Collins Street facade is consistently repeated in the openings of the warehouse section of the building. The whole complex is now occupied by a hotel, housed beneath a glazed atrium formed in 1984.

The original bluestone cobbled laneway, which served the carts and waggons delivering wool and other products to the Rialto building warehouses, survives intact on the ground floor of the atrium. This laneway forms a U-shape by looping around under the building at the Collins Street end, and returning along the whole length of the west facade back to Flinders Lane.

The building was specifically designed with the latest contemporary fire prevention measures. The plaster of internal walls and ceilings of the office section was placed on expanded metal lathing, a significant advance to traditional timber laths. In the stores area each room was compartmentalised with full height masonry walls. The

stone stairs and hydraulic lifts were located in two isolated bays. Traegerwellblech fireproof flooring was employed, a system of curved corrugated iron resting on the flanges of steel joists and covered with concrete.

The Flinders Lane facade incorporates a five storey corrugated iron urinal enclosure. The floors of the block are formed by the galleries, and the walls are simply formed from galvanised corrugated iron. The exact date of these toilets is not known. Pitt's original plans show earth closet toilets on the roof of the building, but a later, apparently undated plan shows urinals in their current position. The architect took the trouble to incorporate Gothic pointed arch windows into the ironwork, giving a sense of unity with the brick structure.

Tenants of the building in the early 1890s included the newly formed Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, responsible for providing Melbourne with a water and sewerage system. Other tenants included the law firm of Theodore Fink, who was a noted lawyer at many 'land boomer' trials in the 1890s. Later tenants included the Melbourne Woolbrokers Association and in 1904 the Wool Exchange Sale Room was located on the fourth floor of the warehouse block.

How is it significant?

The Rialto Building is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Rialto Building is architecturally significant as one of the finest 'boom style' buildings in Melbourne, and is an integral part of an exceptional group of late Victorian commercial buildings in Collins Street. The richly articulated surface mouldings, the array of Gothic windows and polychromatic brickwork to the Collins Street facade is a quintessential expression of 'boom period' architecture. It is one of the finest examples of the commercial Gothic style successfully developed by prominent architect William Pitt.

The rear section of stores stylistically echo the front office section, notably in the use of the pointed Gothic window. The stores are significant as a unique arrangement of warehouse space in Melbourne. The space created by the long internal facade and the narrow laneway is also unique, and despite no longer being open to the elements, the current layout retains the form, substance and atmosphere of the original layout.

The Rialto Building is architecturally significant for its fire-prevention measures. Innovative technology in its construction included fire resistant expanded metal lathing for plaster and Traegerwellblech floors.

The Rialto Building is historically significant as a demonstration of the building boom in Melbourne during the early 1890s, shortly before the economic depression halted building for most of the decade. The design demonstrates the new approach to office accommodation, being specifically planned for a range of commercial tenants and with shops to the ground floor of the street facade. The unusual urinal enclosures demonstrate a novel solution to the provision of sanitation in a multi-storey building.

The Rialto Building is historically significant for its associations with the newly formed Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works. It is also associated with many prominent businesses, including the law firm of Theodore Fink. Additionally, the warehouses link the building historically to the wool industry because the building was an important focal point to the wool markets and auctions as well as for storage.

## **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.
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 declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

External:

\* Minor repairs and maintenance which replace like with like. Note: any changes to the toilets remain subject to permits.

Internal:

\* Change internal finishes of hotel rooms and service areas, including repainting, and refurbishment or replacement of existing fittings, provided no structural alterations are made, and no physical or visual impact is made upon the exterior or original structure, including balconies and walls of the building.

Construction dates	1890,
Architect/Designer	Pitt, William,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	743
Property Number	

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## **History**

History of Place:

The construction of the Rialto included innovative some fireproofing technologies. The expanded metal lathing was a significant improvement on timber lathing. The contractors for the Rialto building, Comely and Gwillam, wrote a testimonial about the lathing in *Building and Contractors News* in November 1890, contemporary to their

involvement with the Rialto building. "We beg to state that having used a considerable quantity we can with confidence recommend it to anyone desirous of having walls and ceilings free of cracks. In our opinion, when properly covered with plaster it is fireproof." (Building & Contractors' News November 15 1890)

The first occupiers of the Rialto Building moved in during early 1892. 497 Collins Street was occupied as follows: lower basement, Farmers Co-operative Association and other primary producers; upper basement, merchants and agents; ground floor, Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Rates Office and Treasurer, Importers and Accountants, luncheon rooms, Strachan & Bostock (Wool brokers). 1st floor, MMBW, Chairman and Secretary; 2nd floor, Fink, Best & Phillips Solicitors; 3rd floor, MMBW engineer William Thwaites.

501 Collins Street was occupied by the Post and Telegraph Office; 503 Collins Street was occupied by MMBW rates office. 505 Collins Street was occupied by G Manstein (Stationers)

By 1904 the Wool Exchange sales room was established on the 4th floor.

The Rialto building is now the site of an hotel and the stores have been converted to hotel rooms and service areas. The hotel has 243 rooms including nine suites and includes a business centre, restaurants and bars, shops, swimming pool and spa, plus two showrooms to Collins Street and an arcade of shops and offices inside the building. A \$10 m refurbishment was carried out in 1992-1993. A refurbishment of the ballroom and conversion of the former tabaret area into a business centre including meeting rooms, reception areas and club lounges Meridien Australia, the current lessees, have a twenty year lease which began in 1992, with a ten year option.

In 1989 the Historic Buildings Council refused a permit to demolish the corrugated iron toilet block. completed in 1996.

Associated People: William Pitt

Born in Melbourne in 1855. Died 1918. 1882 Victoria Brewery, 1884 Gordon House, , 1888 Denton Hat Mills, 1887 Princess Theatre Spring Street, 1889 Oldfleet, 1890 Safe Deposit Building Queen Street, 1908 Foy & Gibson; grandstands at Flemington, Caulfield and MCC.

Theatres: Tivoli Bourke Street, Her Majesty's Sydney, Theatre Royal Adelaide, Grand Opera House Wellington NZ.

## **Assessment Against Criteria**

a. The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object

The Rialto Building has historical associations with the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, formed after the completion of the building and one of the first tenants.

The warehouses link the building historically to the wool industry because, as well as lettable storage space, the building was an important focal point to the wool markets and auctions.

b. The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness

The unusual urinal enclosures demonstrate a novel solution to the provision of sanitation in a late nineteenth century multi-storey building.

The rear stores are significant as a unique arrangement of warehouse space in Melbourne.

c. The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage

d. The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects

The design demonstrates the contemporary approach to office accommodation, being specifically planned for a range of commercial tenants and with shops to the ground floor of the street facade.

e. The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features

Rialto Building is one of the finest 'boom style' buildings in Melbourne, and is an integral part of an exceptional group of late Victorian commercial buildings in Collins Street. It is a quintessential expression of 'boom period' architecture. It is one of the finest examples of the commercial Gothic style by prominent architect William Pitt.

f. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements

The building demonstrates fire-prevention measures, which were increasingly important as city buildings grew taller and larger. Innovative technology included fire resistant expanded metal lathing for plaster, and Traegerwellblech floor construction.

g The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations

## **Extent of Registration**

### **NOTICE OF REGISTRATION**

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended in that the Heritage Register Number H41 in the category described as a Heritage Place is now described as:

Rialto Building, 497-503 Collins Street, Melbourne , Melbourne City Council.

#### **EXTENT:**

1. All the buildings and structures being B1 Rialto building, including the access between the Rialto and Winfield buildings, and LW1 being the cobbled bluestone laneway running both sides of the building, as marked on Diagram 41 held by the Executive Director.

2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 41 held by the Executive Director, being described in part of Plan CP174333B Vol. 10049 Fol. 367 & 368, being part of Crown Allotments 14 and 15, Section 2 in the Parish of Melbourne North.

Dated 3 August 2000

RAY TONKIN  
Executive Director

[Victoria Government Gazette G 33 17 August 2000 p.2070]

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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/>*