

# COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION BUILDING



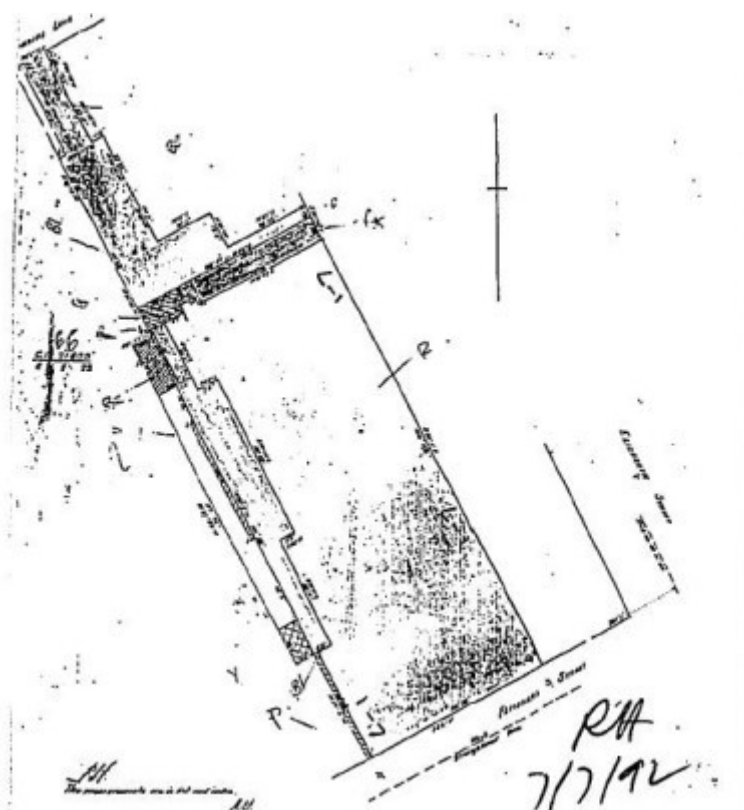
COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS ASSOCIATION BUILDING SOHE 2008



1 commercial travellers association building flinders street melbourne front elevation sep1998



commercial travellers association building flinders street melbourne front entrance view sep1998



h00934 plan h0934

## Location

318-324 FLINDERS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## **Municipality**

MELBOURNE CITY

## **Level of significance**

Registered

## **Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H0934

## **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO659

## **VHR Registration**

August 19, 1992

## **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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## **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on - February 1, 2000

What is significant?

The Commercial Travellers Association Building was designed by Harry Tompkins in 1912 and completed in 1913. It comprises a basement and nine storeys. The ground floor is faced with granite to a height of approximately 2.5 metres. The facade above is partially rendered and partially faced with cream glazed bricks. The rendered areas are treated in an ornate fashion, with exaggerated classical detailing including foliated swags, medallions and cartouches. Of particular note are the rustication of the ground and first floors and the colonnade of the second or piano nobile, which is supported on massive, oversized consoles. Consoles also support the cornice surmounting the facade. Oriel windows rise through the second and third floors and are topped with balconettes. There are also balconettes on the eighth floor. Leadlight is featured in some of the windows, mainly at the lower levels. The building is an early example of steel-framed construction, with reinforced concrete floors and a combination of terra cotta lumber and cement slab for non-structural internal walls. The building ceased functioning as the Commercial Travellers Association club in 1976 and fell into disrepair before being restored as a hotel in the late 1990s.

How is it significant?

The Commercial Travellers Association Building is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Commercial Travellers Association Building is of architectural significance as one of the finest and most distinct expressions of the Edwardian Baroque style in Melbourne. This grand classical non-domestic style, featuring a combination of Beaux Arts Classicism with a revival of English Baroque sources, was adopted as the style of choice for department stores and large commercial establishments in Melbourne in the first two decades of the 20th century. It was thus an eminently suitable style for the headquarters of the roving disciples of commerce, the Commercial Travellers Association. The building was the winning entry in a competition organised

by the Association and judged by the well-respected Percy Oakden, an indication of the high regard in which the building was held by Tompkins' architect peers.

The Commercial Travellers Association Building is of architectural significance for a number of innovations, such as the use of welded wire reinforcing mesh, perhaps the first use of such material in Victoria, and 'Mack' slab cement partitions, the only known use of this technology in Victoria. It was also one of Australia's earliest steel framed buildings. Perhaps most notable was the use of cream glazed bricks, an unusual feature used to combat discolouration caused by pollution from the street and nearby railway yards. The building also boasted equipment such as a built-in vacuum cleaning plant, electrically heated service lifts, potato peeling machines, telephones in each room, a dish washing machine and large electric toaster. The building was also the tallest in Melbourne until the construction of the Manchester Unity, completed in 1932, and the first to be constrained to the new city height limit of 132 feet.

The Commercial Travellers Association Building is of architectural significance as one of the most impressive works of Harry Tompkins. Tompkins was one of Melbourne's best commercial architects during the first three decades of the 20th century. He had a long relationship with the Commercial Travellers Association and also with Sydney Myer, for whom he designed the first Myer building. Tompkins served two terms as President of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects between 1914 and 1916, a reflection of his esteemed position in the architectural profession. Other well-known buildings for which he was responsible include Dimmeys Model Stores in Richmond and the Centreway Arcade in Collins Street.

The Commercial Travellers Association Building is of historical significance as evidence of the once important role played by commercial travellers in the commercial and social development of the State. In the late 19th century and early 20th century commercial travellers were a common sight on the State's railways and roads, as they traversed the countryside displaying their wares. The Commercial Travellers Association of Victoria was formed in 1880 to seek improved working conditions, better hotels and higher quality roads for travelling salesmen. The substantial character of this building demonstrates the prominent role of commercial travellers at a time of relatively rudimentary communication, transport and distribution networks. It is also a reminder of Flinders Street's now-lost status as one of the city's major commercial thoroughfares. The building's proximity to Flinders Street Station reflected the reliance of the travellers on the rail network.

## 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](#).

Construction dates	1912,
Architect/Designer	Tompkins, Harry,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	RENDEZVOUS HOTEL,
Hermes Number	757
Property Number	

## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

Source: "CTA Building", study prepared for the Historic Buildings Council by Bryce Raworth.

The Commercial Travellers Association of Victoria was formed in 1880, the second such Association in Australia (the first being in Adelaide). Its objectives were to seek improved working conditions, better hotels and higher quality roads for commercial travellers, along with benefit schemes, clubrooms and their own masonic lodge. Clubrooms were at first leased in hotels, but in 1885 large premises were taken above the Argus offices to accommodate the clubrooms and secretarial staff. After the formation of a national body in 1895, residential clubs for the association were built in all major cities.

The first purpose-built building for the CTA was designed by the architectural firm of HW and FB Tompkins and built in 1899. The building was located at 190-192 Flinders Street, and at this stage was the first CTA clubrooms erected in Australia. Additions were added subsequently, but it remained inadequate for the Association's purposes and was sold in 1911, although still occupied by the Association until 1914.

By 1908, the Association had acquired property fronting both Flinders Street and Flinders Lane and occupied a three storey basalt warehouse. In that year Tompkins designed a warehouse in Flinders Lane on behalf of the CTA, apparently an investment by the Association in its newly acquired property and a sign of their intention to eventually occupy the site themselves. This became the Association's sample rooms.

In 1912 a decision was made to move the function of the sample rooms from Flinders Lane to Flinders Street, thus bringing the Clubhouse and the sample rooms together on the one frontage. The sample rooms were designed by Tompkins as an extension of the new clubhouse and were called Commerce House. Commerce House was designed slightly after the clubrooms, in a style designed to complement them but with reduced decoration, reflecting the relative importance of the buildings to the Association.

Associated People:

## Extent of Registration

AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 934.

Commercial Traveller's Association Building, 318-324 Flinders Street, Melbourne

To the extent of:

1. All of the building known as the Commercial Travellers Association; and
2. All of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 4705 Folio 940922, marked L-1 on Plan 605192N endorsed by the Chairperson, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council. [Victoria Government Gazette No. G32 19 August 1992 p.2358]

*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/>*