

(FORMER)
ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB OF VICTORIA

111-129 QUEEN STREET
MELBOURNE

EXPERT WITNESS STATEMENT

ASSESSING A PROPOSAL
TO APPLY A PERMANENT
HERITAGE OVERLAY TO THIS SITE
AS PART OF AMENDMENT C387
OF THE MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

5 AUGUST 2021

PETER ANDREW BARRETT

1

BACKGROUND

Amendment C387 of the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* implements the recommendations of the 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review' by Context and GJM Heritage, dated 2020, to apply heritage overlays to five precincts and 137 buildings within the Hoddle Grid.

The Hoddle Grid is an overlay of streets in the Central Business District of Melbourne, laid out from 1837 shortly after permanent European occupation of the Port Phillip District. It is a grid of streets, and little streets and lanes, of approximately 1.6 x 0.8 kilometres. The grid has changed over time with additional streets and lanes, however the original grid is still recognisable. The Hoddle Grid in terms of the heritage study area is defined as the area bounded by Spring Street to the east, the Yarra River to the south, Wurundjeri Way to the west, and to the north parts of La Trobe, A'Beckett and Victoria streets.¹

The subject site, the former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (**RACV Club**), at 111-129 Queen Street, Melbourne is one of the sites in the 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review' recommended for an individual heritage overlay to be applied to the site, as part of Amendment C387 of the *Melbourne Planning Scheme*.

Diagram showing the location of the former RACV Club, and the extent of the proposed heritage overlay (Source of image: Hoddle Grid Heritage Review).



1

City of Melbourne, Participate Melbourne, 'What is the Hoddle Grid?', <https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/amendmentc387/amendment-overview>, retrieved 19 June 2021.

RACV Club, 1961.
(Photographer: Laurie
Richards; Source: RACV
Heritage Collection).



The citation for the RACV Club can be found at pages 975-998 of the 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review' (**Citation**). This Citation contains a statement of significance describing the RACV Club which is proposed to be included in the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* Amendment C387 (**Statement of Significance**).

The earlier Amendment C386 of the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* has applied an interim heritage overlay to this site – HO1068 former RACV Club, 111-129 Queen Street, Melbourne. This interim heritage overlay will expire on 29 May 2022.

It is acknowledged that there is some merit in applying permanent heritage controls to the subject site. In doing so, it is recommended that further work is done by the City of Melbourne and its consultants, as the Citation that is prepared including the Statement of Significance contains a number of errors and inaccuracies in its assessment of the former RACV Club.

My qualifications and experience as an architectural historian are outlined in Section 8 of this expert witness statement.

2 THE BURRA CHARTER

This report is prepared with regard to *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013*; referred hereon as the *Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013* or the *Burra Charter*. *The Burra Charter* is the recognised standard of heritage practice in Australia.

The Burra Charter notes that the policy for managing a place must be based upon an understanding of its cultural significance (Article 6.2), and the cultural significance of a place and other issues affecting its future are best understood by a sequence of collecting and analysing information before making decisions. The Burra Charter Process involves an understanding of that cultural significance first, and the development of policy and finally management of the place in accordance with that policy (Article 6.1). Application of heritage controls to the former RACV Club should be consistent with this conservation policy.

3 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A site inspection was undertaken on 17 June 2021. The exterior of the former RACV Club was inspected. An inspection of the interior of the podium levels (ground, first and second floor [balcony]) was also undertaken during this visit.

I have previously visited the building during the time it was the RACV Club, as a guest.

A number of primary historical sources have been reviewed in the preparation of this report, which includes the RACV Heritage Collection. A search of the RACV Heritage Collection was unable to locate the original plans of the building.²

In preparing this expert witness statement I have reviewed the 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review' (Context and GJM Heritage, 2020), and its Citation for the former RACV club.

All sources (historical and contemporary), where referenced, are footnoted.

2 Mardi Nowak, Head of Visual Arts, Social Impact & Corporate Communications, Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, email dated 20 July 2021.

4

COMMENTS

It is a reasonable conclusion that the 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review' has reached that the former RACV Club meets the criteria for Historical, Representative and Social significances to the City of Melbourne. The site is still associated today as being the former club and, until the 1980s, the administrative headquarters of the RACV. This organisation is recognised as the State's peak motoring body (Criteria A and G). The building is also a representative example of a private social club built in the post-war period in a Modernist-style. The design of its upper levels with punctured window openings demonstrates the departure from an earlier generation of high-rise buildings in Melbourne, which were clad in sheer glass and steel walls (Criterion D).

The former RACV Club does also have some inherent aesthetic values (Criterion E). Nonetheless, these values have been diminished by a number of changes since the building was disposed of by the RACV in 2005. Although aspects of the original Modernist design remain evident ie the massing of the tower upon a two-storey podium, and materiality, much of the early detailing, particularly at podium-level has either been removed or altered. Much of these alterations conflict with the original Modernist design intent of Minimalist lines and detailing, instead much of the change sits awkwardly with the remaining original fabric.

In this respect, the claim in the Citation that the building has a 'high level of integrity to its original design'³ fails to appreciate the changes that have occurred, and the impacts that these changes have had to the building's integrity.

At the time of its completion, a distinct element of the RACV Club when built was its long polished black granite wall on the Queen Street frontage. The openings to this wall were limited to two stairs towards each end, and a shopfront at the Little Collins Street corner. On my inspection, it was noted:

- a good proportion of the polished granite wall has now been removed, and is replaced with shopfronts.
- the original shopfront adjacent to the corner of Little Collins Street has been removed and a larger shopfront fitted south of the main stairs.
- the (south) stairs on the Queen Street frontage have also been altered, and now have stairs added that extend at 90 degrees from the original stairs towards the recessed shopfronts.

3

Refer to 'What is significant?' in the Statement of Significance, 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review', Postwar Thematic Environmental History and Postwar Places' vol 2B, p 996.

These changes have removed the fortress-like response that the building originally had at street-level.

The upper level of the podium has also been remodelled. Adjacent to the Little Collins Street corner, glazing on the podium has been removed to create a recessed balcony. This is faced in a black granite frame and timber cladding. Similar timber cladding has been added to the top of the shopfront on the lower level. The timber is an unsympathetic response, as timber is not used anywhere else on the façade, and the void in the façade has disrupted the linear character of the glazing of the podium.

It was evident at the site inspection, that the balcony above the podium has undergone change. The existing glazed cantilevered canopy, supported by a series of large, steel cranked-members, is not original. The cranked steel elements are built at the front of the pillars supporting the tower (the pillars erroneously described as 'stilts' in one part of the Citation),⁴ lessening the visual effect of these pillars – a visual effect considered significant in the Citation.⁵ The frameless glass balustrade of the balcony of the podium is also not original.

The tower does retain its original form, materiality and fenestration pattern. The bricks are described as 'manganese' in the Citation, but are a pressed brown brick, of a type popular on Melbourne high-rise buildings of the 1960s. Although the window openings retain their original proportions, it was noted on the inspection that the steel window frames on five levels of the building have been removed and replaced with recessed fixed glazed panels. This has disrupted the detailing and removed the original design intent of openable windows on all levels – a relatively uncommon element on high-rise buildings of the post-war period.

Change has occurred to the Little Collins Street frontage of the site. This includes the shops built along the frontage, west of the vehicle entrance. The shops are built where the former car lift was located. Recessed balconies have been added to the first floor of the podium on the Little Collins Street frontage, which have removed more of the original glazing.

4 Refer to 'Description' in the Citation, 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review', Postwar Thematic Environmental History and Postwar Places' vol 2B, p 982.

5 Refer to 'Why is it significant?' in the Statement of Significance, 'Hoddle Grid Heritage Review', Postwar Thematic Environmental History and Postwar Places' vol 2B, p 997.

*Former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria
111-129 Queen Street, Melbourne*



Left: Little Collins/Queen Street corner at the time of completion (Laurie Richards photo, RACV Heritage Collection). Right, the same corner today, showing the enlarged shopfront and recessed balcony on the first floor.



Left: Entrance from Queen Street at the time of completion (Wolfgang Sievers, State Library of Victoria Collection). Right, stairs today, altered to extend towards the new recessed shopfronts.



Above: Photograph of the balcony at the time completion (Wolfgang Sievers photo, State Library of Victoria Collection).



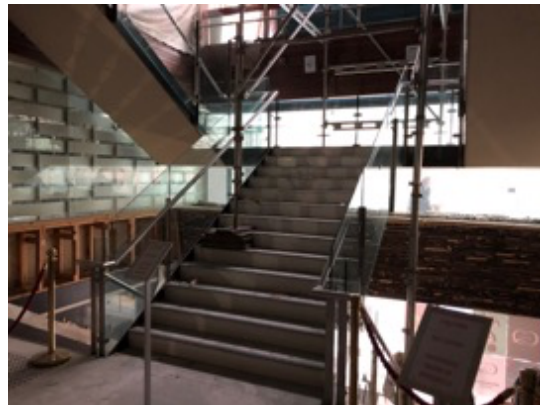
Above: Balcony today, with steel frame glazed awning fitted and new frameless glazed balustrade.



Above: The area enclosed with the blue line has had its steel frame sash windows shown here removed and replaced with fixed glazed panels.



The former internal car lifts (left) have been removed (Laurie Richards photo), and this part of the building fitted with a shop (Roti Bar) fronting Little Collins Street (right).



Most of the original internal detailing of the club has been removed. At left is a photograph of the original stairs leading from Queen Street to the Club (Laurie Richards photo), and the stairs today with their timber balustrade replaced by a steel and glass balustrade.

No internal controls are proposed for the heritage overlay, but it is worth noting that on internal inspection of the building, it was observed that most of the original finishes and fixtures have been removed, and others altered. This includes the split stair to the club, which has had its original timber handrail removed. The previously mentioned car lifts, which provided access for vehicles between the ground and basement has been removed and replaced with a shop facing Little Collins Street. An internal ramp has now been built by the existing owners to provide vehicle access to both levels.

5

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Citation that is clearer as to what change has occurred, and what original and non-original fabric is on the building now, will be of assistance both to the City of Melbourne and the owners when repair, maintenance or alterations are proposed for this building. On the previous pages are photographs that document some of the change that has occurred, which will assist in amending the Citation.

It is in the interests of all parties, the City of Melbourne and their consultants, and the owner of the building, that the Citation and Statement of Significance accurately defines what is significant about the former RACV Club and the change that has occurred, prior to implementing heritage controls upon this site. This will assist in the development of conservation policy and future management of the former RACV Club in accordance with that policy.

The change that has occurred to the building should be noted in the 'description' section of the Citation and also in the Statement of Significance. I recommend that the term 'high-level of integrity' be removed from the description of the building as it exists today. A draft Statement of Significance is at the end of this expert witness statement.

There are also a number of minor changes that I recommend to the Citation, which are relatively inconsequential in the overall assessment of the building, but nevertheless this would be an opportune time to address them. These are outlined in the Section 6 below.

6

ERRORS AND OMISSIONS IN CITATION SUGGESTED TO BE REVIEWED AND/OR CHANGED

Suggested revisions

Footnoting of the sources information is obtained from in the Citation would assist the reader in verifying the accuracy of some claims made in the heritage study, so as to distinguish these from opinions and fact.

Some of the narrative in the Citation on Melbourne's history during this period is overstated in its claims, eg Melbourne in the 1950s-60s was a 'bustling international centre of commerce and culture'. It is a claim not supported by any facts, and would seem an overstatement when comparing Melbourne with, for example, New York and London at this time. It would be more accurate to describe Melbourne as a centre for finance and industry within Australia in the 1950s and 60s.⁶

Similarly, the claim Melbourne was an international tourist destination in this period is, at best, dubious. Until the opening of Tullamarine International Airport in 1970, Melbourne had few direct international flights due to Essendon Airport being unable to handle large international jet aircraft.⁷ Such a claim of Melbourne's profile as an international travel destination in the 1960s should be supported with a source(s).

The discussion about clubs in Melbourne should be expanded upon. Another club of a Modernist design around the corner from the Lyceum Club was the Naval & Military Club that had a striking Modernist design, which was demolished in recent years. Many other clubs remained in their traditional clubrooms in the post-war period such as the Melbourne Club and Australian Club which is also worth noting. Some discussion of whether it was these clubs, the Melbourne and Australian clubs, rather than the RACV, that had a more 'elite' membership would be worth discussion. Future work may need to flesh out the history of private clubs in Melbourne, many of which may be older than the RACV.

Miscellaneous

- Identification of the source that says the building is believed to be the first building in Melbourne to employ fast track or staged approach to development;

6 Context, 'A History of the City of Melbourne's Urban Environment', p 48.
7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melbourne_Airport

- Identification of the quotation 'a beautiful summer rendezvous before lunch or for after dinner coffee';
- Perhaps describe the podium as 'glazed' rather than 'transparent' (page 982);
- The building was relatively tall for Melbourne standards at the time of completion (p982);
- The State significant places listed in the Citation have little in common in terms of architectural style, materiality, massing and use. It may be better to remove these, or provide some commentary as to why they are seen as being of comparative value to the RACV Club.
- Examples from the study period that would be more relevant to cite would be some other buildings in the study, such as the AMP Tower, at 535 Bourke Street (1969), and the State Savings Bank of Victoria, Titles Office Branch, at the corner of Queen and Lonsdale Streets (1967), are better examples of Modernism using punctured wall openings. Many examples cited are clad in glass and steel curtain walling, and have little relevance to this style of Modernism discussed.
- The use of the term 'business' is ambiguous (page 977) and the term 'corporate' or another term may be more appropriate;
- Identification of what 'retail and entertainment precincts' emerged in the 1960s in Melbourne (page 978). It would seem that the retail and entertainment precincts of the 1960s in Melbourne were well established before this time eg Bourke Street, Chinatown;
- The date of the founding of the RACV varies in the Citation between 1903 and 1918 (page 979);
- The *Australasian* Temperance & General Mutual Life Assurance Society Limited (page 980);⁸
- The Tripe Club. What was that, and what is its significance (page 982)?
- Suggest reviewing Criterion H in the Statement of Significance. This is noted as 'historical', whereas it is normally the criterion for association of a place with a person or people. I suggest combining Criterion H with Criterion G, which is social value and association with a cultural or community group.

8

Shirley Thomas, *Yours for Life. The History of T&G Mutual Life Society Limited 1876-1976*, see author's note.

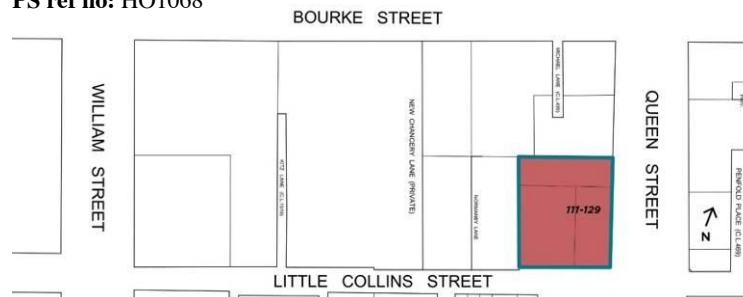
7

DRAFT STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Royal
Automobile Club of Victoria



PS ref no: HO1068



What is significant?

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building at 111-129 Queen Street, Melbourne, completed in 1961 and designed by Bates Smart McCutcheon.

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

- The building's original external form, materials and detailing; and
- The building's high level of integrity to its original design.

Later alterations, particularly at street level, are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building at 111-129 Queen Street is of historical, representative, aesthetic, social and associative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is historically significant as the headquarters of the large and influential RACV who were advocates for the rights of motorists, including the spending of significant public money on infrastructure for motorised transport. In the 1950s and 60s the RACV was highly influential in the promotion of tourism in Victoria. (Criterion A)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is a fine example of a social club in the city centre. Built in 1961, and designed by noted modernist architects Bates Smart McCutcheon, it expresses its function through the glazed lower floors for public use and the masonry-clad that residential tower above. In design it is a relatively early example of a modern tower that is a departure from the curtain-wall high-rise buildings of the 1950s. Its construction program was purportedly an early example of the fast-track method that enabled construction to commence concurrently with detailed design. (Criterion D)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is aesthetically significant for its composition, of which the three-storey transparent cantilevered podium is a notable feature. Despite some alterations that have filled in the undercroft, the podium is still legible. Other attributes of aesthetic value include the main structural columns visible in a recessed glass clerestorey window above the podium and the butterfly roof over the tower block. (Criterion E)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is of social significance for its strong and long-standing association with the RACV Club members, staff and board. Designed as a central city meeting place for members, the club facilities served as a place of social congregation for RACV members for more than 45 years. Members used the Club as a place for business and for personal celebrations and events, resulting in a strong and continuing sense of connection to the premises even after the club had moved to its new premises. (Criterion G)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is historically significant as the headquarters of the State's premier road lobbyist, as a major tourism promoter, and as a private club serving Melbourne's business, professional and social elite that has hosted many significant political and public events for more than four decades. It has remained a highly influential organisation over several decades with many amongst its wide membership also highly influential within Victorian society. (Criterion H)

DRAFT STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (Track Changes)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Royal
Automobile Club of Victoria



PS ref no: HO1068



What is significant?

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) building at 111-129 Queen Street, Melbourne, completed in 1961 and designed by Bates Smart McCutcheon.

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

- The building's original external form, materials and detailing that are parts of its; and
- The building's high level of integrity to its original design.

Later alterations, including:

- New shopfronts on the frontages on Queen and Little Collins Streets;
- Alterations to the stairs at the south end of the Queen Street frontage;
- Removed sections of the first floor of the podium to create recessed balconies;
- Frameless glass handrail and steel frame awning on the podium;
- Fixed glazing on the lower levels of the tower on the Queen and Little Collins Street frontages.

particularly at street level, are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building at 111-129 Queen Street is of historical, representative, aesthetic, and social and associative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is historically significant as the headquarters of the large and influential RACV who were advocates for the rights of motorists, including the spending of significant public money on infrastructure for motorised transport. In the 1950s and 60s the RACV was highly influential in the promotion of tourism in Victoria. (Criterion A)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is a fine example of a recreational club in the city centre. Built in 1961, and designed by noted modernist architects Bates Smart McCutcheon, it

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JULY 2020

expresses its function through the glazed lower floors for ~~semi~~-public use and the masonry-clad ~~tower~~ ~~contained accommodation residential tower~~ above. ~~In design~~ it is a relatively early example of a modern tower departing from the ~~glazed~~ curtain wall ~~popular in the~~ ~~of the~~ 1950s. Its construction program was purportedly an early example of the fast-track method that enabled construction to commence concurrently with detailed design. (Criterion D)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is aesthetically significant for its composition, of which the ~~three~~~~two~~-storey ~~transparent~~ cantilevered podium is a notable ~~feature~~. ~~Despite some~~ ~~a~~Alterations that have ~~diluted its original architectural effect, but its mass and some detailing filled in the undercroft, the podium~~ is still legible. Other attributes of aesthetic value include the ~~main~~ structural ~~piers supporting the tower on the podium that are in front of glazing, columns visible in a recessed glass clerestorey window above the podium~~ and the butterfly roof ~~of ver~~ the tower block. (Criterion E)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is of social significance for its ~~strong and long-standing~~ association with the RACV Club members, staff and board. Designed as a central city meeting place for members, the club facilities served as a place ~~to socialise of social congregation~~ for RACV members for more than 45 years. Members used the Club as a place ~~to conduct for~~ business and for personal celebrations and events, resulting in a strong and continuing sense of connection to the ~~premises building~~ even after the club had moved to ~~its~~ new premises. (Criterion G)

The former Royal Automobile Club of Victoria building is ~~historically~~ significant as the headquarters of the State's premier road lobbyist, as a major tourism promoter, and as a private club serving Melbourne's business, professional and social elite that has hosted many significant political and public events for more than four decades. It has remained a highly influential organisation over several decades with many amongst its wide membership also highly influential within Victorian society. (Criterion ~~H~~~~G~~)

Primary source

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

8

QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE

I am a qualified architectural historian and heritage consultant. I have a Master's Degree in Architectural History and Conservation from the University of Melbourne. I also have a qualification in Architectural Technology from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). In 2017, I completed a program in urban design and placemaking at the Project for Public Spaces in New York.

I am a member of Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), and I adhere to its *Burra Charter* (2013). I am a member of the Pacific Heritage Reference Group of Australia ICOMOS, whose purpose is to provide advice to the President and the Executive Committee of Australia ICOMOS on cultural heritage matters in the Pacific region. Other affiliations that I have are membership of the Australian Architecture Association, and the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand.

I have been involved in a range of heritage projects within Australia including heritage studies, conservation management plans, and heritage assessments of development proposals of residential, commercial, industrial and public buildings.

I am a heritage advisor to the Alpine Shire, Latrobe City Council, City of Kingston, and the Rural City of Wangaratta. I am also a member of a panel of consultants (heritage) for the Moreland City Council, and I am retained from time-to-time as a heritage consultant for the City of Port Phillip. I have undertaken heritage assessments and heritage studies for other municipalities including Glenelg, Wyndham, and Maroondah.

I have appeared as an expert witness on heritage matters at Planning Panel Hearings for matters before the Minister for Planning, the Heritage Council of Victoria, the Victorian Civil & Administrative Tribunal, and in other forums.

I have worked on heritage projects in New South Wales and Tasmania. I have also been involved in heritage projects in the United States of America. In California, I have worked on heritage impact assessments and cultural resources studies of districts of Los Angeles and San Francisco. In 2004, I received a grant from Austrade for the provision of heritage services to the United States.

I have written published architectural histories for the Public Record Office Victoria, the City Museum and for the *Melbourne Design Guide*. I have also been commissioned to write histories of commercial and residential buildings in Melbourne. I am the author of an online architectural history and heritage social media page. I have also been involved with architectural exhibitions, including guest curator of *The Impermanent City: the rise and fall of Melbourne's skyline* at the City Museum.

The University of Melbourne, RMIT, CAE and other educational institutions have engaged me as a tutor and lecturer in architectural history and design. I have also been retained by RMIT to assess postgraduate-level architectural theses. Educational organizations, as well as heritage groups and the media, ask me to speak, or to comment, on architectural history and heritage matters. In 2011, I was invited to speak at the California Preservation Foundation conference in Santa Monica.

9 DECLARATION

I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and that no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Panel.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter Barrett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Barrett
Master of Architectural
History & Conservation (Melb.)