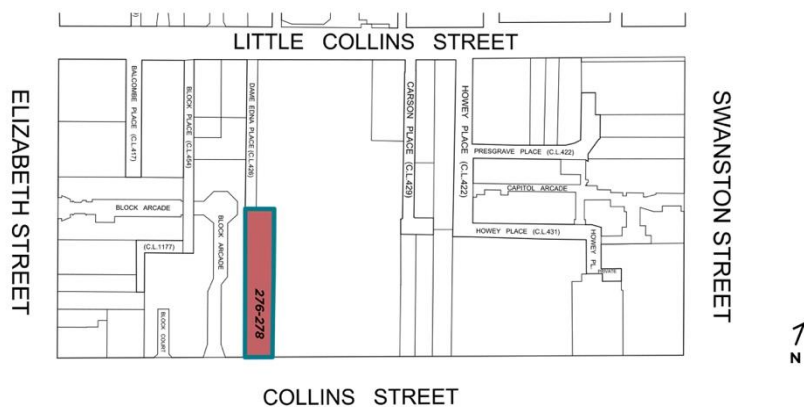


SITE NAME	Former Allans Building [also known as Mering House (current name)]
STREET ADDRESS	276-278 Collins Street, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	102142



SURVEY DATE: October 2019

SURVEY BY: GJM Heritage

HERITAGE INVENTORY	H7822-1747	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	HO502
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
		FORMER CATEGORY	Significant
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Newton and Lobb with Charles N Hollinshed	BUILDER:	Hansen & Yuncken Pty Ltd
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Postwar Period (1945-1975)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1956-1957

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation focused on the postwar history of the site and did not address associations with Aboriginal people or organisations	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here
POSTWAR THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
1 Shaping the urban landscape	1.8 Expressing an architectural style
3 Building a commercial city	3.3 Retail decline and revitalisation in the city centre

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Retail, Education
1920s	Retail
1960s	Retail, Merchant, Hairdresser, Office, Education, Library, Caretaker

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Extent of overlay: To extent of property boundary

SUMMARY

The Former Allans Building was designed by architects and engineers, Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, in association with architect Charles N Hollinshed, for the well-known music retailers and publishers of sheet music, Allans & Co Pty Ltd. The building was constructed in 1956-1957.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The period from 1945 to 1975 was one of radical transformation for Melbourne; from the low-rise city that still reflected its colonial origins to a bustling international centre of commerce and culture. The surviving buildings from this period are evidence of the evolving economic and social conditions in Melbourne at the time and demonstrate the city's transition from its nineteenth century manufacturing origins to its current banking, office and service industry focus. These buildings reflect the increasing commercial and cultural role of Melbourne in the international context of globalisation and postwar optimism as well as a radically altered economic environment which saw an influx of foreign capital and ideas. Collectively, these buildings represent a transformative period in the life of the city; a period that is categorised by significant change, growth and evolution across all aspects of life – social, political, economic and cultural.

Expressing an architectural style in the postwar period

Multi-storey commercial buildings made a significant contribution to postwar Melbourne, particularly from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. With the resumption of building construction in the 1950s after the hiatus of World War II, the advent of curtain wall construction – enabling the application of a non-load bearing skin to the face of a building – radically altered the appearance of the modern city commercial building.

Constructed predominantly for the financial and business sectors, there was an eagerness amongst clients to establish a dominant city presence and to project a modern, progressive and prestigious approach to commercial building design. The resulting Post-War Modernist style of multi-storey buildings, influenced particularly by steel and glass office tower design in the United States, were in stark contrast to the pre-war city buildings in central Melbourne and presented architects of the day with a completely new design challenge.

Thirty major city buildings were completed in Melbourne in four years alone from 1955 to 1958 and 22 were office buildings within, or on the fringes of, the CBD (Saunders 1959:91). Largely influenced by the American skyscraper, the earliest office buildings of the 1950s utilised innovative curtain walling, formed from continuous metal-framing filled principally with glass. The curtain wall is described by Miles Lewis as 'essentially a continuous, non-bearing skin on the face of a building' and is one of the 'leitmotifs of modernism, both in Australia and overseas' (Lewis 2012:185). The curtain walled 'glass box' aesthetic was embraced by the local architects, and many buildings followed to the extent that high-rise office buildings with curtain walling became a defining characteristic of the new buildings in the latter half of the 1950s (NTAV 2014:5-6).

Amongst the first curtain walled buildings to be constructed in Melbourne was the 13-storey glass-fronted Gilbert Court at 100 Collins Street (J A La Gerche 1954-56), which was built to the height limit of 132 feet (40m), and – perhaps the most influential – the free-standing ICI House, 1 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1955-58). Located on the outskirts of the Hoddle Grid, ICI House was clad on all four facades with glass curtain walling and exceeded the well-established maximum building height within the Hoddle Grid. Large numbers of similarly designed city commercial buildings followed, often displaying bold horizontal contrast between alternating rows of glazing and coloured spandrels.

Retail decline and revitalisation in the city centre

Central Melbourne and Central Sydney accounted for approximately one third of Australian metropolitan retail sales in the 1950s. However, the 1950s saw city retailers increasingly struggle to attract consumers from the suburbs, largely due to the increase in car ownership in the postwar period. To counteract this, in 1953 Myer Ltd erected the first multi-storey carpark to be built since World War II in Lonsdale Street. Another carpark, the Grand Central Carpark, opened in Bourke Street soon afterwards (Heritage Alliance 2008:16).

Suburban development and the construction of suburban shopping complexes such as Chadstone Shopping Centre also had a major impact on Melbourne's city centre into the 1960s with traditional businesses including shops, manufacturing and professional services moving to new suburban locations (Spearritt cited in Marsden 2000:49). Several city department stores closed and were demolished or converted to other uses. The Eastern Market (located at the corner of Bourke and Exhibition streets) was demolished in 1960 to make way for the Southern Cross Hotel (Marsden 2000:49).

Some inner-city retailing persisted in this period with Allans and Co opening a new music store at 276-278 Collins Street in 1957 and Myer constructing the Department Aerial Crossover, a four-storey pedestrian bridge over Little Bourke Street designed by longtime Myer architects Tompkins, Shaw and Evans (1963) (Lewis et al 1993:264).

Alliances between government ministers, councillors and traders sought to halt the decline of retail in the Melbourne city centre. Two main strategies emerged: to expedite car access and, from the 1970s, to encourage pedestrians through, for example, the creation of car-free malls, Sunday trading, and the establishment of open-air markets (Marsden 2000:51-52).

In an effort to revive the city's waning retail economy, a trial closure of Bourke Street between Swanston and Elizabeth streets was introduced in late 1973. This followed discussions between MCC and the Retail Trader's Association. The trial resulted in protests from shop keepers and caused traffic chaos (May 2008c). The 1974 Strategy Plan pursued the concept, encouraging 'the maintenance and growth of the retail areas as the major centre for shopping for the metropolitan area' (City of Melbourne 1974:267), but it was February 1978 before the section was formally closed to through traffic. Policies within the Strategy Plan also aimed to counteract:

present economic market forces that would force entertainment and retail activities out of the CBD. The mandatory requirements for retail or entertainment floor space will ensure that the variety provided by shops, restaurants or cinemas is maintained (Interplan for CoM 1974:267).

SITE HISTORY

The Former Allans Building was designed by architects and engineers, Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, in association with architect Charles N Hollinshed, for owners Allan & Co Pty Ltd, music retailers and publishers of sheet music (BAP; *Argus*, 5 May 1956:3). The builders were Hansen & Yuncken Pty Ltd (AIA, Dec 1959:135).

George Leavis Allan (1826-1897) was a singing teacher and musical pioneer in Melbourne. He was born in London but the lure of gold led him to Melbourne in 1852. After a short stint in the goldfields, Allan returned to Melbourne in 1853 to capitalise on his musical expertise, establishing himself as a

well-respected singing teacher. In 1863 Allan joined the musical warehouse of Wilkie & Webster (est. 1850), forming Wilkie, Webster & Allan, and in 1875 he became the sole proprietor of the business. By 1877 it was the largest musical warehouse in the southern hemisphere. His son George became partner in 1881 when the name of the company was formally changed to Allan & Co. The business remained in the Allan family for many generations (Hince 1969; *Argus*, 25 Jun 1932:6). In 1976 the company was taken over by Brash Holdings, however the instrument sales department emerged from the liquidation of Brash's as a separate company in 1998 (May, 2008). Allan's merged with Billy Hyde music in 2010.

In June 1956, the City of Melbourne received a building permit application for the building at 276-278 Collins Street, with an estimated total cost of £341,000 (BAI). The building was constructed in 1956-1957 (Goad et al. 1993: 25).

Allan & Co Pty Ltd had occupied the site from at least the 1870s, with an earlier building constructed in 1876 (*Illustrated Australian News*, 27 Dec 1876:204; S&Mc). This earlier building was destroyed by fire and in May 1955 it was subsequently reported that Allan's intended to build a new 10-storey 'Music House' on the same site (*Cross-Section*, May 1955:3, Jun 1956:2; *Argus* 11 May 1955:1).

The present building is a glass curtain walled office and retail building, which was built to the 40m (132 foot) height limit in place at the time (NTAV 2014:17). The architectural drawings dated April 1956 indicate that the façade was designed with 'terracotta facing' to the vertical strips extending up the sides of the façade and metal-framed windows (Figure 1 - Figure 3).

In May 1956, *The Argus* reported that the new building was to comprise 11 floors and a basement. The lower floors were to be occupied by the music store, with the upper floors to be let. The article reported that the 'front of the building will be faced with aluminium panels between aluminium windows. The ground and first floor were to have a 'full glass front', and include acoustically treated ceilings, heating, a giant piano showroom and television display centre (*Argus*, 5 May 1956:3). The completed building is at Figure 4 to Figure 7.

Allans occupied the building until at least c1982 (S&Mc). In 2019 the building is called Mering House (ComMaps).

Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, architects

Godfrey and Spowers was established in c1901 by architects, William Scott Purves Godfrey and Henry Howard Spowers. The firm designed a large number of houses, warehouses and institutional buildings and was best known for its bank building designs.

Godfrey's son, William Purves Race Godfrey, joined the practice in 1931 as a student. Spowers died the following year and Race Godfrey was made partner in c1934. The firm was suspended in 1941 as a direct result of World War II, during which time Race Godfrey worked with the RAAF as a civilian architect in Melbourne and Sydney and his father, William Godfrey, carried out commissions for air-raid shelters. Race Godfrey recommenced practice late in 1944. His father did not continue with the new firm, and retired from practice in the same year.

By the early 1950s, Race Godfrey expanded the firm to include new partners, Eric Hughes, Geoffrey Mewton and John Lobb, becoming Godfrey, Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb. The expanded firm specialised in large office and institutional buildings. Notable commissions within central Melbourne included the Allans Building at 278 Collins Street (1959), the Bank of Adelaide Building, 265-69 Collins Street (1959-60), the AMP Building, 344-50 Collins Street (1966-68) and the State Savings

Bank of Victoria, 233-43 Queen Street (1967-68). The National Mutual Building, Collins Street, Melbourne (1962-5, demolished 2015) was a key work for the firm during this period.

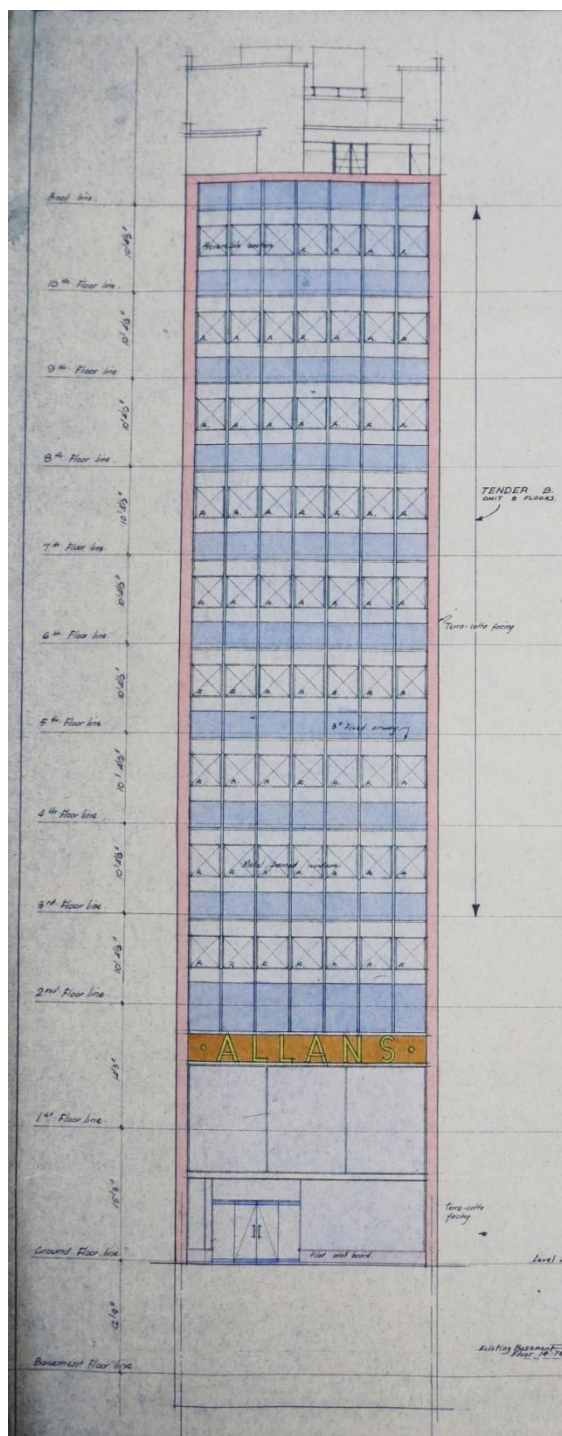


Figure 1. South elevation to Collins Street. Drawing by Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, in association with Charles N Hollinshed, dated April 1956 (BAP).

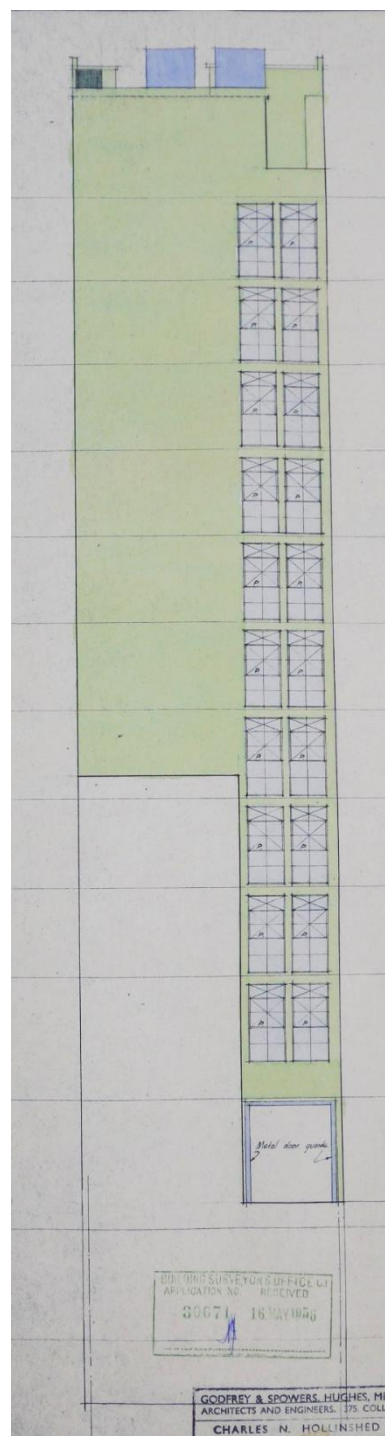


Figure 2. North elevation. Drawing by Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, in association with Charles N Hollinshed, dated April 1956 (BAP).

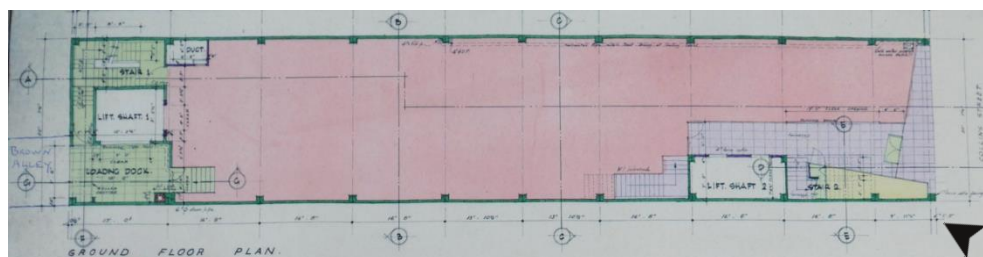


Figure 3. Ground floor plan, Collins Street at right. Drawing by Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, in association with Charles N Hollinshed, dated April 1956 (BAP).

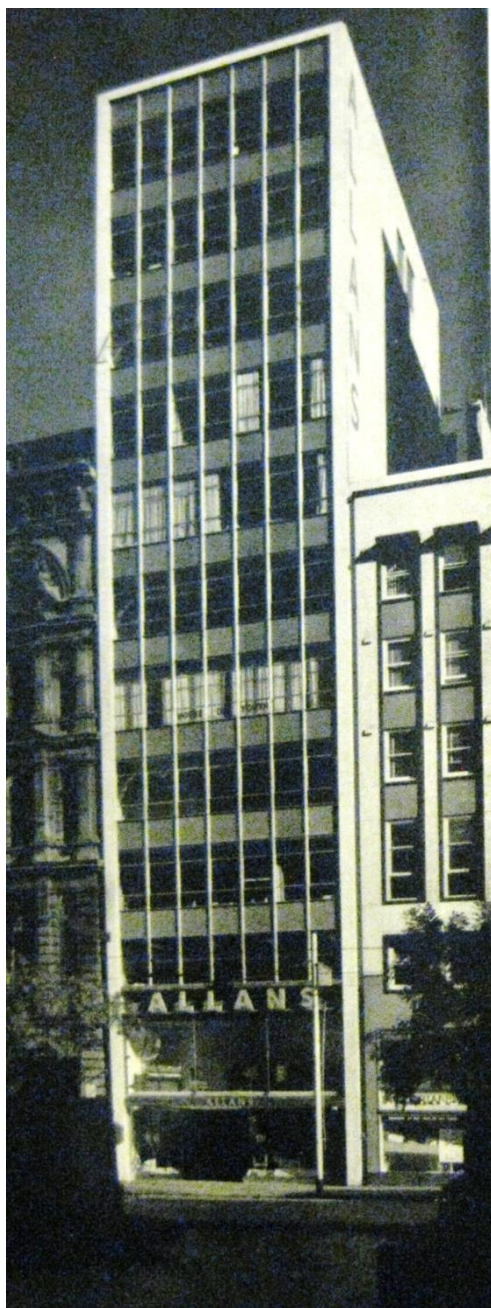


Figure 4. Allans Building, photo published in 1959 (Saunders, 1959:90).



Figure 5. Illustration of the newly completed building published in *Architecture in Australia* in March 1960, advertising Dunlop Rubber Flooring, used throughout the building (AIA, Mar 1960:9).



Figure 6. Photo of the completed building published in *Architecture in Australia* in December 1959.



Figure 7. Allans Music store in 1982 (City of Melbourne Libraries online Heritage Collection, Graeme Butler, photographer, Reference no. Butler16369).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Former Allans Building at 276-278 Collins Street is an 11-storey commercial building located on the north side of Collins Street between Elizabeth Street and Swanston Street. Constructed in 1956-57 to a design by Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb, in association with Charles N Hollinshed Associates, the multi-storey building is an example of the Post-War Modernist style.

Constructed on a long, narrow site, the Former Allans Building has a minimal frontage of 30 feet (9 metres) to Collins Street. Dame Edna Place provides access to the rear of the building from Little Collins Street. The adjacent building to the east partially wraps around the rear of the building and to the west is the low-rise Block Arcade building, dating from the 1890s. Located on the opposite side of Collins Street is the similarly styled Former Bank of Adelaide which was designed by the same architects as the Former Allans Building in the late 1950s.

The building is of concrete encased steel column and beam construction with the Collins Street façade presenting as a tall, narrow and transparent curtain wall of metal framing with alternating rows of glazing and opaque red spandrels (possibly glass with applied finish). The rows of glazing contain a central row (openable, reversible sashes indicated on the original drawings) which are the same height as the spandrel panels. Rows of half-sized windows above and below result in dominant bands of glazing across the façade. Together with continuous mullions which run from above street level to the top of the building, these horizontal bands form a grid-like pattern across the whole façade. Concrete side walls and crowning parapet frame the façade.

Side walls of the Former Allans Building are concrete and a large portion of the west façade is visible above the adjacent Block Arcade building. A vertical 'Allans' sign is painted on this wall, above the adjacent façade. A light court, situated on the east side of the building, provides light to the building above the second floor, while the north (rear) façade has been obscured by later building.

At street level, a double-height portion of the front façade was originally recessed behind the line of the building. This area has been extensively modified with the insertion of a glazed shopfront with fine cantilevered awning set between the original side walls.

INTEGRITY

The Former Allans Building, including the original form and the detailing of the exterior of the building, remains highly intact from its original construction in 1956-57.

Overall, the building retains a high degree of architectural integrity to the Post-War Modernist style in fabric, form and detail. While the building has undergone alterations at street level, these do not diminish the ability to understand and appreciate the place as a fine example of a Post-War Modernist multi-storey commercial building.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Former Allans Building at 276-278 Collins Street is a fine and representative example of the Post-War Modernist style and clearly demonstrates the typical characteristics of 1950s multi-storey commercial building design. The building's transparent grid-like curtain wall façade, with alternating rows of metal-framed glazing and opaque glass spandrels and vertical mullions, can be clearly observed from Collins Street. Despite the redesign of the façade at street level, the upper facades of the Former Allans Building remain highly intact to their original design.

There are a number of buildings in the Hoddle Grid within the City of Melbourne which were constructed in the same period and display similar characteristics to the Former Allans Building. These are detailed below.

State-significant places

A comparative example in the City of Melbourne which is located immediately adjacent to the Hoddle Grid is ICI House, 1-4 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1958). This place is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H0786).

Locally-significant places

Precinct Heritage Overlay

As only a piece-meal evaluation of postwar buildings within the Hoddle Grid in the City of Melbourne has previously occurred, few buildings from the early postwar period are currently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme. Those from the 1950s that are included in the Heritage Overlay are currently included as part of Heritage Precincts, but are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as Individual Heritage Places. These places are:



Former Gilbert Court, 100-104 Collins Street (John A La Gerche, 1954-55) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Significant place.



Former Hosie's Hotel, 1-5 Elizabeth Street & 288-290 Flinders Street (Mussen McKay & Potter, 1954-55), included in HO505 Flinders Gate Precinct as a Significant place.



Coates Building, 18-22 Collins Street (John A La Gerche, 1958-59) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Significant place.



Former Bank of Adelaide Building, 265-269 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton & Lobb, 1959-60) included in HO502 The Block Precinct as a Contributory place.

Other Examples

Despite the demolition of many 1950s multi-storey commercial buildings in the City of Melbourne, a number of fine and highly representative examples of this building type that are not currently included in the Heritage Overlay on a permanent basis have been retained with sufficient integrity to demonstrate this class of place. These buildings clearly illustrate the initial period of curtain wall construction in Melbourne and demonstrate similar characteristics to the subject building. The following examples are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as Individual Heritage Places as part of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review:



Lauren's House, 414-416 Lonsdale Street (Harold Bloom, 1956) (Interim HO1254).



Former Atlas Assurance Building, 404-406 Collins Street (H Garnet Alsop & Partners, 1958-61) (Interim HO1008).



Former London Assurance House, 468-470 Bourke Street (B Evans & Partners, 1960) (Interim HO1006).



Former AMP Building, 402-408 Lonsdale Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1956-59).



Former Ajax House, 103-105 Queen Street (HD Berry, 1956).



HC Sleigh Building, 166-172 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1953-55).



Coles & Garrard Building, 376-378 Bourke Street (Meldrum & Noad, 1957).



Canton Insurance Building, 43-51 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1957).



Former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, 376 Flinders Lane (Commonwealth Department of Works, 1957).

Analysis

As a fine and highly intact representative example of its type, the Former Allans Building at 276-278 Collins Street clearly demonstrates an important phase in the architectural development of multi-storey commercial buildings in the City of Melbourne. Similar to the small number of 1950s buildings presently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme – and a small number of other examples identified throughout the Hoddle Grid and listed above – the Former Allans Building clearly demonstrates this class of place.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓	CRITERION A Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).
	CRITERION B Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).
	CRITERION C Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).
✓	CRITERION D Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).
	CRITERION E Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).
	CRITERION F Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)
	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).
✓	CRITERION H Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

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 43.01-4)	No
INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

REFERENCES

Contextual History references contained within *City of Melbourne Hoddle Grid Heritage Review: Postwar Thematic Environmental History 1945-1975*

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The Age.

The Argus.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985** C

**Central City Heritage
Review 1993** C

**Review of Heritage
Overlay Listings in the
CBD 2002** Ungraded

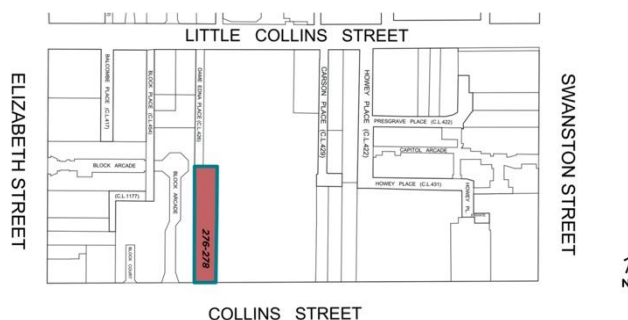
**Central City Heritage
Review 2011** Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Allans Building



PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The Former Allans Building, 276-278 Collins Street, a multi-storey commercial building constructed in 1956-57.

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

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

Later alterations made to the street level facade are not significant.

How it is significant?

The Former Allans Building at 276-278 Collins Street is of historical and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

Constructed in 1956-57, to a design by Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb in association with Charles N Hollinshed, the Former Allans Building has a clear association with the postwar building boom which transformed central Melbourne into a modern high-rise city. The design of these commercial buildings from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s – many of which were architect designed – was driven by the commercial demands and the prestige afforded by a dominant city presence (Criterion A).

The Former Allans Building has strong and enduring associations with the development of the music industry in Melbourne. The music dealership, which continuously occupied the site in Collins Street from at least 1876 to c1982, was noted as being the largest in the southern hemisphere by 1877 (Criterion A).

The Former Allans Building is a fine and highly intact representative example of a Post-War Modernist commercial building. The building strongly reflects the style which was popular in the 1950s, particularly in central Melbourne. Constructed to the prevailing limit-height of 40m (132 feet) at the time, the Former Allans Building clearly demonstrates typical characteristics of a 1950s structure with a curtain wall façade. The transparent front façade of alternating rows of glazing and opaque glass spandrels, along vertical mullions which divide the facade into a grid-like pattern, and the use of materials such as opaque glass and metal window frames, demonstrate important aspects of the Post-War Modernist style (Criterion D).

The Former Allans Building has close associations with the Allan family, headed by George Leavis Allan who worked in the music industry in Melbourne from 1853 and established the music business, Allan & Co, with his son in 1881. The Allan family owned the music business through the latter part of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century. The family were significant contributors to the music industry in Melbourne for over 100 years and the family name was synonymous with this industry for a long period (Criterion H).

Primary source

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

