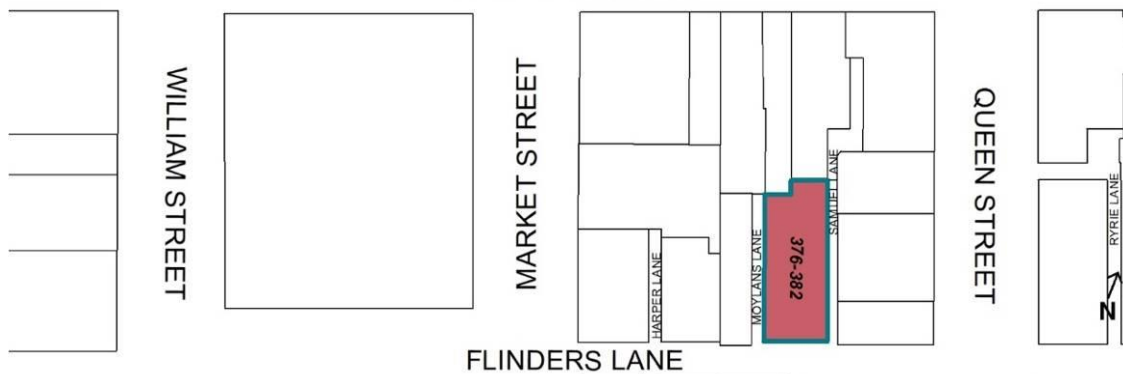


SITE NAME	Former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange
STREET ADDRESS	376-382 Flinders Land, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	103962



COLLINS STREET


SURVEY DATE: March 2019

SURVEY BY: Context

HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
		FORMER GRADE	Ungraded
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	Commonwealth Department of Works	BUILDER:	McDougall & Ireland Pty Ltd
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Postwar Period (1945-1975)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1957

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations.	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review Vols. 3 & 4 June 2016) have therefore not been identified here
POSTWAR THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
1 Shaping the urban landscape	1.8 Expressing an architectural style
2 Governing, administering and policing the city	2.1 Commonwealth government

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Merchants
1920s	Offices
1960s	Telegraphic and telephonic

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Extent of overlay: Refer to map

SUMMARY

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at 376-382 Flinders Land was built in 1957 to a design by the Commonwealth Department of Works. The builders were McDougall & Ireland Pty Ltd. The eight-storey curtain wall and masonry building exhibits elements of the Post-War Modernist style, but also aspects of the earlier Inter-War Functionalist style. The building was one of several telephone exchanges commissioned by the Commonwealth in the postwar era, in response to the rapid expansion of telephone subscriptions and of the technical advancements in telephonic services in the mid to late twentieth century.

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.

Commonwealth government

In 1948, the Commonwealth Government compulsorily acquired land on either side of Little Lonsdale Street, between Spring and Exhibition streets. The Commonwealth Centre (now demolished) was subsequently constructed on this block of land (with a street address of 11-39 La Trobe Street) over the period 1958 to the early 1960s. Its construction transformed 'the image of the Federal government in central Melbourne into that of a modern corporation' (Lewis et al 1993:223-24, 255).

As Commonwealth powers increased after World War II, Commonwealth buildings in city centres rose in number. Of particular influence was the transfer in 1942 of income tax revenue from the states to the Commonwealth and the resultant construction of buildings for the Taxation Office, including a building in Bourke Street, which opened in 1958. Marsden writes that the Commonwealth government presence, including the establishment after the war of the new Department of Housing and Construction, reinforced Melbourne's continuing pre-eminence as Australia's financial centre, at least until the 1960s.

A telephone exchange and postal hall building was constructed by the Commonwealth government at 114-120 Russell Street in the period 1948-54. In 1956 the building served as a relay station for the broadcasting of newly arrived television. In 1959, the Commonwealth Arbitration Courts opened at 450 Little Bourke Street, and in 1965 the Reserve Bank of Australia opened at 56-64 Collins Street. A telephone exchange was also constructed by the Commonwealth Department of Works at 376-382 Flinders Lane and opened in 1957.

SITE HISTORY

The subject site at 376-382 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, part of Crown Allotment 12 of Block 3, was first purchased by W Powell for £17 in 1837 (Badman & S&Mc 1892; DCLS 1839). The subject site had a street frontage to Little Flinders Street (now Flinders Lane). It abuts Moylans Lane on the west and Samuel Lane on the east.

In 1888 two buildings occupied the subject site, which was addressed 376, 380 and 382 Little Flinders Street in 1895 (Mahlstedt Map no 3, 1888; MMBW Detail Plan no 1010, 1895). F Watmuff, printer, and H Dove and Co, carpenters, were the occupants of 45-47 Little Flinders Street, which comprised a two-storey building fronting Little Flinders Street and three single-storey timber structures at the rear of the allotment, facing Moylans Lane. Samuel E and Co, merchants and importers, were the occupants of number 376, an elongated two-storey brick building that was built to the boundary line (Mahlstedt Map no 3, 1888). By 1910, the assemblage of structures at 378 Flinders Lane had been replaced with a three-storey brick building built to boundary line, numbered 378 Flinders Lane, and occupied by the Master Builders Association of Victoria (Mahlstedt Map section 1 no 18, 1910). In 1951 the Master Builders Association was evicted under police supervision to make way for the construction of the new Batman Telephone Exchange (*Mercury* 20 February 1951:2).

The Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange was built in 1956-57 for the Postmaster General's Department, to the design of the Commonwealth Department of Works (then known as Department of Works and Housing) (National Trust 2014:23). Planning for the building had begun at least ten years earlier, by 1946. A notice to erect the building was announced by the Minister for Works in 1946 (*Age* 12 April 1946:8). The Minister planned for the Batman Telephone Exchange to accommodate the administrative staff of the Postal Department and to replace the City West automatic exchange on Little Bourke Street, built 1937, which had reached its capacity for line allocations (*Age* 12 April

1946:8). The switchboard of the manual exchange on Lonsdale Street, opened 1911, had by this point become worn out and superseded by automatic switchboards (*Age* 12 April 1946:8). The Minister gave the estimated cost of the building as £175,550, and the equipment as £554,900 (*Age* 12 April 1946:8). Construction of the building was delayed by the inflated costs of building materials and labour at the end of World War Two.

Melbourne's postwar recovery incorporated a period of rapid population growth. This rise in population, in turn, led to an increased demand for telephone line subscriptions. A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works issued a report relating to the proposed Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at Flinders Lane, noting that while the expected cost of the works had risen dramatically from the initial quote of £175,550 to £441,000, there remained an urgent need for the proposed works to meet the growing demand for subscription lines. The Committee report found that a new exchange to service the western area of the City of Melbourne was necessary, as were the building of the Russell Street Exchange and Civic Exchange on Elizabeth Street, both constructed concurrent to the subject building (Commonwealth of Australia 1946).

In 1949 amendments were made to the original plans for the Batman Telephone Exchange, which included the elimination of a cantilevered section of the building to comply with local by-laws; the inclusion of a sub-basement; the strengthening of the structural frame and floors, and the subdivision of four upper floors (Commonwealth of Australia 1946).

McDougall & Ireland Pty Ltd were awarded the building contract for the exchange (*Herald* 12 June 1953:10). A tender was published in 1950 for the construction of a steel-framed and concrete building to be carried to the height limit of seven storeys plus basement (*Age* 27 May 1950:31). An article published in the *Herald* reported that the sub-basement of the Batman Exchange was reinforced with steel and heavy concrete, descending 17 feet at its deepest end, with foundations some further 30 feet down, enabling the sub-basement to provide safety for staff in the event of an atomic bomb (*Herald* 7 July 1949:5).

By 1953, the structural framework had been erected, and two passenger lifts and a goods lift had been installed (*Age* 4 March 1953:13). In 1954 construction was still underway, as evidenced by advertisements seeking carpenters for the exchange; the main switchboard was installed in the same year (see Figure 1) (*Age* 14 September 1954:16; *Age* 16 June 1954:13). The Batman Telephone Exchange opened in 1957 (see Figure 2). Designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works, the National Trust describe the building's design as 'almost *retardataire* in its [sic] amalgamation of a stark cream brick façade, evocative of pre-war government architecture, with a slightly projecting curtain-walled-bay' (National Trust 2014:22).



Figure 1. The subject building at 376-82 Flinders Lane under construction, c1950-1957. (Source: NAA 1917-1968, Series: B5515, Item no: 9815665)



Figure 2. The subject building at completion c1957. (Source: NAA 1957-1984, Series: B6295, Item no: 9723653)

Few alterations have been made to the subject building apart from a significant internal electrical upgrade in 1966' (Age 15 June 1966:36). Minor works included the provision of a sectional boiler and head tank in 1963 and alterations and additions were made to the internal partitions in 1979 (Age 14 December 1963:67; Age 17 November 1979:116).

By the late 1960s, satellite and microwave technologies had integrated Melbourne's telephones into a global communications system (Healy 2008) and in 1987, Telecom (created in 1975 following the abolition of the Postmasters General Department) announced that it would open a Mobilenet cellular mobile telephone service, with the Lonsdale Telephone Exchange one of twelve base stations in Victoria to which Mobilenet users could subscribe (Age 25 May 1987:35).

It is believed that ownership of the subject building was transferred from the Commonwealth government to Telecom (later Telstra Corporation) in 1986.

The Telstra Corporation presently occupies the whole of the building.

Commonwealth Department of Works, designer

The Commonwealth Department of Works was established in 1901 to manage the creation of public works in the newly federated nation. Although the agency has operated under different titles in its history – it was known as the Department of Works from 1952 to 1973 – it is commonly referred to as the Commonwealth Department of Works (CDW) to distinguish it from state-based agencies. The Department was responsible for the design, construction, alteration and maintenance of Commonwealth buildings and other engineering works. Its offices were located in Melbourne until 1929, when they were transferred to Canberra. A period of intensive works were carried out by the CDW during and immediately after World War Two, as the Department managed the building of essential infrastructure as well as significant postwar planning (Smith 2006). By the early 1970s, the activities of the CDW were slowly declining; its functions were transferred to the Department of Housing and Construction in 1978, then the Department of Transport and Construction in 1982 and

from 1987, it was known as Australian Construction Services. The vestiges of the CDW were sold off to an engineering firm in 1997 (Willis 2012).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at 376-382 Flinders Lane is an eight-storey commercial curtain wall and masonry building. It was constructed in 1956-57, but planning for the building had begun at least ten years earlier, by 1946. The building exhibits elements of the Post-War Modernist style, but also aspects of the earlier interwar Functionalist style. Located on the northern side of Flinders Lane, the building is abutted by Moylans Lane on the west and Samuel Lane on the east.

The principal façade to Flinders Lane exhibits an unusual asymmetrical combination of a solid modernist form of light-coloured face brick, with an offset projecting curtain wall which extends from the first to the fifth floors. The curtain wall abuts a projecting vertical fin wall at its western end but is inset from the corner of the building at its eastern end. The curtain wall is framed in aluminum, with vertically alternating clear glazed and opaque panels to provide a lightweight grid across the façade. The height of glazed and opaque panels at each level varies, and there are three rows of clear glazed panels to each opaque row at the second and third levels, whereas the first, fourth and fifth floors have two rows of clear panels. Two large ventilation shafts are inserted into the curtain wall at the eastern end, each occupying the equivalent of two vertical modules. All of the windows are fixed, suggesting that the building was constructed with air conditioning systems.

There are two additional levels within the face brick component above the projecting curtain wall module, and each level is punctuated by six equally spaced vertically proportioned window openings, each of which has a projecting perimeter concrete frame. The original double hung timber frame windows are extant at the seventh floor level, but have been replaced by fixed single pane aluminum frame windows at the sixth floor level. A vertical element with a flagpole extends one level higher than the main roof level on the easternmost corner of the building. There are narrow projecting eaves at the top of both the curtain wall and at the main roof level. The internal building structure is of reinforced concrete post and slab.

The southern section of the eastern (Samuel Lane) façade is face brick near the front corner and off-form concrete masonry at the rear. Within the face brick section there is a continuous vertical window providing daylight into the stairwell. The western (Moylans Lane) façade is also off-form concrete, punctuated by a regular pattern of steel frame windows.

At the street level the building is clad with large (possibly original), vertically proportioned tiles. There are no windows to the Flinders Lane façade at ground level, but the building entrance is located on the eastern side and is recessed with the wall curving outward to the principal façade. Three concrete steps lead to the front door, which features a large glazed transom above a modern door.

INTEGRITY

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at 376-382 Flinders Lane is highly intact in terms of its original built form and configuration, with very few obvious external alterations or additions to the original fabric, other than replacement of the front door and windows on the sixth level. The original non-loadbearing aluminium curtain wall with its alternating clear glazed and opaque panels is extant,

as is the solid modernist form of light-coloured face brick with its window openings and projecting perimeter concrete frames. Overall, the building is of very high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

After World War Two ended, building activities in the central city revived slowly. The 1950s saw the development of the modern multi-story office building in Melbourne, often built for insurance or finance companies, or for professional offices. Reinforced concrete frames provided the structural systems, allowing the façade to be clad in non-load bearing curtain walls. The Post-War Modernist style became popular, becoming the preferred option for commercial buildings being constructed in central Melbourne during the late 1950s and beyond. Characteristics of the Post-War Modernist style include a cubiform overall shape, plain smooth wall surfaces, contrasting texture and expressed structural frames.

Curtain wall designs were used in a number of corporate buildings built in the 1950s. Early examples were the Norwich Union Insurance offices at 53-57 Queen Street (Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson), which incorporated panels of opaque black glass, and the new Allan's Music Store building in Collins Street (Godfrey Spowers, Hughes, Mewton & Lobb), with metal panels in a bright gloss red. In early examples, curtain walls were typically fully glazed, while in later examples, a greater range of materials were used to achieve variety of expression. A group of buildings built predominantly in the 1950s combined expansive glazed panels with solid masonry sections to achieve a distinctive aesthetic. They represent a particular stage in the development of this new building type.

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 Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange. 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.



Former Allans Building, 276-278 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton & Lobb, 1956-57) 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

In its use of a non-loadbearing curtain wall façade system, the former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at 376-382 Flinders Lane is comparable to a number of other central Melbourne buildings included – or recommended for inclusion – in the HO. The subject building is particularly comparable with Laurens House, as both are examples of early 1950s commercial buildings that utilise a major curtain wall component in conjunction with a solid masonry form, rather than the curtain wall being the sole façade element.

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 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

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PREVIOUS STUDIES

Central Activities District Conservation Study 1985	Ungraded
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Central City Heritage Review 1993	Ungraded
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Review of Heritage overlay listings in the CBD 2002	Ungraded
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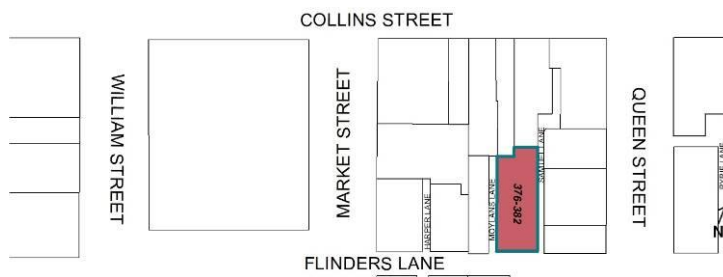
Central City Heritage Review 2011	Ungraded
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Automatic Telephone Exchange



PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, 376-378 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, built by the Commonwealth Department of Works in 1957, is significant.

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

- Original building form and scale;
- Original asymmetrical composition of solid light-coloured face brick form and nonloadbearing curtain wall to its principal (Flinders Lane) façade;
- Vertically proportioned window openings with projecting perimeter frames; and,
- Original street level façade clad in tiles and recessed entry door opening with toplight.

Later alterations are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange at 376-378 Flinders Lane is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, opened in 1957 at 376-382 Flinders Lane, is historically significant for the material evidence it provides of the broadening of Commonwealth government powers after World War Two, a shift that resulted in increased construction of Commonwealth buildings in city centres by the Commonwealth Department of Works. As a large-scale

purpose-built building it demonstrates the growth and changes in telecommunication technology in the period following World War Two. (Criterion A)

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, is significant as a highly intact example of postwar multi-storey development in central Melbourne, utilising the Post-War Modernist style that characterised this new wave of development. These buildings represented the new modernism in their modular, industrial Bauhaus-inspired aesthetic incorporating features such as consistent access to daylight and open floor plans to meet new standards for commercial office accommodation. The presence of stylistic features characteristic of the interwar Functionalist style demonstrates the building's lengthy planning and design phase as a result of delays to construction that were typical of early postwar construction. (Criterion D)

The building is also representative of the modern purpose-built telephone exchange buildings, designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works in the early postwar period to accommodate growth in telecommunications as well as accommodating an expanded workforce. The internal technical requirements of these telephone exchange buildings are evident in the variations between high floor to ceiling heights across different levels. (Criterion D)

The former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange is aesthetically significant as a substantial, refined and highly intact example of a lightweight aluminium curtain wall Post-War Modernist style multi-storey building. The principal façade to Flinders Lane exhibits an unusual asymmetrical combination of a solid modernist form of light-coloured face brick, with an offset projecting curtain wall which extends from the first to the fifth floors. The building also demonstrates characteristics of the interwar Functionalist style, including the use of light-coloured face brick punctuated by vertically proportioned window openings with projecting perimeter frames. Overall, it is a well-executed design by the Commonwealth Department of Works, who were responsible for many high quality public buildings during the interwar and early postwar periods. (Criterion E)

Primary source

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

