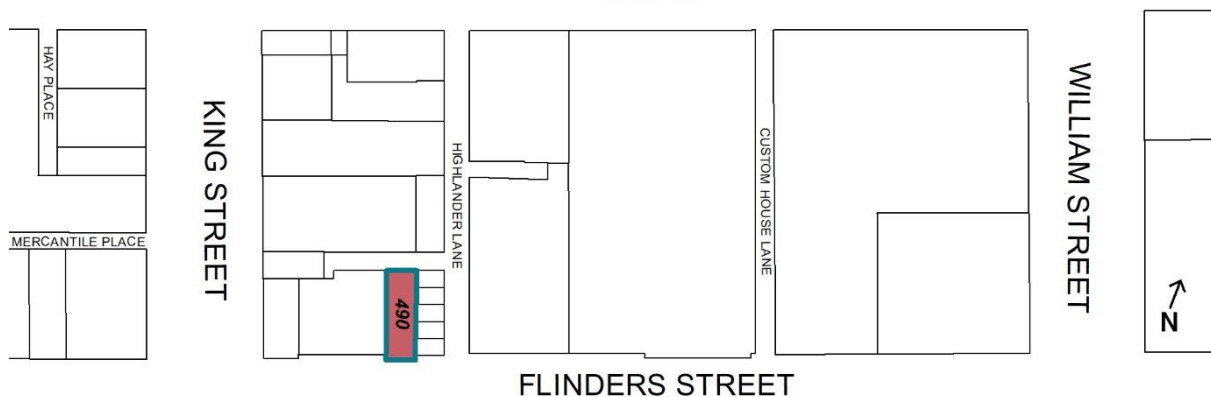


SITE NAME	Willis' Buildings
STREET ADDRESS	490 Flinders Street Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	103996



FLINDERS LANE



SURVEY DATE: January 2019

SURVEY BY: Context

HERITAGE INVENTORY H7822-1863

EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY No

PLACE TYPE Individual Heritage Place

PROPOSED CATEGORY Significant

FORMER GRADE C

DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST: George Willis (likely)

BUILDER: George Willis

DEVELOPMENT PERIOD: Victorian Period (1851-1901)

DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION: 1869-70

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, Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here.
HISTORIC THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
5 Building a Commercial City	5.4 Building a retail centre

LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE	
Archaeological block no: 58	Inventory no: 863
Character of Occupation: Commercial, Residential	
Block 2, Crown Allotment 1, purchased by J P Fawkner in the third land sale, 1838.	
1839 Williamson	
1837 & 1840 Hoddle	Subdivisions, lanes and building by 1840
1855 Kearney	
1866 Cox	
1877 Dove	Three two-storey buildings: Grocer, Producer, Fruiterer
1880 Panorama	
1888 Mahlstedt	As above
1905/6 Mahlstedt	As above, occupants not listed
THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Retail and residential
1920s	Retail and residential
1960s	Retail

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

Willis' Buildings, 490 Flinders Street, Melbourne, are a pair of two-storey shop buildings, constructed in the pre-boom period in 1869-70 in the Victorian Italianate style. The buildings were originally constructed as a row of three shop and residences for and by builder George Willis. Until the 1920s, the ground floor spaces operated as shops and the shopkeepers lived in the residences above. The third shop was demolished in c1973. Willis' Buildings have been continuously occupied by a number of retail and service businesses, including, for the first 50 years, a grocery, general store and tailoring business.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Building a commercial city

Developing a retail centre

Even before the early 1850s, Melbourne had established the foundational infrastructure for international trade and commerce, including retail markets, shipping agents, and industry and finance houses - the beginnings of an entrepreneurial global city (Context 2012:2).

Distinctive land use precincts had emerged within the city centre by the early 1840s. As Melbourne's population increased, retail activity moved east to the central zone, close to both supplies provided at the port and to demand from residential areas to the north and east. The central area provided an even grade, particularly suitable for high volumes of pedestrians (MPS:86).

By the early 1840s, Elizabeth and Swanston streets, from the Town Hall in the south-east to the General Post Office to the north-west, had become the focus of retail activity, influenced also by the location of the Western Market in the west of the city which operated as the city's premier wholesale fruit and vegetable market until 1930 (May 2016:176). The Eastern Market opened in 1847 as a fruit and vegetable market on the corner of Stephen Street (later Exhibition Street) and Bourke Street and drew retail further east.

With the economic boom of the 1880s, the 1880s–1890s was a decade of significant expansion in Melbourne. Investment funds poured in from Britain, imposing buildings were constructed and speculation reached fever pitch in land, houses, offices and shops (Marsden 2000:28). As historian Graeme Davison states, commercial Melbourne extravagantly asserted 'her wealth in stucco and stone' (cited in Marsden 2000:28).

Suburban retailing increased towards the end of the 1880s as greater Melbourne's population approached 280,000 and tramlines transported shoppers to suburban shops, and conversely, from the suburbs to the city (Young and Spearritt 2008).

Development slowed during the economic depression of the 1890s, only recovering with the revival of immigration in the first decades of the twentieth century. Although affected by World War One in the period 1914-18, by the end of the 1920s, Melbourne's population had reached one million people. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the last residents moved out of the city to the new suburbs, with the retail and manufacturing sectors rapidly taking up city properties (Marsden 2000:29-30).

Retail premises in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century generally included upper-level accommodation for families involved in the business. Multi-storey shop and dwelling type buildings housing ground-level shop with rooms above were constructed across the retail strips of Melbourne, and three- or more storied commercial and retail buildings began to proliferate between Bourke and Lonsdale streets from the late 1880s (Lovell Chen 2017:220).

SITE HISTORY

The site at 490 Flinders Street is part of the Crown Allotment 1 of Block 2, purchased by John Pascoe Fawkner in 1838. By 1840, a building had been constructed on the site (Fels, Laver and Mider 1993, Inventory no 863).

The terrace pair at 490 Flinders Street, known as Willis' Buildings and originally built as three two-storey shop buildings, was constructed in 1869-70 by and for George Willis (MCC registration no 3344 as cited in AAI, record no 75807; RB 1870). The third terrace building was demolished c1973 to

form part of the Centre City Flats, built c1975 (*Age* 5 December 1974:23; S&Mc 1974). Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 6 show the early configuration of the buildings as a terraced row of three.

The subject site was addressed 105 and 107 Flinders Street from 1870; 488 and 490 from 1890; 488-492 in 1915; and 490 and 490A from c1940s (S&Mc 1870 and 1890; MMBW Detail Plan no 739, 1895; S&Mc 1945).

From 1871 to the 1920s, the ground floor shops were used for retail business, including a grocery store and a general store, with the upper floors used as residences. In 1871, the year after construction was complete, the subject buildings were occupied by Thomas Auld, grocer (number 488), and William Cherrington, who ran a general store until c1885 (number 490) (RB 1871; S&Mc 1871). Auld remained an occupant until c1890 (S&Mc 1890). Cherrington shared occupancy of number 490 with F Roche, importer of colonial produce, from 1875 (S&Mc 1875). From 1875-90 tenants at number 490 included Roche, George Bale, clothing importer, from 1885; and Francis Longmore, chemist, in 1890 (S&Mc 1875, 1885; 1890, 1900; MCC registration no 3344 as cited in AAI, record no 75807).

Ownership changed after the death of George Willis in 1903, and the executors of George Willis' estate held title over the Flinders Street buildings for some years, using the rent paid to the Estate to keep the buildings in repair. In 1907, Herbert Shaws was listed as owner. Adolf Leibner was the owner in 1915 (RB 1907, 1915). Retail tenants continued to lease the property at that time, with tenants including Walter D Spencer, grocer (number 490) and Waller Rickets, tailor (number 488) (S&Mc 1915).

By the 1920s, the upper level residences were turned into retail spaces, and between 1925 and c1950, various retailers occupied the Willis' Building. Operated by different individuals, the upper level of 490 Flinders Street was occupied by hairdressers between 1925 and 1942, while the ground level was used as tea rooms and a spirit store (S&Mc 19250-1945).

By 1948, the two buildings had been joined internally and a single-storey workshop was added to the rear of the land (see Figure 5). From 1950 the use of the building changed, taking on manufacturing association when Newell & Co Irrigation Machinery Manufacturers occupied the buildings in the 1950s and 1960s (S&Mc 1950, 1960). Other retail uses from 1960 included a sandwich bar and hairdresser until 1970 (S&Mc 1950-1974). Entwistle tattoo artist operated from the premises from 1970 (S&Mc 1974).

The westernmost terrace, number 492 Flinders Street (demolished c1973), was long used by tailors Solomon Bros, tenants for more than forty years from the late 1920s until c1970, as seen in Figure 7 (S&Mc 1927-1970). After the demolition of number 492, new openings, awnings and an open staircase were installed at the surviving building pair in 1986 (MBAI 1986). The surviving pair of buildings at 490 Flinders Street is presently being used as a restaurant (CoMMaps).

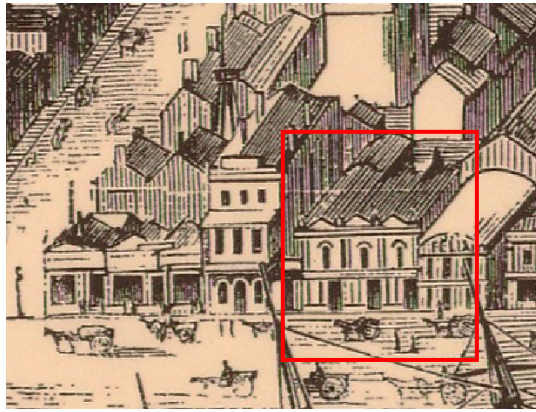


Figure 1. Extract from a lithograph showing Willis' buildings in 1880. (Source: Calvert 1880, NLA)

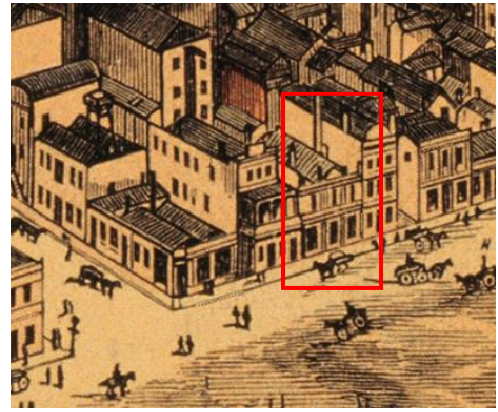


Figure 2. Extract from a lithograph showing Willis' Buildings in 1882. (Source: Cooke 1882, SLV)

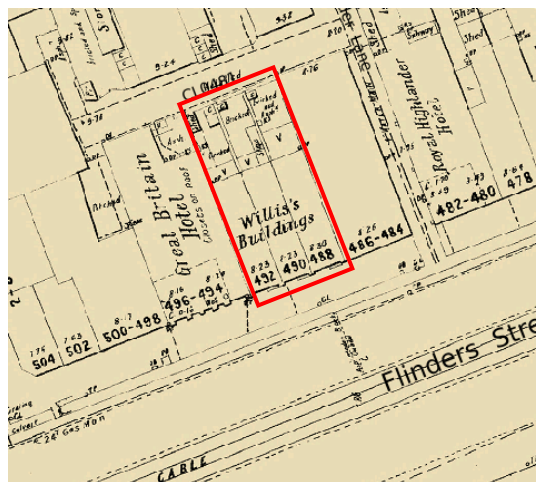


Figure 3. Extract from a MMBW Detail Plan showing the subject site in 1895. (Source: MMBW Detail Plan no 739 1895)

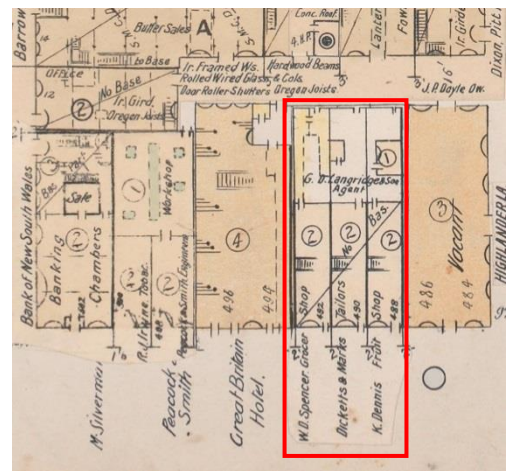


Figure 4. Extract from Mahlstet map showing the three terraces the formed Willis' Buildings in 1910. (Source: Mahlstet Map Section1 no 21 1910)

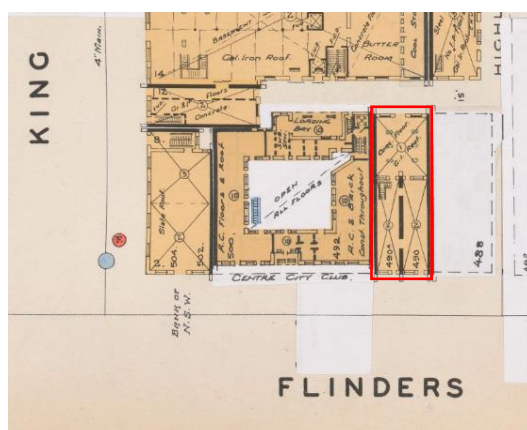


Figure 5. In 1948, the two surviving buildings were connected internally and a single storey workshop added at the rear. The extract from a Mahlstet map, amended after 1948, showing 490 Flinders Street shows the two buildings after the demolition of the third terrace. (Source: Mahlstet Map Sect 1, no 21, 1948, SLV)

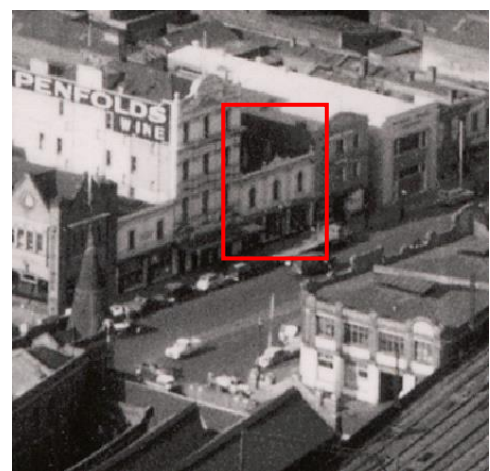


Figure 6. Extract from a 1950s aerial photograph of Melbourne looking northeast showing Willis' Buildings prior to the demolition of the third terrace. (Source: Pratt c1950, SLV copyright)



Figure 7. Photograph showing all three buildings that comprised Willis' Buildings in 1966. The buildings had been joined since 1948; the building on the left (with signage of long-time occupants, Solomon Bros) was demolished c1973. (Source: Halla 1966, SLV [copyright](#))

George Willis, builder

George Willis was the owner and builder of the row of shop residences at 490 Flinders Street. Not much is known about his practice as a builder. Willis and his wife Ellen were the owner-occupants of a four-roomed brick cottage on the corner of Bridge and Nott Streets in Sandridge (Age 7 October 1871:2; ER 1873). At the time of his death in 1877 Willis owned the Sandridge property, a four-roomed wattle and daub house in Moorooduc on the Mornington Peninsula, and the subject buildings (PROV VPRS unit 187, item 15/1000). The probate of his will was granted at £4,220 (*Herald* 23 May 1877:3). It appears that Willis was a successful builder with several properties in Victoria (PROV VPRS unit 187, item 15/1000).

SITE DESCRIPTION

Located on the northern side of Flinders Street between William and King streets, near the southwestern corner of Hoddle Grid, the row of two (originally three) two-storey shops and residences at 490 Flinders Street, Melbourne was constructed in the pre-boom period in 1869-70, with shops at ground floor and residences above. The pair of attached buildings is in the Victorian Italianate style, and has a modestly decorated painted render façade with some classical detailing, typically seen in other small-scale examples of the type in central Melbourne. Originally built as a row of three shops, the westernmost shop was demolished c1973.

At the first-floor level there is a simple moulded cornice that terminates in an expressed block with a square pyramid motif at each party wall, supported on an acanthus leaf bracket. The first-floor façade is of flush painted render, with rusticated pilasters denoting the party walls, terminating in a cornice and low parapet, also supported by pressed cement acanthus leaf brackets. The surviving westernmost building (originally the central module) has a small triangular pediment with moulded lettering stating 'Willis' Building' surmounted with modestly decorated triangular pediment. The window

openings at the first-floor level have projecting moulded sills and architraves with a semicircular arch with a keystone, all of which is typical mid-Victorian detailing. The windows are simple timber frame double hung sashes, which are either original or of a similar pattern.

One original cement rendered chimney is intact, located in the middle of the two remaining shops.

The ground level shopfronts have been substantially altered from their original configuration, although the base masonry sections clad in green glazed tiles are probably early twentieth century. The pilasters denoting the party walls are expressed at street level as simple painted render elements sitting on plinths. A lightweight cantilevered awning has been added at the first-floor level.

To the rear of the buildings, there is a single-storey gabled brick addition built during the interwar period. It has a cement rendered lintel above a multi-paned industrial window and a roller gate. The lintel had signage 'Newell & Co', which is still evident.

INTEGRITY

The former 'Willis' Buildings' at 490 Flinders Street, Melbourne is largely intact with some changes visible to the original or early elements of the building. Changes include the demolition of the western shop and alterations to the original shopfront at street level. The building retains its original scale; painted render principle façade at the first floor with pilasters, cornices, pediment and masonry window surrounds, as well as the original cement rendered chimney. It substantially retains its original fenestration, pattern of openings and timber frame windows. The integrity of the building is diminished by alterations on the ground floor including the replacement of the original shopfronts. The early twentieth century configuration with base masonry sections clad in green glazed tiles dates from the early-twentieth century modifications and remains extant. The street-level awnings are an unsympathetic addition. Overall, the building is of high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The former 'Willis' Buildings' at 490 Flinders Street is a largely intact example of a pair of modest two-storey shops and residences, constructed in the pre-boom period in 1869-70, in the Victorian Italianate style, in close proximity to the port and bustling fish market. It has a modestly decorated painted render façade with some classical detailing, typically seen in other small-scale examples of the type in central Melbourne.

Erected to serve as daily retail points, the small number of surviving shops can be found in both main streets and smaller laneways in precincts peripheral to the city centre. Whilst the upper storeys have come to be used for storage or other uses rather than residential, the ground floors of these examples continue to operate as commercial outlets.

The subject building is comparable with the following examples, being of a similar use, scale, location or creation date. The images and descriptions are adapted from CoM Maps unless stated otherwise, with images dated c2000 or later.

Clarke's Shop & Dwellings, 203-205 Queen Street, 1869 (HO1070)

A two-storey rendered brick retail building with a basement, two ground level shops and an upper level office. Designed in the Italian Renaissance style by George Browne of the firm Browne & Howitz and built for the grazier William John Turner Clarke by Charles Brown in 1869.



Figure 8. Clarke's Shops & Dwellings, 203-205 Queen Street, built in 1869-70 (Source: Butler 2011).

470-472 Little Lonsdale Street, 1872 (Interim HO1281 – Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

A pair of early shops with simple detailing, typical of the mid-Victorian period, which is mostly intact on the upper façade of this pair of shops.



Figure 9. 470-472 Little Lonsdale Street, built in 1872. (Source Context 2017)

171 Bourke Street, 1867 (Interim HO1237 – Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

An early two-storey shop/dwelling dating from 1867. Simple detailing to the upper façade is typical of mid-Victorian era. Distinctive brass framed highlight leadlight windows (c.1910) are intact to the street façade. The building operated as a pharmacy for more than 100 years. Motifs in the leadlight reflect this use.



Figure 10. 171 Bourke Street, built in 1867.

189-195 Exhibition Street, 1882 (HO630, Significant in HO507 Little Bourke Precinct)

A row of two-storey brick shops with residences above and a basement. Built in 1882 in the Renaissance Revival style.



Figure 11. 189-195 Exhibition Street, built in 1882. (Source: Butler 2011)

201-207 Bourke Street, 1874 (Interim HO1239 – Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

A row of four three-storey shops with residences above. Built by investors F B Clapp and W G Sprigg in 1874.



Figure 12. 146-150 Bourke Street, built in 1874. (Source: City of Melbourne 2018)

Bourke Street East Post Office, 35-37 Bourke Street, 1872 (HO527, Significant in HO500 Bourke Hill Precinct)

Two storey rendered brick shop. Designed in the Renaissance Revival style and built 1872 for J M Langley, a glass and china importer. From 1892 and 1969 it was used as a post office.



Figure 13. 35-37 Bourke Street, built in 1872.

The former 'Willis' Buildings' at 490 Flinders Street is a substantially intact example of two-storey shops and residences constructed in the pre-boom period in 1869-70 in the Victorian Italianate style. Originally built as three two-storey shop residences, one shop was demolished c1974, leaving the extant pair. The building has a modestly decorated painted render façade with some classical detailing, typically seen in other small-scale examples of the type in central Melbourne. More substantial examples of the style, including town halls, post offices and large houses, utilised a more elaborate palette of decorative elements to emphasise its classical references.

Many of these modest Victorian shops and residences are found along Bourke Street, which formed part of the early manufacturing and retail area, whereas Flinders Street during the mid-Victorian period thrived with port-related activities. These examples are becoming increasingly rare, especially on the primary street frontages of the Hoddle Grid, where more recent large-scale developments are in evidence.

490 Flinders Street is comparable with a number of other HO listed examples of the type, including the Bourke Street East Post Office at 35-37 Bourke Street, constructed in 1872. The buildings are of a similar scale and degree of Victorian Italianate detail retained. The building at 35-37 Bourke Street is located within a much more intact context of low scale Victorian shop residences than 490 Flinders Street.

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**

D

**Central City Heritage
Study 1993**

C

**Review of Heritage
overlay listings in the
CBD 2002**

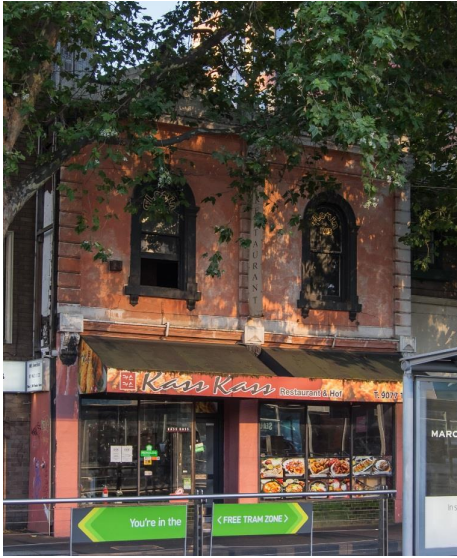
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**Central City Heritage
Review 2011**

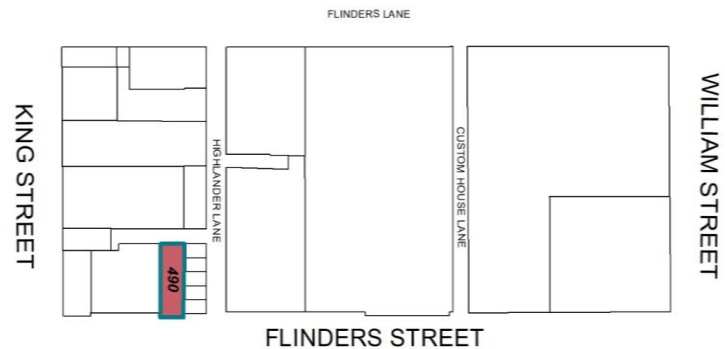
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Willis' Buildings



PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

Willis' Buildings at 490 Flinders Street, Melbourne, a pair of two-storey shop and residence buildings, built in 1869-70.

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

- The original building form and scale;
- The original painted render and face brick walls and pattern of fenestration including rusticated pilasters, cornice, parapet and pediment with moulded lettering and window openings at the above ground levels with projecting moulded sills and architraves with a semicircular arch with a keystone;
- The cement rendered chimney and shopfront base masonry sections clad in green glazed tiles; and
- The original timber double hung windows.

The later alterations made to the street level facades, such as the awnings and plate glass shopfronts, are not significant.

How it is significant?

Willis' Buildings at 490 Flinders Street, Melbourne is of local historic and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The pair of two-storey shop buildings at 490 Flinders Street, Melbourne, originally three two-storey shop residences, constructed in 1869-70 for and by builder George Willis, is historically significant for the evidence the building provides of the need for and provision of daily retail points with associated residences in a part of the city that, during the mid-Victorian period, thrived with port-related activities. The buildings have been continuously occupied by a number of retail and service businesses through to

the present day, including grocery, general store and tailoring businesses for the first 50 years after the building was completed, and used as combined shop residences until the c1920s . (Criterion A)

The former 'Willis' Buildings' at 490 Flinders Street is significant as largely intact two-storey shops and residences constructed in the pre-boom period in 1869-70 in the Victorian Italianate style. Increasingly rare in terms of their use and building typology in this part of the city, they are otherwise typical of retail buildings of the Victorian era where the ground floor operated as a shop and the shopkeeper and their family lived in the residence above. The building is also typical of the modestly scaled and fine-grained retail expansion in central Melbourne until development slowed during the economic depression of the 1890s. The building has the classical detailing often applied to small scale examples of this type in central Melbourne. Elements characteristic of the classical style include its rusticated pilasters, cornice, parapet and pediment with moulded lettering and projecting moulded sills and architraves with a semicircular arch with a keystone on the first level window openings. The building also retains components of its early twentieth century shopfront. (Criterion D)

Primary source

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

