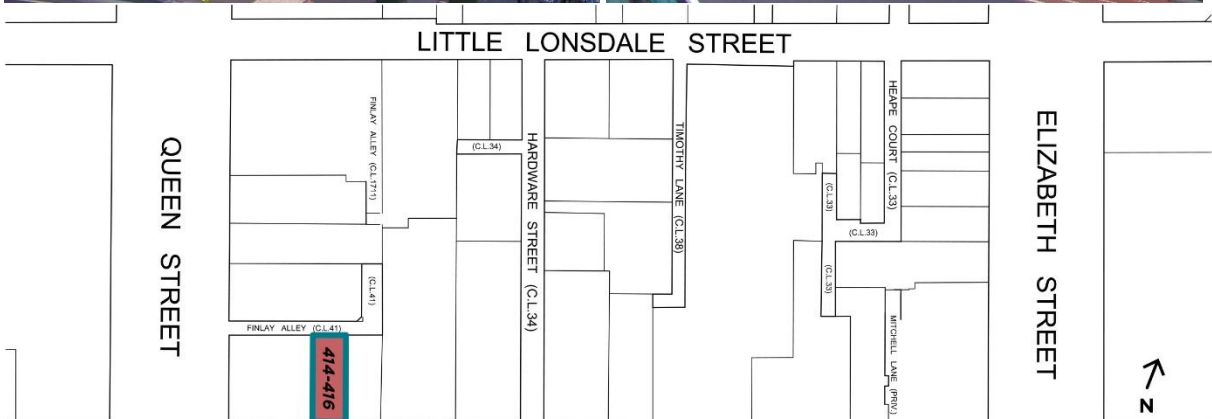


<b>SITE NAME</b>	Laurens House
<b>STREET ADDRESS</b>	414-416 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne
<b>105735</b>	105735



**SURVEY DATE:** October 2017

**LONSDALE**

**SURVEY BY:** Context

**HERITAGE INVENTORY**

N/A

**EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY**

No

**PLACE TYPE**

Individual Heritage Place

**PROPOSED CATEGORY**

Significant

**EXISTING GRADE**

C

**DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:**

Harold Bloom

**BUILDER:**

Not known

**DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:**

Postwar Period (1945-1965)

**DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:**

1956

## 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, 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	3.2 Business and finance

## LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Retail
1920s	Retail
1960s	Commercial office

## 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

Laurens House at 414-416 Lonsdale Street, designed by architect Harold Bloom in 1956 is an eight-storey office building featuring an asymmetrical curtain wall facade comprised of a combination of lightweight glazing and ceramic tiles.

## 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.

### **Business and finance in the postwar period**

The postwar period was one of fluctuating fortunes in the business and finance sectors. In the main however, economic confidence and financial deregulation came together to create a period of growth that would radically change the appearance of central Melbourne.

Speculative investment in Melbourne increased after the Commonwealth government lifted restrictions on share dealings in 1947, which resulted in a dramatic increase in new company registrations (Marsden 2000:44-45). Subsequently, during the 1950s, a number of national and international companies sought to assert a physical presence in the country, constructing corporate buildings in the city centre. In Melbourne, up to the mid-1960s, investment was predominantly driven by British and American companies, government bodies, large Australian corporations such as AMP and BHP, and property developers, including Lend Lease (formerly Civil and Civic) and L J Hooker Ltd. Later in the 1960s, it was also driven by private developers such as Grollo and Lustig & Moar (Marsden 2000:46-47).

The construction of large bank buildings was also prolific during the postwar period with the passing of the Banking Act 1947, which led to an increase in the number of bank branches established in Victoria. One of the most significant changes in banking in Australia at this time was the creation of the new Reserve Bank of Australia in 1959, which replaced the central bank known as the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (Heritage Alliance 2008:17). Bank buildings constructed in the central city during this period included the State Savings Bank of Victoria at 233-243 Queen Street (1967-68), the Bank of Adelaide Building at 265-269 Collins Street (1959-60) and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Building at 251-257 Collins Street (1971-73).

The period between 1961 and 1963 was one of business recession, while the years between 1967 and 1969 was a time of growth due to two mineral booms. From 1967 to 1971 the construction of new office space in the city centre more than doubled that of the previous five years (City of Melbourne Strategy Plan 1974 in Clinch 2012:66-67). The property boom ended during the economic crash of the early 1970s and the 1974 oil crisis when many British institutions that had founded the commercial property industry left Australia. Government bodies and banks subsequently took over much of the building construction in the city centre (Marsden 2000:48)

### **SITE HISTORY**

The land at 414-416 Lonsdale Street is part of Crown Allotment 1, Block 29, purchased by Matthew Cantlon in 1837 (DCLS). By the early 1950s, the subject site was occupied by a pair of two-storey shops and dwellings (*Age* 18 June 1953:13).

In June 1953, the pair of brick shops and dwellings at 414-416 Lonsdale Street, which was part of M J Metcalfe's estate, was sold for £7,500 (*Age* 18 June 1953:13). The shops and dwellings were demolished by 1955, and the vacant land was rated at a Net Annual Value (NAV) of £320 in the 1956-57 financial year (RB 1956).

In January 1956, Harold Bloom, architect, called tenders for the erection of a four-storey reinforced concrete office building for George Laurens Pty Ltd, a debt collecting company. The gross floor area of the building was 8,800 square feet (*Age* 25 January 1956:19).



In March 1956, the owner of the building, George Laurens, applied for a permit through the Melbourne City Council to erect an office building on the site (Figure 1). Laurens also expressed his intention to ultimately extend the building to seven storeys in height (VPRS 11201/P/1 UNIT 376).

The quantity surveyor for the building was Crisp & Wolferatan, with the construction contract awarded to F T Jeffrey Pty Ltd at an estimated cost of £47,000 (Age 15 August 1956:12). Concrete form work had commenced by August 1956 (Age 15 August 1956:12). According to the rate record from the 1957-58 financial year, 414-416 Lonsdale Street was only completed as a four-level office building. The first NAV of the newly finished building was £3,000 (RB 1957).

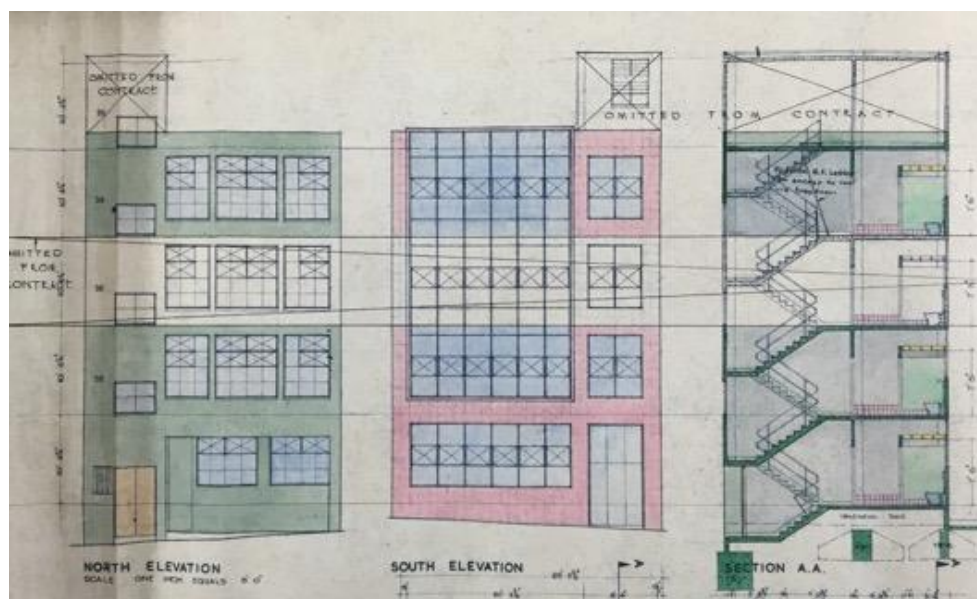


Figure 1. Elevation drawings prepared by Harold Bloom in 1956 (Source: VPRS11201/P/1 UNIT376).

Named after the owner, the building became known as 'Laurens House' (Mahlstedt Map, section 2, no 4a, 1962). The building contained four levels of open-plan office spaces. A loading zone was provided at the rear of the ground floor, which was accessed from the rear service lane, Finlay Lane. A kiosk was installed in the lobby, behind the main entrance. The provision of the 'light court', or a lightwell, is also notable. A small section near the eastern boundary on each floor was recessed towards the west so that the natural light could flow into all levels (Figure 2) (VPRS 11201/P/1 UNIT 376).

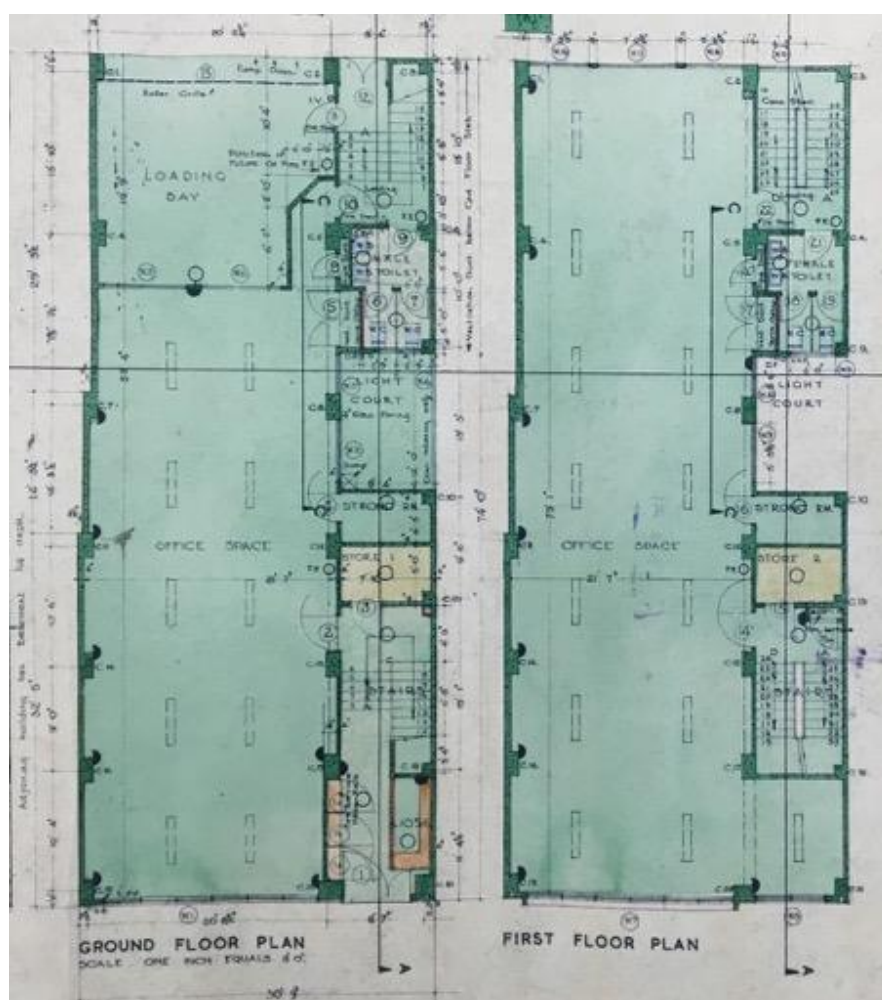


Figure 2. The ground and first floor plans showing the internal arrangements of the office levels. Note the provision of the 'light court' on the eastern boundary. (Source: VPRS 11201/P/1 UNIT 376)

In March 1960, Bloom invited tenders for a four-storey addition to Laurens House. The quantity surveyor was again Crisp & Wolferatan (Age 26 March 1960:48). The construction work, which extended the building to eight storeys high, was carried out at a cost of £50,000 and completed by the next financial year. The NAV in 1961 tripled to £9,000 pounds compared to the previous year (RB 1961-2).

In 1962, a Mahlstedt Fire Survey Plan noted the subject building as an eight-storey building with hollow blocks and concrete. At the same time, the storage rooms behind the southern staircase had been turned into a lift (Mahlstedt Map, section 2, no 4a, 1962). The light court was also extended to the entire height of the building (Figure 2, Figure 3).

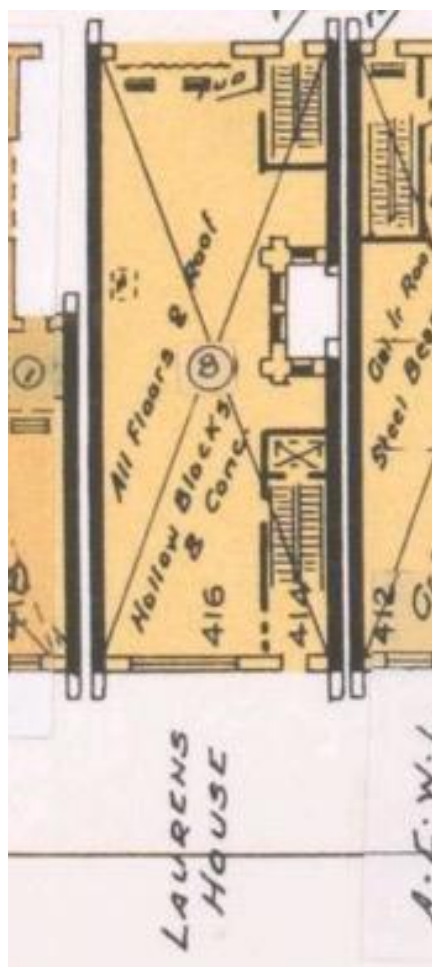


Figure 3. The building footprint in 1962, following the addition of four levels. (Source: Mahlstedt Map, section 1, map no 4a, 1962)

Since its opening in 1956, Laurens House has housed local financing and commercial firms. George Laurens Pty Ltd occupied the front half of the building, while the rear was tenanted by A D Goodman and M Kelly, both solicitors. The lobby kiosk was leased to M Wagman, tobacconist (S&Mc 1960; RB 1960).

Since 1961, the offices of Laurens House have been shared by George Laurence Pty Ltd, A D Goodman, M Kelly, Cameron, Goodman & Co, and a branch of the National Bank of Australia Ltd.

Around 1970, the building was sold to Peak Properties Pty Ltd. Following the change of ownership, the building was vacated by its tenants, except for the National Bank of Australasia (Age 6 April 1961:5; S&Mc 1965, 1970). By the mid-1970s, the building was renamed UTC House. The tenants around this time were Glassop & Son Pty Ltd, bankers; L G Quinn & CO Pty Ltd, accountants; Davies & Collison, patent attorneys; N P Dunn, solicitors; D Ting & Byrne, solicitors; Civil Security Agency, UTC Pty Ltd, travel agency, Myer Southern Stores (buying office); and the National Bank of Australasia Ltd (S&Mc 1974).

The offices were subdivided in 1978. The ground-level shopfront and entrance to number 416 is an addition from 1990. The construction cost at that time was \$20,000 (MBAI).

The building currently contains eight businesses and one shop (CoMMaps).

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The building was first constructed as a four-storey building and five years later was extended by an additional four stories, to the same design. The building is distinctively modernist in style. It is distinguished by its cuboid form and asymmetrical curtain walled façade.

The main façade appears as a light weight, transparent glazed section, in contrast to the more solid tiled section to one side, concealing the stairwell to the upper floors.

The glazed section is comprised of repeated horizontal bands combining three rows of windows over a ribbed metal spandrel. Each band corresponds to a floor level within the building. Glazing is arranged in squared aluminium frames, with the middle row operable. Metal spandrel panels match the square dimensions of the windows, resulting in regular squared effect overall. A band of ribbed metal runs along the top edge of the building.

The solid section is clad with square ceramic tiles and inset with windows with the same dimensions as the adjacent glazed section. The ceramic tiles run down to street level where a separate entry is provided for access to the upper floors.

## **INTEGRITY**

The upper façade of the building retains a high level of integrity. The shop front has been altered and minor changes have occurred to the stairwell entry. The current recessed glazed shop front does not appear on the original drawings or maps (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3), suggesting it was installed sometime after 1962. The additional four storeys were completed using the same design.

## **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

The 1950s saw the development of the modern multi-story office building in Melbourne, often built for insurance companies or finance companies. Concrete and steel structural frames provided building support allowing the façade to be clad in a non-load bearing curtain wall. 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 in the mid-1950s to early 1960s 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.

### **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 constructed in 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 and Lobb with Charles N Hollinshed, 1956-57) included in HO502 The Block Precinct as a Significant 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:



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



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



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



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).



London Assurance House, 468-470 Bourke Street (Bernard Evans, 1960).



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

### Analysis

Laurens House at 414-416 Lonsdale Street compares well to the above examples of mid-height curtain walled office buildings from the mid-50s. Laurens House retains a high level of integrity, when compared with the other examples.

**ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

✓	<b>CRITERION A</b> Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).
	<b>CRITERION B</b> Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).
	<b>CRITERION C</b> Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).
✓	<b>CRITERION D</b> Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).
✓	<b>CRITERION E</b> Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).
	<b>CRITERION F</b> Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)
	<b>CRITERION G</b> 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).
	<b>CRITERION H</b> 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



## REFERENCES

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

*Age*, as cited.

City of Melbourne Interactive Maps (CoMMaps) 2017, <http://maps.melbourne.vic.gov.au/>, accessed 7 June 2017.

City of Melbourne Municipal Rate Books (RB), as cited.

Department of Crown Lands and Survey, Victoria (DCLS) c1839, 'Names of purchasers and amounts paid for allotments at first land sales held in Melbourne in 1837, 1838 and 1839', State Library of Victoria (SLV): Land subdivisions of Melbourne and suburbs, 1837-1876 Map key, accessed online 11 May 2018.

Mahlstedt's Pty Ltd 1948 *City of Melbourne detail fire survey. Section 1*, Mahlstedt Pty Ltd, Melbourne.

Marsden, Susan 2000, *Urban Heritage: the rise and postwar development of Australia's capital city centres*, Australian Council of National Trusts and Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

Melbourne Building Application Index (MBAI), retrieved from Ancestry.com 2015, *Victoria, Australia, Selected Trial Brief and Correspondence Registers and Other Images, 1837-1993* [database on-line], <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed online March-April 2018.

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Sands & McDougall, *Melbourne and Suburban Directories* (S&Mc), as cited.

Storey, Rohan 2008, 'Skyscrapers' in *eMelbourne*, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne>, accessed 13 May 2018.

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**PREVIOUS STUDIES**

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**Central Activities District  
Conservation Study 1985**

D

**Central City Heritage  
Review 1993**

C

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

Ungraded

**Central City Heritage  
Review 2011**Ungraded

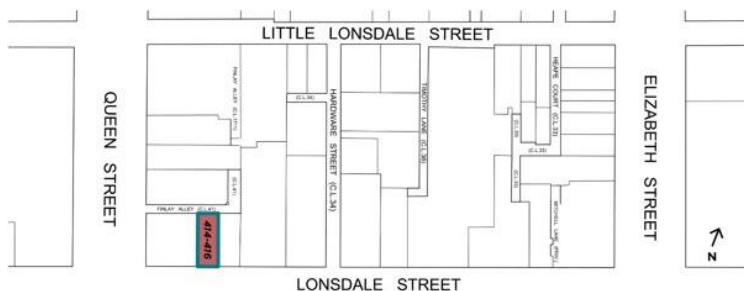
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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Heritage Place:** Laurens House



**PS ref no:** HOXXXX



### What is significant?

Laurens House, a modernist office building at 414-416 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, completed in 1956.

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?

Laurens House at 414-416 Lonsdale Street is of local historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

### Why it is significant?

Laurens House built in 1956, is of historic significance for its demonstration of the surge in office development at the time, which reflected not only the adoption of modern architecture, but also widespread economic and political change. From 1949, significant increases occurred in commercial enterprise in Australia in the areas of mining, finance, commerce, and industry, a process facilitated by speculative investment after the Commonwealth government lifted restrictions on share dealings in 1947. This contributed to an increase in the development of city offices. (Criterion A)

Laurens House is a representative example of an early curtain-walled office building of the early postwar era (1950s-60s). The building is one of a group of commercial buildings built for insurance and finance companies in the city centre during this period. The modernist aesthetic expressed the ambition and corporate image of these companies. (Criterion D)

The eight-storey office building known as Laurens House is distinctively modernist with visual interest derived from the arrangement of building elements across the asymmetrical façade. The lightweight glazed curtain wall contrasts with the more solid masonry elements to one side of the building. This use of solid and void in façade composition distinguishes the early multi-storey curtain wall offices from later examples where glazing was used across the whole façade. Laurens House retains a high level of integrity, comparing favourably with the other examples that have often been refaced or altered significantly at ground level. (Criterion E)

**Primary source**

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

