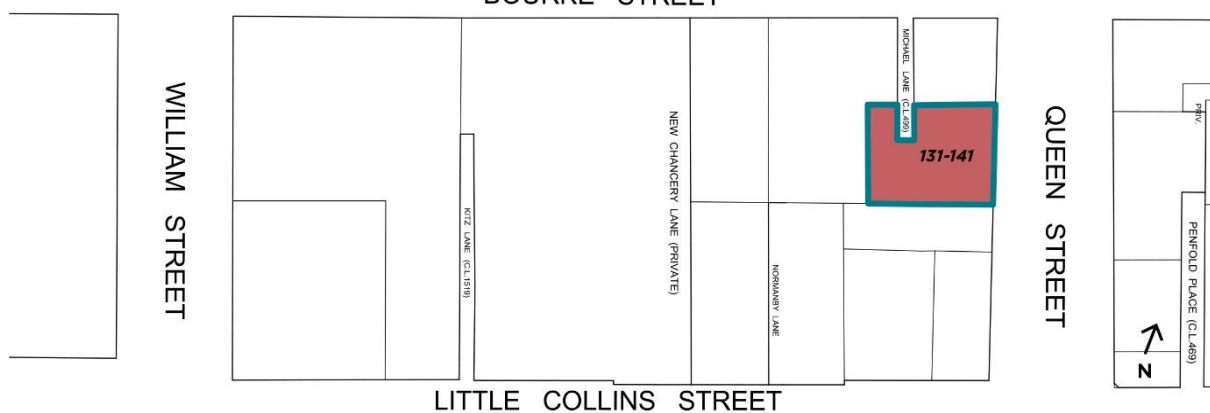


SITE NAME	Former Victoria Club building
STREET ADDRESS	131-141 Queen Street Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	108069



BOURKE STREET



SURVEY DATE: November 2017

SURVEY BY: Context

HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
		FORMER GRADE	C
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	Plottel, Bunnett, & Alsop	BUILDER:	Not known
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Interwar Period (c1919-c1940)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1927

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
HISTORIC THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
13 Enjoying the city	13.1 Public recreation
	OTHER SUB-THEMES
12 Expressing social and political opinion	12.4 Celebrating the larrikin spirit

LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE	
Archaeological block no: 35	Inventory no: Inventory not provided
THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Warehouse and Yards
1920s	Offices
1960s	Offices

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

131-141 Queen Street was built as the private Victoria Club, a forerunner of the Victorian Racing Club. Originally built as a three-storey building with elaborate interior finishes in 1927, it was extended with additional storeys in 1956.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Enjoying the city

Public recreation

By the time the British settlement of Melbourne was taking shape, horseracing was already a well-organised sport in New South Wales and Tasmania.

The racing interest gradually assumed a formal structure, in 1842 forming the short-lived Port Phillip Turf Club and then the Victoria Turf Club in 1852. In 1856 the Victoria Jockey Club appeared but in 1864 the two amalgamated to form the Victoria Racing Club (VRC)...

The wealth produced during the gold rushes made Melbourne the centre of Australian horseracing... the introduction of the Melbourne Cup in 1861 invited inter-colonial interest with the Sydney horse Archer winning the first two Cups....Private entrepreneurs also developed racecourses...

Horseracing was the main public forum for betting and gambling in the colony. Racing clubs raised prize money from the bookmakers, horse owners used the betting ring to support their pursuit and, as horseracing became more organised, betting on the horses became a popular pastime. Betting was legal but unregulated and horseracing became the target of all those who wished to change public behaviour by removing gambling from organised sport.

The battle-lines were drawn in the Parliament of Victoria. By the late 1870s the pari-mutuel or totalisator form of betting challenged the primacy of the bookmaker in offering a betting service to the public...In 1906...[the] totalisator was closed, gambling was restricted to licensed on-course bookmakers, and the number of racing days allocated to proprietary racecourses reduced. Although the on-course totalisator was legalised in 1930, illegal off-course betting continued until 1960 when off-course betting through the Totalisator Agency Board (TAB) was legalised.

In the 1920s horseracing in Melbourne was given a major boost by the introduction of radio...After World War II horseracing was consolidated, centralised on the racing clubs based at Caulfield, Flemington and Moonee Valley, and at Sandown where a new course was opened in 1965. The late 1940s saw record crowds...

When the first TAB betting shops opened in 1961 the face of horseracing changed. The televising of races in hotels and TABs transformed the spectator experience. From the 1980s the racing clubs began to reconstruct facilities at the courses and to offer spectators a more attractive environment... (Senyard 2008).

Expressing social and political opinion

Celebrating the larrikin spirit

Melbourne has long been a city of contrast. Alongside its churches, free-thinkers and deep-seated Victorian respectability, it has also long been a city of gamblers, drinkers and larrikins. The very motivation to immigrate to an unknown life in the distant colonies was itself a gamble, and success often relied on luck as much as it did on talent and hard work. Much of Melbourne's wealth in the

nineteenth century derived from the game of speculation — itself a gamble of sorts — on the price of land and on the chance of finding gold. Betting and gambling were also carried on in private clubs, hotels, public parks, and elsewhere (Context 2012:90).

SITE HISTORY

The land comprising the subject property at 131-141 Queen Street was first purchased by George Mercer as part of Crown Allotment 31, Block 14, in the City of Melbourne (CoM Maps). Before 1895, the buildings on the subject site were previously numbered 61-69 (Figure 1).

The listing of occupants in the Sands and McDougall street directory indicates that buildings existed on the subject site by 1861 (S&Mc 1861). In 1888, three, two-storey structures existed on the subject site for commercial and possibly residential purposes (Mahlstedt Map no 14, 1888).

It appears that the former buildings were demolished between late 1926 and 1927, as, by 1927, a new building was being erected on the site for the Victoria Club (S&Mc 1926,1927). A group of bookmakers who had split away from Tattersalls Subscription Betting Rooms founded the Victoria Club in 1880 for the purpose of calling cards and settling bets in a social, club environment (de Serville 2008). The Victoria Club, alternatively known as the Victorian Club, flourished, and, with increasing membership figures, its needs outgrew the old club premises on Bourke Street (*Argus* 8 March 1927:13). At a council meeting in 1923, the Victoria Club made the decision to purchase the land and buildings at Queen Street for £37,000 with further plans to borrow money for the purchase of the adjoining land (*Sporting Globe*, 3 October 1923:5). Similar clubs were in the process of expansion in the mid-to-late 1920s; Tattersalls clubs in Sydney and Brisbane had recently moved into elaborate new buildings and the design for the Victoria Club was developed to compare favourably with these buildings (*Argus* 8 March 1927:13).

Architects J Plottel, Bunnett, and Alsop prepared the plans for the new club in 1927 after engaging, at the club committee's request, in a thorough study of club architecture in England and America (*Argus* 8 March 1927:13). Plans were drawn for a 10-storey building with the intention to start works on the first three storeys immediately and the remainder to be built once the club had secured occupancy of the entire building (*Argus* 8 March 1927:13). The contract for the works was for £90,000 and construction completed by 1928 (MBAI 9615).

The design for the building was elaborate, featuring a façade modelled on Italian lines (Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6) and an interior replete with dining, reading and card rooms, a bar and buffet service, a barrel-vaulted lobby (Figure 11), mezzanine floor and marble stair-case (*Argus* 8 March 1927:13). H Oliver and Sons were the decoration contractors for the club; contemporaneous media described their use of freestone walls, oak panelling and the chosen colour scheme of cerulean blue, gold and vermillion, as unusual decorative features (*Real Property and Architecture* 18 July 1928:11).

Postwar additions

In 1954, Plottel Bunnett & Alsop Partners Architects invited tenders on behalf of the Trustees of the Victoria Club for the construction of a seven-storey addition to the building (*Argus* 11 December 1954:13). The Commonwealth Oil Refineries planned to lease the seven-storey extension, which was expected to be completed before the 1956 Olympic Games, at an estimated cost of £500,000 (*Argus* 23 August 1955:6).

Queen Street was undergoing significant transformation in the 1950s and the Victoria Club was one of three buildings on the street that was built to the existing 40 m (132 ft) height limit level (set by the

planning regulations) at the time of its construction (*Argus* 6 April 1956: 19). Works were delayed in March 1956, by a building stoppage involving 75 workers walking off site work in protest against the failure of master builders to implement an agreement giving the workers an increase of 36 shillings per week (*Age* 14 March 1956: 3). However, it appears the matter was resolved as the additions were completed by 1956. By 1958, BP Australia were occupying the new seven-floor extension. Before the relocation, COR/BP head office was based at 90 William Street, Melbourne (*Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* 20 April 1950:891). The company continued to sell fuel under the COR brand until 1959 (BP Australia 2016). A photograph of the building from 1958 shows the building displaying both the BP and COR logos on its northern façade (Figure 8). During BP's occupation of the subject site, several reconfigurations of the interior took place via the instalment of partitions on the third, fourth and eighth floors in 1969, 1970 and 1973 respectively (MBAI).

Victoria Club robbery

On 21 April 1976 at the Victoria Club which had been founded as a breakaway social betting club, six masked gunmen invaded the club premises and made off with the takings from the Easter Racing Carnival (McConville 2008). The robbery, dubbed the 'great bookie robbery', drew significant media attention both in Australia and overseas (*Chicago Tribune* 22 April 1976:12). Following the robbery new windows and a mechanical door were installed in the building in 1977 and alterations to the staircases were made in 1978 (MBAI 49259). The Amateur Sports Club moved into the building in 1978, sharing premises with the Victoria Club who had been experiencing financial difficulty since the robbery (*Age* 7 February 1978:32). Internal alterations continued into the 1980s with partitions being erected in the fourth and eighth floors (MBAI). The robbery continues to be a subject of interest to Victorians; in 1986 a television miniseries dramatising the event was made and in June 2018 a segment on the robbery aired on the ABC's Nightlife radio program (IMDb 2018; ABC 2018).

In 1986 the Victoria Club sold their headquarters, moving the club premises to the 41st level of the Rialto Towers in 1987, again moving several times before the organisation folded between 2008 and 2012 (de Serville 2008; *Age* 4 April 2012).

Other associations

The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney moved into the building in 1928, the same year the basement was subdivided (S&Mc 1928; MBAI 10905). The following year Mrs R Rolls opened a café on the subject site and further additions were made in 1929 and 1930 (S&Mc 1929; MBAI). Between 1931-1938, the Victoria Club shared the premises with R Rolls Café (which became Rosa Café in 1935), the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney, and the Typewriter Service Company, later Sydney Pincombe Ltd Typewriter Imports. By 1942 the Victoria Club and the Commercial Bank of Sydney were the only listed occupants for the address (S&Mc 1942). Little building activity occurred in the 1930s-1940s except for partitions erected in 1946 (MBAI).

The subject site presently hosts a variety of occupants, including the Turf Sports Bar; the Universal Institute of Technology; and offices providing professional services. In early 2009 the *Growing Up* competition, initiated by the Committee for Melbourne's Future Focus Group, called for design submissions for a roof top garden on the subject site; the Committee received 32 submissions, awarding first place to 'Head for the Hill' by Bent Architecture (Ehrmann 2011). The roof top garden was officially opened in July 2010.

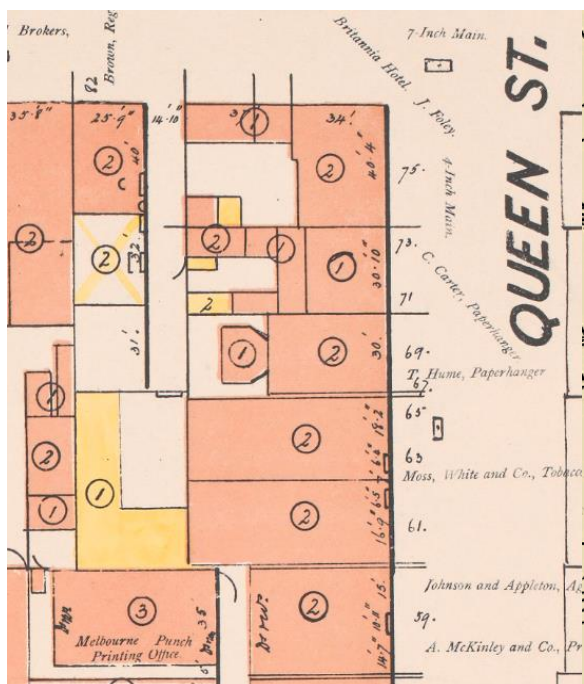


Figure 1. An extract from 1888 Mahlstedt Map showing the subject site numbered 61-69. (Source: Mahlstedt & Gee, no 14, 1888).

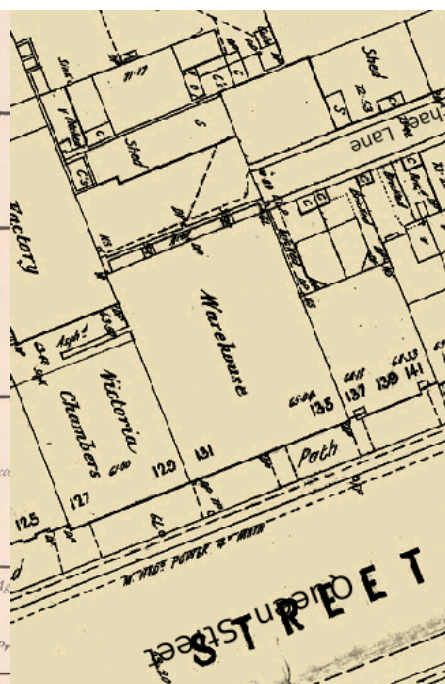


Figure 2. An extract from 1895 Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works detail plan showing subject site numbered 131-141. (Source: CoMMaps).

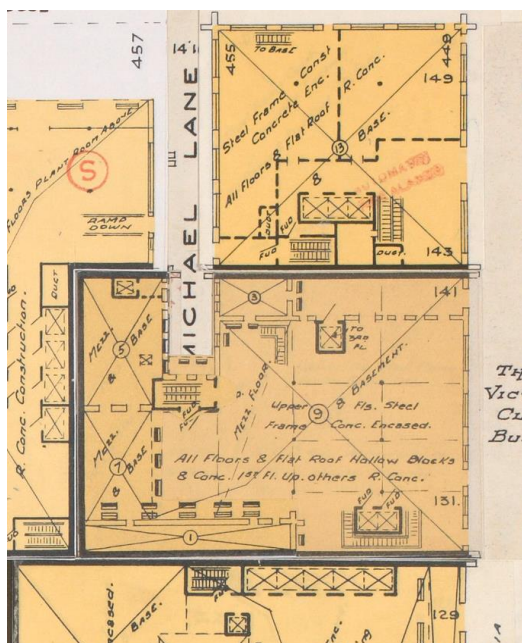


Figure 3. An extract from a 1948 Mahlstedt Map. Note that the map has been amended and shows the building post-1956 extensions. (Source: Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 17, 1948).



Figure 4. Extract from 1927 building plans showing elevation and section of 131-141 Queen Street. (Source: PROV VPRS 11200/P1, unit 1175, item 9615)

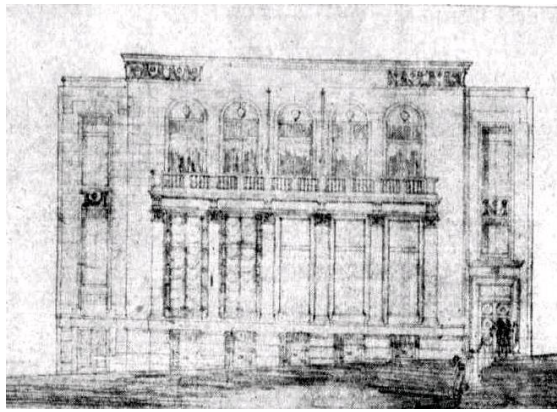


Figure 5. Elevation of the Victorian Club building's first three storeys. (Source: *Herald* 1 June 1927:13).



Figure 6. Victorian Club's new building. (Source: *Herald* 18 July 1928:11).

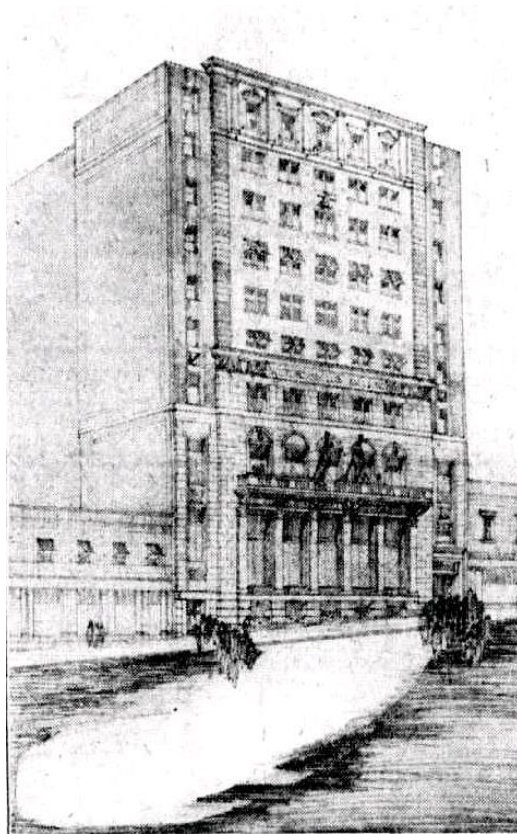


Figure 7. Victorian Club building as it will appear when the whole of the plans have been carried out (Source: *Herald* 1 June 1927:13).



Figure 8. BP Australia 131-141 Queens Street, showing BP and COR signage on the northern façade. (Source: Sievers 1958, SLV).

Plottell, Ernest Bunett & George Alsop, architects

There is little information available about Plottell, Ernest Bunett & George Alsop's partnership. It appears, from advertisements, that they commenced practice in the early 1920s working in both Canberra and Melbourne. During their brief partnership, the architects' works included the Golf Club House, Melbourne (*Herald* 14 September 1927:15); Barnet Glass Rubber Co Ltd factory, Footscray (*Construction and Local Government Journal* 26 June 1929:15); and major extensions to the Riverine

Club, Wagga Wagga (*Daily Advertiser* 21 September 1929:9). A notice in the Canberra Times in 1930, announced that the partnership had been dissolved by mutual consent on the 29 December 1929 (*Canberra Times* 10 February 1930:3).

Joseph Plottel, the most well-known of the partners, was born in Yorkshire in 1883. Plottel received his architectural training in London before moving to South Africa in 1903. In 1906, Plottel moved to Melbourne and worked for the railways, then in the office of Nahum Barnett before opening his own office in 1911. Plottel produced designs for a range of building types, including industrial, residential and commercial. His architectural style combined a Mediterranean influence with Moderne aesthetics. Plottel's works include the St Kilda Synagogue (1926) and the Beehive Building, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne (1935) (Grow 2012:545).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The 10-storey Victoria Club building is situated between two buildings of a similar height and serviced by Michael Lane at the rear. The building was originally constructed as three storeys, with the final seven storeys added by the same architects but to a more restrained post war design. Queen Street was undergoing significant transformation in the 1950s and the Victoria Club was one of three buildings on the street being extended to the height limit applicable at the time of its construction in 1927.

The Victoria Club is designed in the interwar neo-classical style with three entrances; a central bay slightly projecting from each side that has its own entrance to the street and two symmetrically spaced side entrances. Interestingly the two side entrances are designed differently, one in grey granite and one in red. Both feature moulded door surrounds with the red entrance also including an entablature above the doorway and a combination of scrolled and egg and dart stone carving. The double timber doors feature a medallion motif.

The first three storeys are highly modelled and are composed of a base of granite with windows lighting a half basement. Entrances are located in the centre and to each side of the frontage with a half flight of stairs leading to the lofty space of the first-floor chamber (Figure 9). The exceptionally tall proportions of this room form a 'piano nobile' or principal first floor and have five floor to ceiling windows across the front. These are set within deep reveals of decorative moulded stucco with columns between. Above this floor is a full-length Italianate-style balconette opening from the first-floor board room. This floor has a repeating series of arch headed openings with blind arches decorated with a wreath motif. Windows and doors are multipaned as are the those of the floor below. Above the first three floors are seven floors of plain stucco facing and regular plain windows in contrast to the decorative floors below. A small cornice crowns the flat roof, now with landscaping and converted to a roof top bar.

The interior decoration noted in contemporaneous media described the use of freestone walls, oak panelling and the chosen colour scheme of cerulean blue, gold and vermillion, as unusual decorative features. Paint schemes still appear to reflect some of this detail in the way in which plaster detail is picked out. The barrel-vaulted lobby retains its decorative plaster ceiling, the ground floor chamber its ceiling and moulded column capitals, and the boardroom has a highly decorative geometric medallion ceiling.



Figure 9. First floor board room with decorative ceiling. (Source: Melbourne Heritage Action)



Figure 10. Ground level chamber ceiling and column detail ceiling. (Source: Melbourne Heritage Action)



Figure 11. Entry with decorative plaster vaulted ceiling. (Source: Melbourne Heritage Action)

INTEGRITY

The Victoria Club building, completed in two stages – 1927 and 1956 – represents the culmination of the work of a single firm of architects over a 30 year period. Internally the main spaces have retained much of their original form and decorative elements. Overall the Victoria Club retains a high degree of integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The tradition of private member clubs from the nineteenth century such as the Melbourne, Australian, Naval and Military, Savage and Kelvin Clubs flourished in the early years of the twentieth century, particularly expanding the opportunities for women to enjoy the same benefits of a club as men had long enjoyed. Other specialist clubs such as RACV and Tattersall's also invested in city real estate and build social and accommodation facilities for their members.

The images and descriptions are provided by CoM Maps unless stated otherwise, with images dating from c2000 or later.

Curtin House, 248-258 Swanston Street, 1922 (Significant in HO507 Little Bourke Street precinct)

Curtin House, in the Little Bourke Street precinct originally known as the Tattersall's Club is a seven-storey building of 1922. It includes the interior of the Tattersall's Club on the first floor with original columns and a coffered ceiling. The exterior is a fine example of the interwar classical style with a balconette across the entire frontage on the sixth floor.



Figure 12. Curtin House, 248-258 Swanston Street, formerly the Tattersall's Club constructed 1922.

The Alexandra Club, 81 Collins Street, 1934 (HO568, Significant in HO504 Collins Street East precinct)

The Alexandra Club was designed by Anketell & K Henderson in 1937. It features a neo-Georgian brick façade of five storeys. The interior retains its' 1930s design in decorative columns and coffered ceiling, concierge's cabin and lift lobby.



Figure 13. 81 Collins Street, Alexandra Club constructed 1934.

Athenaeum Club, 83 Collins Street, 1929 (HO568, Significant in HO504 Collins Street East precinct)

The Athenaeum Club is a six-storey brick and stucco building designed by Cedric Ballantyne in 1929.



Figure 14. Athenaeum Club, 79 Collins Street constructed 1929.

The three examples above are typologically quite similar to the Victoria Club in their scale and form and use. All employ aspects of the interwar architectural vocabulary of either neo-Classical or neo-Georgian design. The Victoria Club, a product of two different eras, was completed in the postwar era in an austere fashion resulting in a less elaborate overall design than that originally proposed. The Athenaeum, Tattersall's and the Alexandra clubs all represent a more united composition than the Victoria Club building. Tattersall's retains a significant interior as does the Victoria. Each club, including the Victoria, makes a significant contribution to the understanding of use and enjoyment of the city and its urban form.

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

The interior space or spaces of this place have been assessed as significant. Further comparative work on interiors in a future stage of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review will inform whether interior controls for this place may be applied.

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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**

Ungraded

**Central City Heritage
Review 2011**

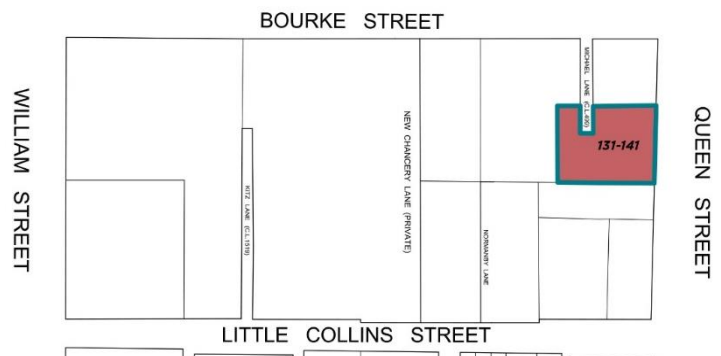
Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Victoria Club building



PS ref no: Interim HO1258



What is significant?

The former Victoria Club at 131-141 Queen Street, built as a three-storey building in 1927 and extended in 1956 with an additional seven storeys.

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;
- The original pattern and size of fenestration; arch head openings and blind arches
- The entrance door surrounds, entablature, scrolled egg and dart stone relief, double timber doors with medallion motif;
- The granite cladding, balconette, columns, wreath motifs and cornice on the Queen Street elevation; and
- Original decorative interior features in the barrel-vaulted lobby, the ground floor chamber, and the boardroom.

Any later alterations are not significant.

How it is significant?

131-141 Queen Street is of local historic, representative, aesthetic and associative significance.

Why it is significant?

Historically the Victoria Club demonstrates the tradition of private member clubs in the central city. 131-141 Queen Street is of historic significance for its association with the Victoria Club and with the history of horse racing in Victoria. The Victoria Club, founded in 1880 by a group of bookmakers who split away from Tattersalls Subscription Betting Rooms, was set up for the purpose of calling cards and settling bets. A seven-storey addition to the building in 1956 demonstrates the growth of the club after World War Two. 131-141 Queen Street is of historical significance as the clubrooms, from 1927 to 1986, of one of the earliest and longest running clubs in the state. It is of historical significance as the location in 1976 of the 'great bookie robbery', an event which attracted widespread public attention and ultimately contributed to the demise of the Victoria Club. (Criterion A)

131-141 Queen Street is a notable example of interwar neo-Classicism. This is evident in the highly elaborate first three levels that are articulated through manipulating floor to ceiling heights and giving importance to the first floor in the form of a 'piano nobile'. The building also demonstrates the practice of extending low rise buildings of two or three storeys to meet the 40-metre height limit, once this became possible in the 1950s. (Criterion D)

The Victoria Club is aesthetically significant for its exterior and interior to the extent of its 1920s features designed by Joseph Plottel, Ernest Bunett & George Alsop. Attributes of aesthetic significance include the first three floors as expressed on the exterior and the interior spaces of the entrance with its barrel-vaulted ceiling, ground floor chamber and first floor board room. The granite half basement and grey and red granite surrounds to the entrance doorways are highly decorative as are the timber double doors to the northernmost entrance. Other attributes include the windows, doors and balconette to the Queen Street elevation. (Criterion E)

The Victoria Club Building is of significance for its long association with the Victoria Club, an organisation established by and for bookmakers, and an important part of Victoria's racing history. The Victoria Club building was designed for and built by the Victoria Club and was 'home' to club members – bookmakers – for nearly 60 years; it was their first permanent clubrooms and the location of the event that brought them notoriety, and that may have ultimately impacted the ability of the club to survive. (Criterion H)

Primary source

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