

Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Part 3, Division 7 of the *Heritage Act 2017*

Name	Robur Tea Building
Location	28 Clarendon Street Southbank, City of Melbourne
Date Registered	5 May 1982
VHR Number	VHR H0526
VHR Categor(ies)	Heritage Place
Hermes Number	1037



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE HERITAGE COUNCIL:

To amend the existing registration of VHR H0526 in accordance with s.62 of the *Heritage Act 2017* by adding land.

Reasons for the proposed amendment

The registration of the Robur Tea Building, which was gazetted in 1982 in the Historic Buildings Register, requires updating. At that time no land was able to be registered under the Historic Buildings Act. Only buildings are included in early registrations, not the land on which they sit or an appropriate curtilage. Places registered since that time include both buildings and land. Early registrations are currently being updated to reflect this change.

Under s.49(1)(d) of the *Heritage Act 2017* the Heritage Council may include additional land to registered places.

The existing registration documentation is provided at Attachment 1 of this report.

STEVEN AVERY

Acting Executive Director

Recommendation Date: 17 November 2017

AMENDMENT BACKGROUND

An application to amend this registration by adding land was made by the Executive Director on 9 November 2017. The application was prompted by a concern to provide clarity around this registration in the context of proposed works on the land around the Robur Tea Building. This building was gazetted in 1982 in the Historic Buildings Register and that time no land was able to be registered under the *Historic Buildings Act*. The Robur Tea Building registration only includes the building, not the land on which it sits or an appropriate curtilage. Early VHR registrations are currently being updated by adding land.

Under s.49(1)(d) of the *Heritage Act 2017* the Heritage Council may include additional land to registered places.

CURRENT EXTENT OF REGISTRATION

Historic Building No.526 - Robur Tea Building, 10 Clarendon Street, South Melbourne.
[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. 43 5 May 1982 p.1284]

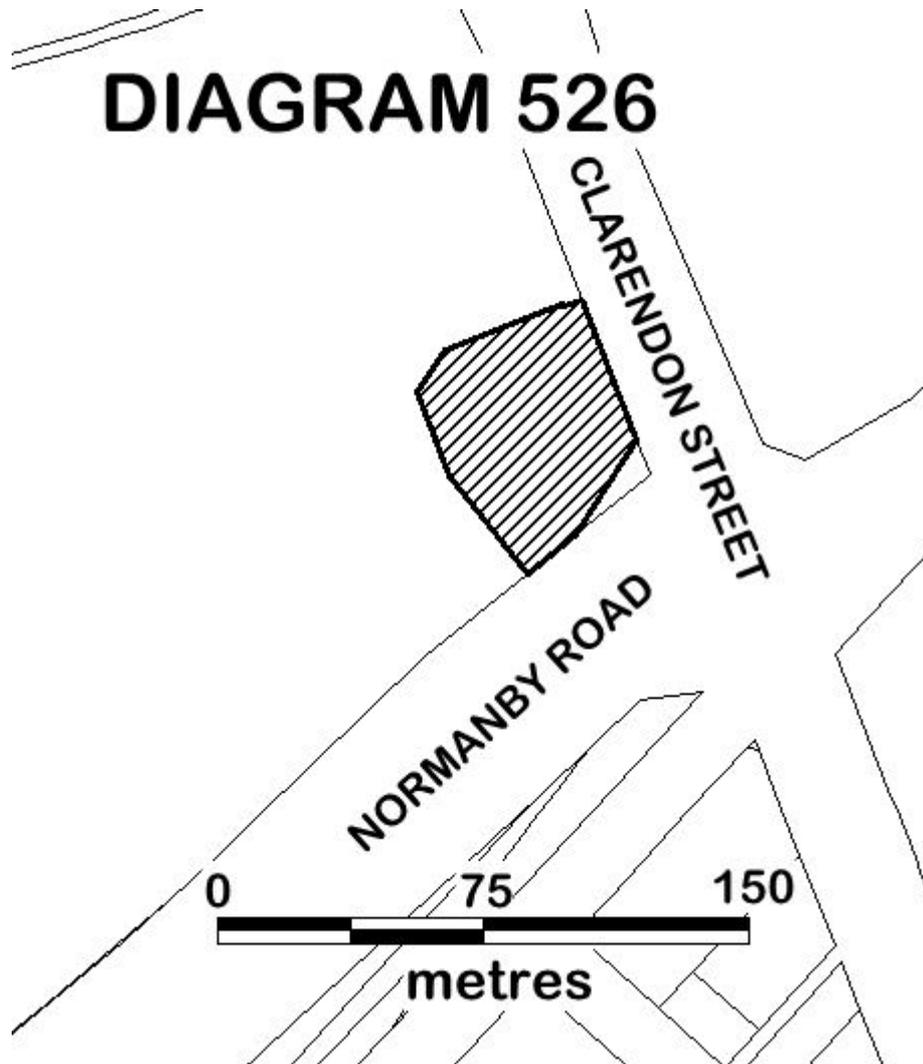
No extent diagram accompanies this registration.

CATEGORY OF REGISTRATION

Heritage Place. No change.

RECOMMENDED EXTENT OF REGISTRATION

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 526 encompassing all of Crown Allotment 2179 City of South Melbourne, Parish of Melbourne South.



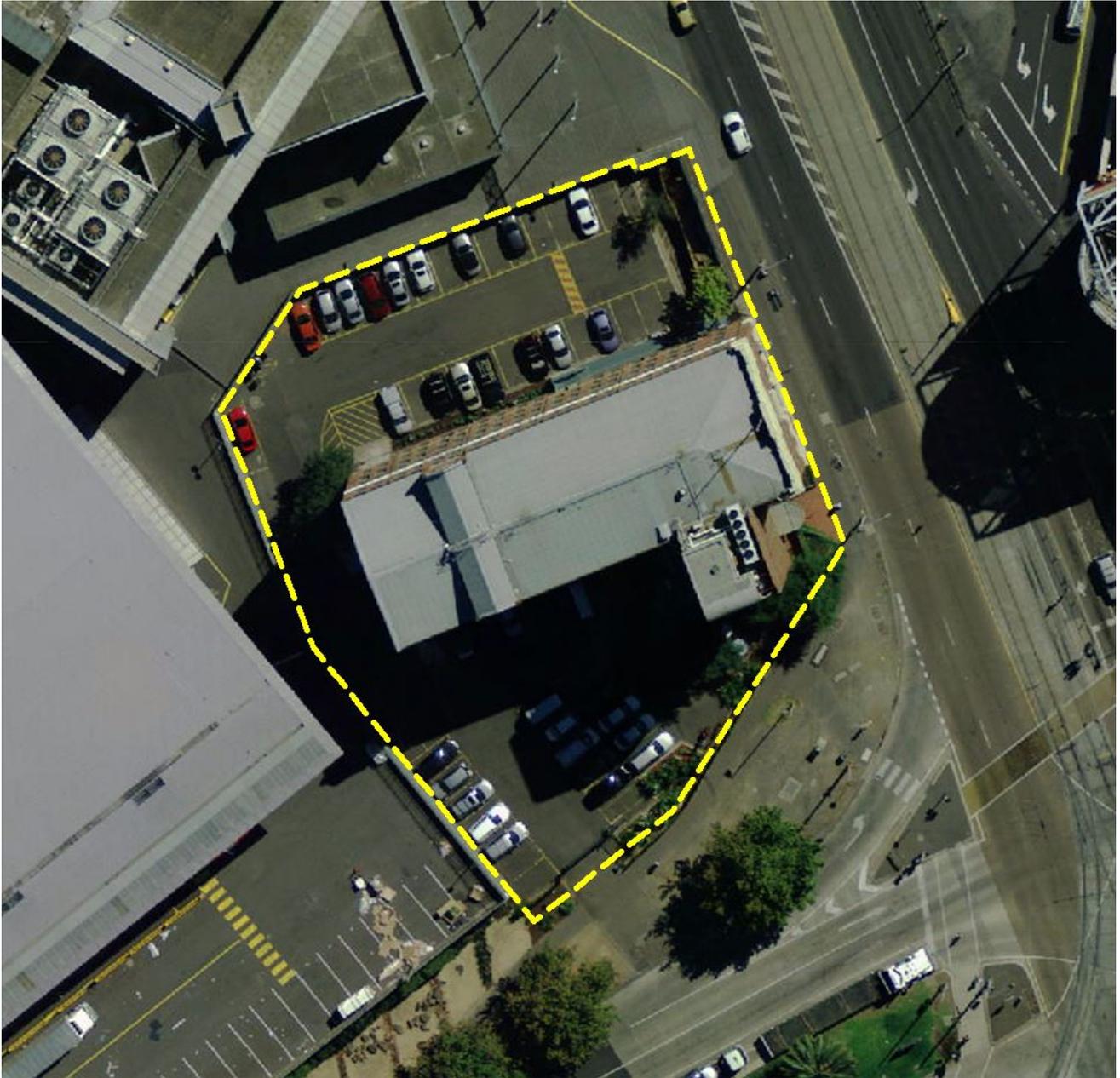
The extent of registration of place or object name in the Victorian Heritage Register affects the whole place shown on Diagram 526 including the land, all buildings (including the exteriors and interiors), landscape elements and other features.

The recommended extent is the same as the nominated extent.

RATIONALE FOR EXTENT

The land proposed for registration is the cadastral parcel on which the building stands. It is the view of the Executive Director that this area of land will provide an appropriate curtilage and setting, and will allow the place, being a prominent corner landmark, to be clearly read and understood.

AERIAL PHOTO OF THE PLACE SHOWING PROPOSED REGISTRATION



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RECOMMENDATION REASONS

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDING THE INCLUSION OF ADDITIONAL LAND IN THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER

The Executive Director recommends that the Heritage Council amend the registration of the Robur Tea Building in accordance with s.62 of the *Heritage Act 2017*. The architectural, historical and technical cultural heritage significance of the Robur Tea Building has been recognised by its inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H0526).

The Statement of Significance observes that the Robur Tea Building is a noted work of Nahum Barnet, a prominent architect working in the four decades that saw Melbourne emerge from the 1890s depression and flourish during the Edwardian period. It is one of the finest and most prominent examples of a nineteenth century warehouse in Melbourne. It was for many years one of the tallest buildings outside the CBD, its height and freestanding character making it a South Melbourne landmark even today.

The Robur Tea Building is one of the few remaining traces of the industrial and warehousing establishments that until the 1970s and 1980s dominated the south bank of the Yarra, in an area where swampy land made substantial building difficult and residential development unattractive. This former industrial area has now been 'swamped' by leisure and luxury apartment developments.

While the Robur Tea Building has been known for some time as the 'Tea House', it was originally constructed as a stationer's warehouse and factory, and is now one of the few remaining factory buildings in the city. Its later use as a tea warehouse also serves as a reminder that this part of the river bank was once a thriving wharf area, before bigger ships and changed cargo handling methods led to the construction of larger capacity port facilities further towards the mouth of the Yarra.

This is an early listing (1982) and only the building, not land is included in the registration. The Executive Director recommends that the Heritage Council add land to this registration in accordance with s. 49(1)(d) *Heritage Act 2017* on the grounds that the land underneath and surrounding the building should be included in the registration to 1) provide a curtilage, 2) protect the setting and 3) enable control over development on the land in proximity to the registered building thereby protecting the cultural heritage values of the place.

It is recommended that the cadastral block – defined as all of Crown Allotment 2179 City of South Melbourne, Parish of Melbourne South – be included as part of the registration of the place.

ATTACHMENT 1

EXISTING REGISTRATION DETAILS

TO BE SUPERSEDED BY THE FOREGOING RECOMMENDATION

EXISTING CATEGORY OF REGISTRATION

Heritage place

EXISTING EXTENT OF REGISTRATION

Historic Building No.526 - Robur Tea Building, 10 Clarendon Street, South Melbourne.

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. 43 5 May 1982 p.1284]

No extent diagram accompanies this registration.

EXISTING STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

The Robur Tea Building is named after one of its better known occupants, but it was in fact built between 1887 and 1888 as a warehouse for Fergus and Mitchell, manufacturing stationers. The architect was Nahum Barnet, the engineer John Grainger and the builder James Moore. The building is constructed of load-bearing red brick and provides six above ground floors which are separated by cream brick courses. The largely unadorned walls are amply supplied with windows. The timber floors are supported by cast iron columns and steel beams. The building is a simple box shape with ornamentation confined to a rendered central entrance surround on the east facade which is reflected by an arched balcony the height of the top two floors.

How is it significant?

The Robur Tea Building is of scientific (technical), architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Robur Tea Building is of scientific (technical) significance because of several innovative techniques employed in its construction. The most notable feature of the building is the solution to the problem of foundations. The building was erected on a swampy site and initial advice to the owners was that a building of the size proposed was not feasible. The engineer John Grainger was engaged and he devised a system of 450 ironbark piles and concrete rafts to support the six storey structure. It was a remarkable solution and no directly comparable buildings exist because such difficult foundations were not tackled again until after WWI. Another innovation was the use of steel beams supporting the floors, one of the earliest uses of such technology in Victoria. These innovations are a tribute to John Grainger, architect and engineer, who, in partnership with several reputed architects, contributed to such noted structures as Princes Bridge, the swing bridge over the La Trobe River at Sale, the administration block of the Melbourne Town Hall, Elizabeth House and Collins House and the conversion of Cliveden Mansions, East Melbourne.

The Robur Tea Building is of architectural significance as one of the finest and most prominent examples of a 19th century warehouse in Melbourne. It was for many years one of the tallest buildings outside the CBD, its height and freestanding character making it a South Melbourne landmark even today. The functional requirements of a warehouse are clearly evident in its simple box-like shape, but a certain amount of pride is expressed in the restrained decoration of the eastern facade.

The Robur Tea Building is of architectural significance as a noted work of Nahum Barnet. Barnet was a most prominent architect in the four decades that saw Melbourne emerge from the 1890s depression and flourish during the Edwardian period. Certain architectural details indicate that this building was seminal in Barnet's development as an architect. In particular the central arched motif links the six storeys of the facade, a detail that became a major element in his central city buildings. Buildings such as the Auditorium Building, Paton

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Building and the Davison Building at the corner of Collins Street and Elizabeth Street are typical of his city buildings. Barnett's practice was extensive, however, and included such buildings as the Villa Chandos in East Melbourne, the Florida Mansions in St Kilda and the Toorak Road Synagogue.

The Robur Tea Building is of historical significance as a reminder of the character and location of 19th century commerce in Melbourne. The Tea building is one of the few remaining traces of the industrial and warehousing establishments that until the 1970s and 1980s dominated the south bank of the Yarra, in an area where swampy land made substantial building difficult and residential development unattractive. These older uses have now been 'swamped' in their turn by leisure and luxury apartment developments. While the building has been known for some time as the Tea House, it is worth remembering that it was originally constructed as a stationer's warehouse and factory, and is now one of the few remaining factory buildings in the centre of the city. Its later use as a tea warehouse also serves as a reminder that this part of the river bank was once a thriving wharf area, before bigger ships and changed cargo handling methods led to the construction of larger capacity port facilities further towards the mouth of the Yarra.

EXISTING PERMIT POLICY

None.

EXISTING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS

The introduction of or alteration to office partitioning provided that such works are not attached to any original fabric, except where the attachment occurs through structurally sound mortar joints.