

# ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE HERITAGE COUNCIL



**NAME:** Former Oriental Hotel  
**LOCATION:** 57 Nelson Place, Williamstown  
**FILE:** 13/006734, 13/009883  
**HERMES NUMBER:** 195688



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE HERITAGE COUNCIL:

- That the place NOT be included in the Victorian Heritage Register under Section 32 (1)(b) of the *Heritage Act 1995*.

**Recommendation Date:** 21 February 2014

## EXTENT OF NOMINATION

The nomination received was for the place known as the former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown.

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION

### *History Summary*

The former Oriental Hotel was built as the Cox's Family Hotel in the busy commercial centre of Williamstown, almost twenty years after Point Gellibrand (on the west side of Hobson's Bay) became the disembarkation point for migrants and stock from Van Diemen's Land in 1835. After the declaration of the Port Phillip District in 1836 the township of Williamstown was laid out simultaneously with the township of Melbourne. The first land sales took place at both locations in June 1837. The availability of deep water resulted in Williamstown developing as the first port of Melbourne rather than the main settlement, and the development of the town was directly linked to this important role from the late 1830s. Early buildings were most commonly associated with shipping or catering for both crew and the large number of migrants arriving in Melbourne. The need for temporary accommodation and refreshment for new arrivals and those living and working in the busy port town resulted in the construction of many hotels in Williamstown from the 1830s onwards – none survives from the 1830s and 1840s. A large number of hotels were constructed during the prosperous 1850s including Cox's Family Hotel (later the Oriental Hotel). Built in 1854, it was located in Nelson Place, directly opposite a second Government Pier constructed in 1853. Renamed the Barkly Arms Hotel in 1857, it was described the following year as a 15 room brick building with two adjoining cottages in Ann Street. Known as the Oriental Hotel by 1881, this building suffered fire damage in 1886 and changes may have been made to the building at this time. Further internal changes took place in 1891. Between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, alterations were made to the exterior of the hotel. Renovations again occurred in 1989 and the hotel was closed in 1990 and has been unoccupied since.

### *Description Summary*

The main building of the former Oriental Hotel is a simple Georgian style three storey rendered brick structure. Situated on a corner site, the parapeted building is almost square in plan. Unlike most corner hotels, it does not have a splayed corner or a corner entrance. A cellar is located under the north-west corner of the building. Facades are unadorned and contain regularly spaced rectangular window openings. A substantial cornice and pediments were removed from the facades in the late 1920s/early 1930s and small projections were added to the corners of the remaining parapet. Projecting window hoods were also added to the facades. A single storey wing runs south along Ann Street, replacing an earlier single storey wing. A verandah has been added to both facades in more recent years and an adjoining bottle shop was constructed in Nelson Place in the 1970s.

## RECOMMENDATION REASON

### **REASON FOR NOT RECOMMENDING INCLUSION IN THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER**

The former Oriental Hotel has historical and architectural significance at a local level but does not have sufficient cultural heritage value at a state level to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register.

The former Oriental Hotel has local historical significance as one of a group of six remaining corner hotels in Williamstown erected during the gold rush period (1850s-60s) when the settlement on the west side of Hobson's Bay became firmly established. Three of these, including the former Oriental Hotel, are located

near Nelson Place, the original commercial centre of Williamstown. The former Oriental Hotel was the first of these hotels to be built by three years.

The former Oriental Hotel, while unusual for being a hotel of three storeys in Williamstown, is an architecturally undistinguished building. It demonstrates the principal characteristics of a gold rush era corner hotel, however many of this type were constructed in Victoria in the 1850s and early 1860s reflecting the impact of the gold rushes across the state. A large number of these are extant and many demonstrate the characteristics more clearly than the former Oriental Hotel, which has been significantly altered. At least ten 2-storey corner hotels and four 3-storey corner hotels from this period are included in the Victorian Heritage Register. These include a group of three 3-storey hotels built at a similar time in Geelong, which are largely intact externally and are of greater architectural interest than the former Oriental Hotel. As at Williamstown, these hotels are also associated with a port, however their more sophisticated design better reflects the prosperity of the Victorian gold rushes.

Five other hotels remain in Williamstown from the gold rush period. These are in better condition than the former Oriental Hotel and are able to demonstrate at least as well the form and function of a hotel of this period. None of these is included in the Victorian Heritage Register but warrant assessment in the future.

### **Summary**

The Executive Director, Heritage Victoria, finds that the Oriental Hotel does not meet the Heritage Council criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register as a place of state level significance, but that it is of local heritage significance representing the class of item and demonstrating the development of the period.

## RELEVANT INFORMATION

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY**      HOBSONS BAY

### HERITAGE LISTING INFORMATION

**Heritage Overlay:**                      Yes                      **HO Number:**      HO211

**Heritage Overlay Controls:**

External Paint	Yes
Internal Alteration	No
Tree	No

### HISTORY

#### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

##### *Development of Williamstown*

The townships of Melbourne and Williamstown were surveyed after the Port Phillip District of New South Wales was declared in 1836, however Point Gellibrand had already become the disembarkation point for immigrants and their stock from Van Diemen's Land from late 1835. William Lonsdale arrived to take charge of the new district in 1836 and considered both the banks of the Yarra River, with its fresh water supply, and the western shore of Hobson's Bay, with its available deep water, as potential settlement locations. The former was selected as the location of the major settlement of Melbourne, however settlements were laid out in both these locations in the following year.

Like Lonsdale, Governor Bourke was impressed with the location at Point Gellibrand when he visited Port Phillip in 1837 and he directed Surveyor Hoddle to immediately survey the whole peninsula. Named by Governor Bourke, the township of Williams Town was surveyed at Point Gellibrand that year and comprised four blocks of land fronting Nelson Place, including Section 1 between Ann Street and the present Kanowna Street. Hoddle used a grid subdivision pattern with streets similar in width to those of Melbourne and included one service street in the same manner as the secondary streets included in the design of the Melbourne grid. The first land sales were held in June 1837, on the same day as the first land sales in Melbourne.

Williamstown developed as the first major port of Port Philip for both passengers and cargo and the first substantial jetty in the district was constructed there in February 1839. The difficulty of navigating the Yarra River and the shallower water off Port Melbourne resulted in Williamstown handling most of Melbourne's shipping through the 1840s, and the development of the town was directly linked with this role. By 1840 the settlement was reported to contain a small number of timber houses, tents, huts, a store, bakery and two hotels.

The arrival of large numbers of migrants resulted in the need for temporary accommodation in the vicinity of the wharf and hotels were of vital importance in Williamstown. Early buildings constructed along Nelson Place were most commonly associated with shipping or catering for both crew and passengers. Early hotels such as the Woolpack Inn, Ship Inn and Albion Hotel provided accommodation and refreshment to both new arrivals and those living and working in the busy settlement. Many of these hotels were also used as public meeting places, court rooms (including for inquests into deaths) and entertainment venues. Twenty-seven hotels were reportedly open by 1860 and Nelson Place remained the commercial centre of Williamstown until the 1880s.

A second pier was constructed at the end of Ann Street in 1853, named the New Pier. The Old Pier was lengthened and a patent slip, customs house and pilot's office were all constructed by 1856. The opening of the railway to Geelong in 1857 increased Williamstown's role in the export of wheat and wool.

The prosperity of the period resulted in the growth of the settlement at Williamstown and by the mid 1850s many of the allotments in the surveyed township were sold. A variety of buildings were constructed in the 1850s, including a number of hotels. Local government came to the district in 1856 when Williamstown was proclaimed a borough and the developing township was linked by rail to Melbourne in 1859. The township continued to develop through the 1860s and 1870s, and was proclaimed a town in 1886.

Williamstown became a centre for ship building and repair as its use as a port declined in the late 1870s, with facilities such as the Alfred Graving Dock and the state ship building yard established in the mid-1870s. This change in function resulted in the commercial centre of the township moving from its original location in Nelson Place further inland to Ferguson Street and Douglas Parade from the 1880s.

For many years Williamstown's industrial development was essentially associated with maritime activities however other industries also commenced operation. The main railway workshops of the Victorian Railway Department were established at the end of Nelson Place in 1856 and other industries included the Alfred Woollen Mills, Melbourne Glass Bottle Works and the Australian Forge and Engineering Company. The portion of land bounded by Nelson Place, Ann Street, Cecil Street and Morris Street (later Kanowna Street) remained largely vacant into the early 20th century. Some industrial development occurred in Morris Street, including a chemical factory (c1906) and the James Seymour & Co Pty Ltd Woollen Mills which were established in the 1930s and expanded over the next 30 years to occupy a large portion of this land. The mill operated under the name of the Port Phillip Woollen Mills in the later part of the 20th century.

Industry in Williamstown has decreased markedly since this time. The opening of the Westgate Bridge in 1978 provided easier access to Williamstown from Melbourne and as a result it has become a largely residential suburb.

### *Hotels*

The first Melbourne hotel licences were issued in 1837 and by the end of the following year eighteen hotels had been established in Melbourne. Hotels were important establishments, often one of the first public buildings in a community, and were usually built in prominent positions to attract patronage. This was often on corner sites on main roads. In port towns such as Williamstown, hotels were built near the waterfront to provide accommodation for passengers and meals, refreshment and entertainment for port workers. This is illustrated clearly in the 1908 MMBW Detail Plan of the four early town blocks in Williamstown which shows ten hotels in this area alone.

Hotels were also used for other purposes in the early years of Victoria's development, before more appropriate buildings had been erected. This included municipal council meetings, court proceedings and church meetings. They have also provided venues for private functions and public events such as political meetings, theatre, dances and various sports.

In an attempt to limit the adverse effects of drinking, licensing laws were introduced to impose minimum standards and to reduce the number of hotels in areas. Minimum size standards were introduced in 1875 and the number of permissible hotels operating within areas was reduced in 1907. A number of hotels were closed at this time by the Licenses Reduction Board, including a number in Williamstown.

## HISTORY OF PLACE

The former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown is situated in Nelson Place near the shore of Hobsons Bay. The allotment was sold at auction to Benjamin Skelton, boatman, for 23 pounds 15 shillings, at the third sale of town land on 27 June 1849. It was allotment 8 of Section 1 in the Parish of Cut Paw Paw and comprised approximately 0.2 hectares (almost a quarter acre).

On Skelton's death in 1853, probate was granted to his wife Sarah, who married Henry Cox immediately after her husband's death. It appears that they mortgaged this land and then entered into an agreement to erect a hotel or house on the land in April 1854 (Register Book, Titles Office). The site was an ideal location

for a hotel as it was directly opposite the New Pier constructed in 1853, east of what became the Old Pier, and near the proposed Patent Slip.

An advertisement appeared in the *Argus* in September 1854 for a 'good female cook wanted for Cox's Hotel', indicating that a hotel had been constructed by this time. This is confirmed by a lithograph titled 'Williamstown Hobson's Bay, 1854' which shows the hotel. In October an inquest was reported as being held at Cox's Family Hotel in Williamstown. This was followed by other inquests held at the hotel, with the last held in what was called the Cox's Family Hotel in January 1856. The hotel building was therefore possibly used as a morgue before one was constructed at Williamstown in 1859.

In October 1855 an advertisement appeared in the *Argus* for the auction of the whole of the contents of the Cox's Family Hotel including stock, furniture, fixtures and effects. It would appear that Henry and Sarah Cox were experiencing financial difficulties and this was confirmed the following year when it appears that Cox was forced to sell land at Brighton.

The hotel was renamed the Barkly Arms Hotel, presumably after the arrival of Sir Henry Barkly who was appointed Governor of Victoria in November 1856. In January 1857 the hotel was still referred to as the Cox's Family Hotel in the *Williamstown Chronicle*, however by May 1857 Joseph Soden was granted the licence to the Barkly Arms and by April 1858 Thomas Carroll was noted as the licensee in the *Argus*.

A plan produced in 1858 (the Windsor Plan) shows that the allotment contained a square corner building, a narrow wing to Ann Street and three smaller buildings. In June that year the Barkly Arms and two adjoining cottages were advertised for sale. The advertisement described it as a 'substantially built and commodious hotel [that] occupies the best side in Williamstown for business purposes, being situated at the corner of Ann Street and Nelson Place, opposite the Government Pier and the new Patent Slip. Is doing a first rate business, and is let for £800 per annum.' In the Rate Book of 1858/59 the Barkly Arms is described as a 15 room brick building with Henry Cox listed as the owner of this and two timber dwellings on Ann Street and the occupier of one of these cottages.

In July 1859 Henry and Sarah Cox were sued over the mortgage taken out on the hotel property and Cox was reported as insolvent as a result of legal expenses in October 1860. The Barkly Arms was purchased by John Bogle, partner of Alexander McNaughtan who sued the Coxes, and the hotel subsequently had a succession of publicans. Although there has been reference to the hotel being destroyed by fire c1870, there has been no primary evidence to support this claim. In fact rate books consistently describe the hotel as being a brick 16 roomed building from the late 1850s through to 1886/87.

By 1881 the hotel was known as the Oriental Hotel with Richard Murphy as its licensee, and his wife Bridget continued to be associated with the hotel for many years. She and her first husband took over the Barkly Arms in c1867 and Bridget was noted at her death in 1894 as having conducted the hotel for 16 years, retiring from business in 1883.

In December 1886 the Oriental Hotel suffered damage from a fire which destroyed the adjoining restaurant and bakery in Nelson Place. It was reported in the *Williamstown Chronicle* that it was saved from total destruction but sustained damage. Rate books show that between 1886/87 and 1887/88 the hotel went from being a 16 room brick hotel to a 22 room brick hotel, which may reflect changes made following the fire. In 1891 the hotel underwent renovations as reported in the *Williamstown Chronicle*. These were largely internal works.

Between 1925 and 1933 the appearance of the Oriental Hotel changed significantly with the removal of a substantial cornice and pediments. Small projections were introduced at the corners of the remaining parapet and projecting window hoods were also added to the facades. The Rate Book description remained unchanged although the number of rooms was reduced to 19.

A drive-in bottle shop on Nelson Place was constructed in the 1970s and in 1989 the hotel was renovated and renamed Willy Tavern. It closed the following year and since 2005 the hotel has been owned by Nelson Place Village Pty Ltd.

## **VICTORIAN HISTORICAL THEMES**

### **02 Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes**

2.4 Arriving in a new land

### **03 Connecting Victorians by transport and communications**

3.1 Establishing pathways

### **05 Building Victoria's industries and workforce**

5.6 Entertaining and socialising

## **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

The former Oriental Hotel is a simple Georgian style, three storey rendered brick building with a basalt plinth, which is situated on a corner site at the intersection of Nelson Place and Ann Street. It is nearly square in plan and, unlike many corner hotels, does not have a splayed corner or a corner entrance. A cellar is located under the north-west corner of the building. It has a single storey wing which runs south from the building along Ann Street and replaces an earlier single storey wing.

The facades of the building are plain. Early cornices and pediments have been removed from both facades and the remaining parapet has small corner projections. Projecting window hoods have been inserted above openings. The window openings are rectangular with projecting sills and are regularly spaced in the street facades. Multiple entries provide access to the hotel at street level from both street frontages. Most openings at all levels and on both facades appear to be original. An original entry, close to the corner in Ann Street, has been converted to a window and the original ground floor window at the end of the Ann Street facade was converted to a door opening then more recently bricked in. A second storey window opening in the east facade also appears to be original and retains its multi-paned sashes.

## **INTEGRITY/INTACTNESS (as at February 2014)**

The form of the three storey corner hotel building is substantially intact from its construction in 1854. The window openings of the upper two levels remain, however changes have been made to openings at street level. Some alterations have been made to the facade in an attempt to modernise the building in the early twentieth century. The original cornice and pediments of the upper facade have been removed and replaced with corner projections, and projecting hoods have been added above openings.

The single storey wing in Ann Street is a later addition. It replaced an earlier single storey building which is evident in early photographs and the original form of this is indicated by a shadow line on the south side of the three storey building. A single storey verandah has been added to the north and west elevations of the building in more recent years.

## **CONDITION (as at February 2014)**

The building is in very poor condition both externally and internally. Due to safety concerns, the interior of the former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown has not been accessed in the preparation of this assessment report. However detailed engineering reports have been undertaken and these indicate that the building has suffered deterioration particularly in the walls with leans, bulges and cracking all easily identifiable. In addition water ingress (both falling damp and lateral damp) has affected finishes and internal structure.

## COMPARISONS

### Hotels in Williamstown

A large number of hotels were built in Williamstown in the decades after the settlement was established in the late 1830s. More permanent structures were constructed during Williamstown's establishment phase of the 1850s and 1860s, and of these, the earliest extant example is the former Oriental Hotel which was constructed in 1854. At least five hotels which were constructed in Williamstown in the next decade are extant.

These are:

- Former Prince of Wales, 1 Nelson Place (c1857)
- Former Napier Hotel, 50 Stevedore Street (1858)
- Former Alfred Hotel, 92 Stevedore Street (1859-60)
- Former Telegraph Hotel, 17 Ann Street (1862)
- Steam Packet Hotel, Cole Street (1862-63)

These hotels are all of two storeys, are located on corner sites and have splayed corners typical of the period. None are included in the Victorian Heritage Register.



Former Prince of Wales Hotel, c1857



Former Napier Hotel, 1858



Former Alfred Hotel, 1859-60



Former Telegraph Hotel, 1862



Steam Packet Hotel, 1862-63



Bridge Hotel (VHR H1792), 1868

Another extant hotel in Williamstown is the two storey timber Bridge Hotel which was built in Thompson Street in 1868. This is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H1792) as an extremely rare surviving two storey timber mid-nineteenth century hotel in Victoria.

These hotels all display similar characteristics to the Oriental Hotel. They are in better condition and are able to demonstrate at least as well the form and function of a hotel of this period.

### Three storey hotels in Victoria from the 1850s

The construction of three storey hotels in Victoria in the 1850s was less common than single or two storey hotels. A small number of three storey hotels remain extant, including three in Geelong and one in Fitzroy which are included in the Victorian Heritage Register.

The Geelong examples are:

- Bay View Hotel, 2-4 Mercer Street, Geelong (VHR H1159, 1853-54)
- Former Terminus Hotel, 96 Mercer Street, Geelong (VHR H1162, 1853-54)
- Former Golden Age Hotel, 2-4 Gheringhap Street, Geelong (VHR H1161, 1854)

All are significant as sophisticated and ambitious architectural designs from the gold rush period and are highly intact in form and detail. They are located on corner sites and feature unusual curved, rather than splayed, corners.

The fourth example is the former Eastern Hill Hotel, 77 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy (VHR H0816, c1854-56) which is one of the largest and most intact gold rush hotels to survive in inner Melbourne.



Bay View Hotel, Geelong (VHR H1159)  
1853-54



Former Terminus Hotel, Geelong (VHR H1162)  
1853-54



Former Golden Age Hotel, Geelong (VHR H1161)  
1854



Former Eastern Hill Hotel, Fitzroy (VHR H0816)  
c1854-5

These three storey examples, built at the same time as the Oriental Hotel, Williamstown, are of greater architectural interest than the latter. The three Geelong examples are particularly noteworthy for their distinctive curved corners and detailed facades. Their port location reflects values similar to that of the former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown.

### Two storey hotels in Victoria from the 1850s

There are a number of two storey hotels that survive from the gold rush period in Victoria and at least ten of these are included in the Victorian Heritage Register. They are noted as being of significance as part of a group of gold rush era buildings which survive either in Melbourne or in country Victoria.

Examples in Melbourne:

- Duke of Wellington, Flinders Street (VHR H1175, 1850 with additions 1857 & 1904)
- Former Black Eagle Hotel, Lonsdale Street (VHR H2265, 1850)
- Former Oddfellows Hotel, Little Lonsdale Street (VHR H2266, 1853)
- Former Queens Arms Hotel, South Melbourne (VHR H1827, 1854)
- Grace Darling Hotel, Collingwood (VHR H0660, 1854)



Duke of Wellington, Flinders Street, 1850/57



former Queens Arms Hotel, South Melbourne, 1854

Examples in Victorian towns:

- London Inn, Portland (VHR H0237, 1853 or earlier)
- Former Scottish Chiefs Hotel, Geelong (VHR H0662, 1853 or earlier)
- Former George and Dragon, Geelong (VHR H116, 1855)

- Fyansford Hotel (VHR H0744, 1854)
- Guildford Hotel and Music Hall (VHR H0739, 1855-56)



Fyansford Hotel, 1854



Guildford Hotel and Music Hall, 1855-56

### Conclusion

A large number of hotels remain from the gold rush period to illustrate the typical characteristics of mid-nineteenth century hotels in Victoria and these are well represented in the Victorian Heritage Register. They include single, two and three storey buildings which display such common features such as corner siting, splayed corners, rendered facades, regularly spaced rectangular windows at all levels and either parapeted or eaved roofs. Many of these hotels are more intact than the former Oriental Hotel, Williamstown and therefore demonstrate the form and function of this building type more clearly. Despite the unusual adoption of a three storey hotel building in the 1850s, there are other examples, such as those in Geelong, that are of greater architectural interest than the former Oriental Hotel.

### ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

The former Oriental Hotel is significant for the following reasons, but not at the State level:

The former Oriental Hotel is historically significant at a local level for its association with Melbourne's first major port. As the oldest surviving hotel in Williamstown, the building demonstrates the development of the port during the gold rushes and the importance of Nelson Place as the commercial heart of Williamstown before the 1880s. The hotel forms a group with other corner hotels in the immediate area which date from a similar period. The operation of the hotel for approximately 140 years is of local significance.

The former Oriental Hotel is significant at a local level as a mid-nineteenth century hotel building. Despite some later modifications to the facades, the original corner section of the building remains reasonably intact and demonstrates some typical characteristics of a simple Georgian hotel from this period. These include corner siting and unadorned facades with regularly spaced rectangular openings and a simple parapet (although modified). The building's three storey form, and the lack of a more typical splayed corner, is unusual.

### KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT

Lesley Alves & Associates, 'Heritage Report. Oriental Hotel, Williamstown', June 2012  
 B Haynes, 'The History of the Coxs Family Hotel, Barkly Arms Hotel, Oriental Hotel', 2013  
 VCAT Statements of Evidence: HLCD May 2013  
 Lovell Chen June 2013  
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W Elsum. *The History of Williamstown from its settlement to a city, 1834-1934.*

W P Evans. *Port of Many Prows.* South Melbourne 1993

L Strahan. *At the Edge of the Centre; a History of Williamstown.* North Melbourne 1994

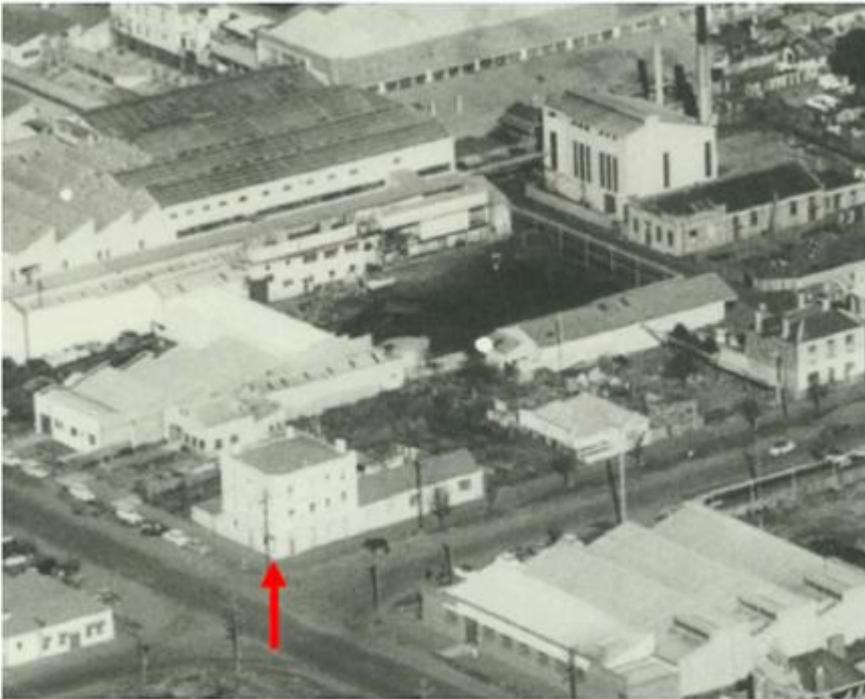
## ADDITIONAL IMAGES



Ann Street elevation, 1904, showing the original parapet and cornice and the early single storey wing (source: *Williamstown Illustrated*)



Detail of a view of Nelson Place, c1870-75, the former Oriental Hotel from the north-east, showing the heavy cornice and pediment that were removed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (source: State Library of NSW)



Photograph from north-west, 1950s (source: SLV)



View of west elevation (Ann Street) from south-west



View of north elevation (Nelson Place) from north-east





Views of the interior (source: Lovell Chen)