

**APPENDIX A Preliminary Heritage Appraisal, April 2012**



The former Oriental Hotel  
55 Nelson Place  
Williamstown



Prepared for  
Nelson Place Village Pty Ltd

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## 1.0 Introduction

This preliminary assessment of the former Oriental Hotel has been commissioned by Nelson Place Village Pty Ltd, the developer of the land known as the Nelson Place Village. The purpose of this report is to provide a preliminary heritage appraisal of the subject site and in particular to comment on proposed demolition.

### 1.1 Location

The former Oriental Hotel is situated on the corner of Ann Street and Nelson Place (Figure 1) with a drive through bottle shop, the entrance being made from Nelson Place with an exist via Ann Street.



Figure 1 Map showing the location of the former Oriental Hotel on the corner of Ann Street and Nelson Place. *Source: Melway online maps.*

## 1.2 Planning controls and policies

### 1.2.1 The former Oriental Hotel

The former Oriental Hotel is identified as HO211 in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme and is of individual local significance as identified by the *Hobsons Bay Heritage Study (2006)*. Further, the building was identified as an E grade building in the *City of Williamstown Conservation Study (1987, revised and republished 1993)*.

#### *Significance*

As identified in the *Hobsons Bay Heritage Study*, prepared in 2006 and amended in 2010, the statement of significance for the Hotel is as follows:

*What is significant?*

The former Oriental or Builders Arms Hotel [Barkly Arms], constructed c. 1871, at 55 Nelson Place, Williamstown.

*How is it significant?*

The former Oriental or Builders Arms Hotel at Nelson Place, Williamstown is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

*Why is it significant?*

Historically, the hotel is significant as one of a number along Nelson Place in proximity to the waterfront, which demonstrates their important role in the early development of the town and the importance of Nelson Place as the commercial heart of Williamstown during the mid to late nineteenth century. It also illustrates how hotels were upgraded following changes to licensing laws during the late nineteenth century, which required hotels to have a certain number of rooms of minimum dimensions to be licensed (AHC criteria A4 and D2).

Aesthetically, although altered, it is significant as a rare example of a three-storey corner hotel that relates to other similarly sited nineteenth hotels in the Nelson Place and Government Survey Heritage Precincts (AHC criteria B2 and E1).

#### *1.2.2 Government Survey Heritage Precinct Heritage Overlay*

The former Oriental Hotel, is also located within the 'Government Survey Heritage Precinct', HO8, which comprises an area bounded by Ferguson Street, Nelson Place, Kanowna Street, Morris Street, Esplanade, Giffard Street and Railway Place.

The statement of significance for HO8, which applies to the entire Nelson Place Village site, except for a single property in Cecil Street, as included in the *Hobsons Bay Heritage Study 2006*, is as follows:

*What is significant?*

The Government Survey Heritage Precinct which comprises all land included within HO8 and places individually listed in the schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the area generally bounded by Ferguson Street, Nelson Place, Kanowna Street, Morris Street, Esplanade, Giffard Street and Railway Place. It does not include land in HO68.

*How is it significant?*

The Government Survey Heritage Precinct is of local historic, social and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

*Why is it significant?*

Historically, the Government Survey precinct demonstrates the most important and prosperous phase in the development of Williamstown from the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, which was directly associated with the development of the port and later, influenced by the development of railways and associated industries. The early settlement of Williamstown and its importance as a port and defence facility also contributes to a broader understanding of the history of Victoria.

Socially, the Government Survey is important for its ability to assist in understanding and interpreting the life style of this isolated and close-knit community during the nineteenth century.

Aesthetically, while there are examples of unrelated postwar development within the precinct, as a whole it retains remarkably intact and cohesive groups of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings that are an integral part of the special character of early Williamstown. Key elements include:

- The distinctive street layout based on a series of intersecting grids, which illustrate prevailing attitudes towards town planning in the nineteenth century.
- Unusual or rare early building styles and types such as the basalt houses and the timber duplex houses with no dividing wall that are characteristic of this part of Williamstown but less common elsewhere in the metropolitan area.
- The major nineteenth century community and civic buildings, many designed by noted Melbourne architects, both individually and in key groups – notably in Electra Street and the former Market Reserve.
- The unifying effect throughout the precinct of groups of predominantly Victorian and Edwardian era houses with common or similar characteristics of design, siting and scale that creates cohesive and homogeneous streetscapes. Many are externally intact and others, although altered, still retain their distinctive form and siting and hence contribute to the precinct.
- The basic nineteenth century or early street construction and the remnant mature exotic street planting found in some streets that combines with exotic planting in private gardens to reinforce and enhance the period expression of the precinct.

Not all of these elements are found in all streets within the precinct. As a consequence, there are a number of distinctive sub-precincts, which include Cecil Street, Electra Street, Esplanade, Hanmer Street, Nelson Place, Osborne Street, Pasco Street and Verdon Street that have individual citations in this Study. There is also an individual citation for Ferguson Street, which forms the northern boundary of the precinct.

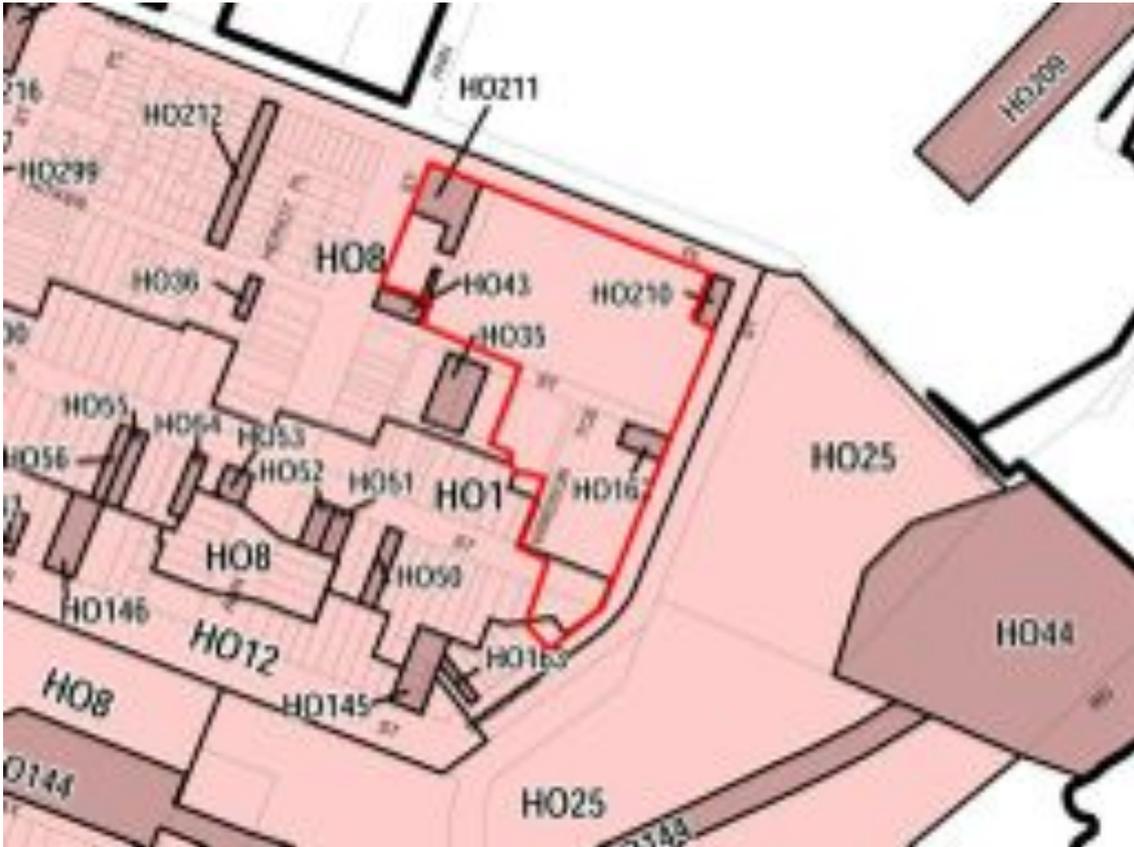


Figure 2 Detail of Heritage Overlay map with the Nelson Place Village site indicated.  
Source: Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme.

### 1.2.3 Planning Panel recommendation

The inclusion of the former Oriental Hotel in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay was addressed by a Planning Panel in the consideration of Amendment C34 to the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme in 2004. Following examination of the issues, the Panel provided the following discussion and recommendation regarding the property:

On the basis of Mr Raworth's evidence and the report by Wallbridge & Gilbert, supported by our own inspection, we have accepted the following as facts:

- The building's condition is extremely poor and, although no evidence was provided as to whether, or at what cost this building could be restored to a safe and habitable condition, the cost would clearly be very substantial. The assessment of this property that is provided in the *Williamstown + Newport Heritage Place Citations* as being in 'good' condition is not accepted. Rather, it should read as 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- The historic, three-storeyed section of building has been substantially altered and its integrity is at best moderate or possibly poor (taking account of the single storeyed extensions). We accept Mr Raworth's conclusion that the building presents as a "Victorian building that is...lacking much of its former detail".

We note that the *Williamstown + Newport Heritage Place Citations* places much importance on the fact that the building is a rare example of a three-storeyed hotel (one of only three in the area) and is situated on a corner site. Other Panels such as Bayside Planning Scheme Amendment

C29 (Part 2) have concluded that it is not appropriate to subdivide a general category of building (eg Victorian multi-storeyed hotels) into a series of sub-categories such as corner/non-corner sites and number of storeys. Most buildings could be defined as rare if their general category is divided into sufficiently small sub categories. We consider it appropriate to adopt a similar view and to assess this building within the larger group of Victorian hotels.

On this basis, we conclude that the building does not meet AHC Criterion B2 – *importance in demonstrating a...distinctive land use, function or design...in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest*. Because of the substantial alterations that have been made to its exterior, we also do not consider that this building satisfied AHC Criterion E1 (*importance for a community for aesthetic characteristics...*). Because of the building's substantial loss of integrity, together with the large number of other hotels along Nelson Place that have much greater historic integrity, we further do not consider that the building satisfies any of the following AHC Criteria:

- A4 – *Importance for association with...developments...which have had a significant role in the human occupation...*
- D2 – *importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of the range of human activities...including way of life...land use, function...*

While we have not taken into account the severe structural deterioration of the building, the submission made by Mr Finanzio in relation to the poor structural condition of No. 94 Morris Street is also applicable here. That is, it is appropriate to consider the net community benefit that would be achieved by requiring the building's restoration and conservation. Again, as in the case of No 94 Morris Street but without having any estimates for the cost of structural restoration of this building (which we expect would be extremely high) we consider that the retention of this building would be an unreasonable impost on the owner. Taking into account the existing loss of the building's architectural integrity, we conclude that it is most unlikely that any net community benefit would be achieved.

#### *Recommendation*

That the building at 55 Nelson Place, Williamstown, is not of local heritage significance and should be removed from the Heritage Overlay HO173 [*sic* – as identified in the Panel Report].

It is noted that whilst the Panel recommended the removal of the Oriental Hotel from the Heritage Overlay, Council chose not to adopt that recommendation and included the Hotel in the Heritage Overlay as an individually identified place.

#### *1.2.4 Heritage Victoria Register*

No part of the former Oriental Hotel is included within the Victorian Heritage Register.

#### *1.2.5 National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Register*

The former Oriental Hotel has not been classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).



Figure 3 The former Oriental Hotel from the Ann Street showing the single storey wing along Ann Street.  
Source: Lovell Chen Architects



Figure 4 The former Oriental Hotel and drive through bottle shop accessible from Nelson Place, Williamstown  
Source: Lovell Chen Architects.

## 2.0 Brief history and description

### 2.1.1 History

The history of the hotel is briefly summarised in the Hobsons Bay Heritage Study Amended 2010.

There has been a hotel on this site since 1856 when the original 'Barkly Arms' was erected - Evans (1969) notes that it was "accused of being a disorderly house in 1860".<sup>1</sup> This hotel was destroyed by fire c.1870 and the present much larger building was erected shortly afterwards. The rate book description by 1870-71 was a 16 room brick hotel with a net annual value of £110. The description remained the same until 1888-89 when the number of rooms increased by 6 and the net annual value had increased to £198.<sup>2</sup>

The upgrading of the hotel in the 1880s followed the introduction of new licensing laws in 1877 that required hotels to have a certain number of rooms of minimum dimensions to be licensed.<sup>3</sup> It was renamed the 'Oriental' in 1881.

Unusually, the hotel remained in family ownership well into the twentieth century at a time when many larger hotels were being acquired by major breweries such as the Carlton and West End company. The Murphy family were long term proprietors during this period.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1.2 Physical description

The former Oriental Hotel is a three and one storey brick structure finished externally in a paint to render and brick. The three storey corner block is approximately square in floor plan and comprises a public bar and associated spaces at ground level, with guest rooms above. A cellar is located in the north-west corner. Facade openings to the street include entry doors accessed from Nelson Place and Ann Street and a combination of fixed display windows and narrower windows with traditional double hung sashes. On the upper levels the facade is punctuated by regularly spaced vertical rectangular window openings which in large part retain timber window frames and sashes. Above the windows on both the first and second floor are shallow projecting lintels with a chamfered outer edge. The age and purpose of these elements is unclear. It is conceivable that they are the remains of a nineteenth century windows surround or alternatively an element introduced in the Inter-war period to modernise the facade appearance. The latter appears more likely as the only early image of the hotel which has been located, albeit blurred, suggests that the window treatment has always been relatively plain (Figure 5).

To the south-west along Ann Street and to the north-east along Nelson Place are single storey wings. The former is visible in the 1904 image of the building which shows a structure with a hip roof and double hung sash windows. Whether the existing wing retains fabric from this earlier structure is unclear, but likely (Figure 5). The Nelson Place wing is a more recent addition. On both street frontages a modern interpretation of a traditional

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1 Evans, *Port of Many Prows*, p.71

2 Williamstown Rate Books 1870-71 (24), 1888-89 (20)

3 Williamstown History Kit 10b Hotels and Breweries

4 Williamstown Rate Books

timber post supported verandah has been erected. There is no obvious evidence to indicate that such a verandah ever existed on the building.

Internally the hotel has a combination of brick and timber framed walls, timber floors laid on timber joists and a combination of solid plaster and lath and plaster linings. Later fibrous plaster and plasterboard linings are also in evidence. The ground floor spaces have been almost entirely stripped of any evidence of the nineteenth century presentation and the guest rooms also evidence progressive modernisation. The main stair appears to be original, but is severely damaged and lacks a balustrade and handrail.

As has been noted in past reports and assessments the condition of the building is extremely poor with evidence of long term water entry and major structural movement. The water entry and resultant timber decay has led to internal collapse of ceilings and floors in the northern portion of the building, down to ground level. In the southern portion the major structural movement has caused the formation of extensive cracking in both external and internal walls. The cause of the movement is unclear, although it may have been contributed to by a large tree located on the south-east side of the site. The cracking is such that the upper levels of the building could be regarded as unstable and unsafe to enter. The condition of the building is a result of long term neglect and is not of recent origins.

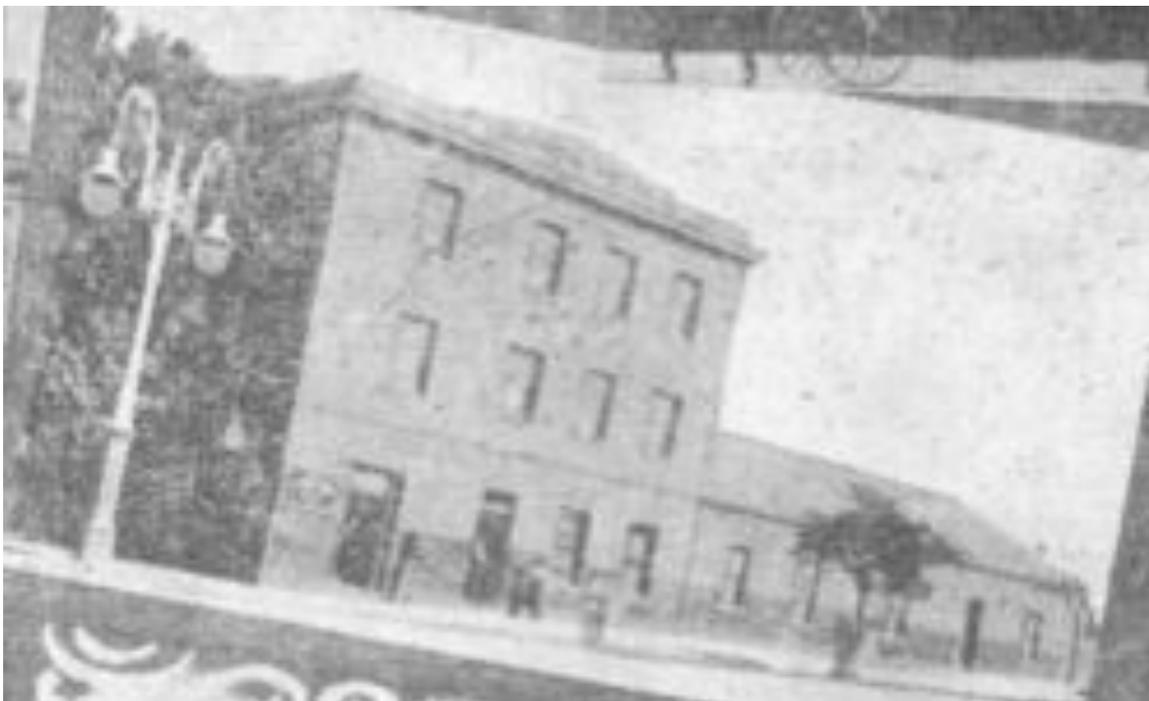


Figure 5: Enlarged image of the former Oriental Hotel c. 1904 showing the corner façade facing onto Ann Street and Nelson Place.  
Source: Williamstown Illustrated.

### **3.0 Preliminary assessment**

The former Oriental Hotel has been identified as a place of local significance based on its historical and aesthetic value. It has also been assessed as a place which in the local context is relatively rare as an example of a three storey hotel dating from the second half of the nineteenth century. Contrasting with this assessment the Planning Panel which considered its individual inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay, under Amendment C34, concluded that it was not of local significance and should not be identified as such. In arriving at its decision, while provided with evidence on the condition of the building, the panel did not rely on

this information in forming a view. The primary consideration appears to be one of integrity and lack of integrity in the surviving fabric.

The conclusion of this preliminary assessment is that the former Oriental Hotel is a building which has over the years undergone a relatively high degree of alteration and modification and is of relatively low physical integrity. It is a building which has an interesting local history, but one which is unlikely to be greatly different from many such places in the area. Under such circumstances its elevation as a place of individual heritage significance would appear to be unwarranted. It is, however, a place which, even in its altered state contributes to an understanding of the development of the related heritage precinct and can be seen as of 'contributory significance' in this context.

Further to the consideration of its significance the building is in a severely degraded state. By way of simple observation it is evident that it suffers from major structural movement and decay. While it would be possible to repair, rebuild and reconstruct, such a process would be highly invasive and involve considerable cost.

In considering the immediately relevant sections of the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme at Clauses 21.07 *Heritage* and Clause 22.01 *Heritage Policy*, the conclusion of this preliminary assessment is that the former Oriental Hotel is not a building in which the fabric is considered to be of 'primary significance' to heritage precinct in which it is located and that it is a place in which the 'structural integrity' is at a minimum compromised and that its poor condition and low integrity is a product of long term neglect and change and not a consequence of the deliberate actions by its current owner. Under such circumstances it is a place where demolition, while not a preferred outcome, can reasonably be supported. It is an outcome which would remove a building which makes a contribution to the heritage and significance of the local area but not at a level which would result in the significance of the area being unacceptably compromised or diminished.

With regard to any replacement building our assessment is that a key consideration will be the manner in which the new building addresses the corner and intersection, and maintains the role of a defining corner element, as is found in a number of the surviving hotel buildings in the vicinity. Desirably a replacement building should be built hard to the street frontages, on the corner at least, and rise to a similar or slightly greater height, dependent upon the nature of development in the flanking sites to Ann Street and Nelson Place. It is a building which could have a level of prominence, but should not dominate the local context.