

NAME: "Victoria Buildings"
ADDRESS: 193-207 Smith Street
CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1888-89
ALTERATNS/ADDITNS: 2 bays of the building demolished, upper floor demolished, verandahs removed, shop fronts altered.
ARCHITECT: Norman Hitchcock
BUILDER: Unknown
FIRST OWNER: J. Woods
FIRST OCC./USE: Shops
PRESENT OWNER: Various
PRESENT OCC./USE: Shops/various
CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS: Cement rendered brickwork
INTACTNESS/CONDITION: Upper floors substantially intact
AREA/STREETSCAPE: Part of recommended Streetscape A19



(30) Victoria Buildings 1896

IMPORTANCE

This building formerly known as "Victoria Buildings" was constructed in 1888-89 to the design of Norman Hitchcock for John Woods, a prominent Fitzroy land owner. The original scheme of four projecting domed pavillions was never realised and was modified to include two storey pavillions probably at each end of the building. The second floor has subsequently been removed and the balustraded parapet and pediment stripped. The surviving upper floor facade is intact apart from numbers 199 and 201 which are painted. In 1926 the shop fronts were altered to incorporate plate glass and tiled stall boards, and these are still surviving to three shop fronts. The cantilevered verandah with pressed metal ceiling was probably installed at this date, replacing the original verandah.

This building is the most ambitious of Hitchcock's commercial designs, and despite the demolition of two bays and facade alteration provides a significant example of an ornate premises constructed at the height of the boom.

It provides an important streetscape component to this significant commercial precinct.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that this building be added to the Historic Buildings Register. Any further painting of the upper floor facade is strongly discouraged. It is also recommended that it be added to the Register of the National Estate and be specified under Clause 8 of the Town and Country Planning Act (Third Schedule)

BUILDING ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE:

This building was constructed in 1888-89 for John Woods to the design of Norman Hitchcock.¹ It was known as "Victoria Buildings."

The original scheme² proposed four projecting domed pavillions capped with unusual flag holders, but it appears that this scheme was never realised, possibly due to the expense of the domes. An early photo survives of 1896³ showing that a three storey section was built at the corner of Condell Street; this was probably repeated at the other end of the building (over the present 193 & 195 Smith Street).

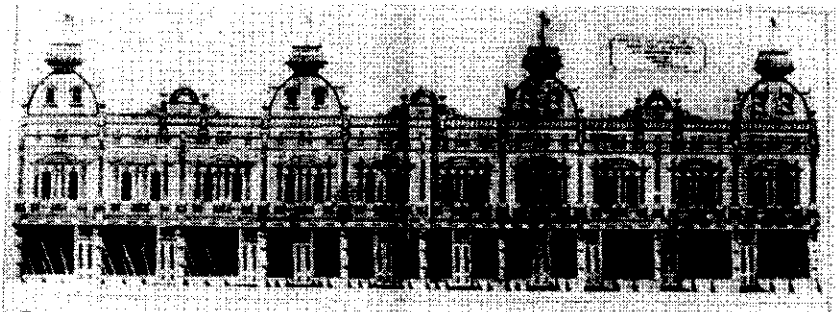
The building as it survives today is only a portion of the original scheme, but what remains to the first floor is intact. The facade is of elaborately detailed cement render, unpainted (except for 199 and 201). The elaborate paired windows match those of the original scheme with incised Corinthian pilasters topped by segmental arch pediments.

The final two bays of the building were demolished by the Commonwealth Bank, so that the building does not occupy the whole block between Charles and Condell Streets as it originally did. The balustraded parapet and urns have been removed resulting in a debased parapet treatment. The original console masks survive on the cornice.

This building is the most ambitious scheme executed by Hitchcock. John Woods was a successful timber merchant and owner of more than a hundred houses in and around Melbourne. He came to Melbourne in 1841 and settled at his residence in Condell Street, reputedly the fourth house built in Fitzroy.⁴

In 1911, the Fitzroy Permit Book recorded new windows for the J. Woods Estate at 199 Smith Street.⁵ However, drawings dated 1926 show proposed shopfront alterations to all the shops with insertion of plate glass windows, tiled stall boards, dividing piers and transom lead lighting.⁶ These windows still survive virtually intact to no. 195, and in an altered form to nos. 201 and 207. All the other shop fronts are new. The cantilevered awning with pressed metal ceiling replaced an earlier verandah which extended along the length of the shop fronts and around to the side streets.

There are other commercial premises designed by Hitchcock, including Mateer's Bakery, cnr. Johnston Street and Campbell Street, Ball and Welch premises 198-204 Faraday Street, both with intact upper floor facades and ornate cement decoration. However the Smith Street building is the most ambitious (in size and original concept) of all the surviving Hitchcock commercial buildings. The building is important as a streetscape component to this shopping precinct. On a state wide basis it is one of the most ornate sequence of two storey shops, despite alteration and demolition of the two end shops.



(31) Original Design of
Victoria Buildings
1888

1. *Australasian Builder and Contractors News* 22.9.1888
2. As viewed in op cit 29.9.1888
3. *Leader* supp. Feb 8 1896 p.1-4
4. A. Sutherland (ed) *Victoria and its Metropolis* 1888 Vol. 2 p. 660
5. Fitzroy Council Permit Book 25.7.1911 A.E. Eckberg Builder.
6. Measured Drawing Collection LaTrobe Library WH SHO 2, 3 sheets dated 23.8.1926 Albion H. Walkley Architect "Proposed Alterations to Shop fronts, Smith Street Collingwood for Mrs. Woods, 193-211 Smith Street."