

## Identification and location

**Name of place:**

**Other Name**

**Address**

**Place Identifier**  **Heritage Overlay Number 2000**

**Heritage Significance**

**Creation date(s)**  **Map (Melway)**

**Boundary description**

**Local Government Area**

**Ownership Type**

## Description

**Site Type:**

### Physical Description

The general character of the Footscray Commercial Precinct is of attached one and two storey cemented and face brick Edwardian and Victorian era shops with residences over; in the precinct there are some individually significant inter-war examples and landmark buildings. All buildings are built to the street frontage and there is typically a trabeated façade evocative of Italianate design influences. Properties show a near universal parapeted form and a repeating module is determined by the Victorian-era shopfronts of 5-6m. The above character is punctuated by large structures (like the Barkly Theatre) and/or landmark corner buildings like the Moderne style Royal Hotel at the Droop St corner, and the Edwardian-era Plough Hotel and Greens Buildings. The last two buildings make up the corners of the Geelong Road and Barkly St crossing and provide an entry point to the precinct.

The impact of later, large and visually bland post WW2 redevelopments, such as Forges, is particularly evident on the west side of Nicholson Street, contrasting with the universally 5-6 metre frontage modules of the surrounding highly ornamented Victorian and Edwardian era shops. With the devotion to economy increasing with the advance in the 20th century, each new facade was simpler than the previous. Joined they form a two-storey flush wall to the shopping street where period expression is minimized. In addition to this later development, renovation of the Victorian & Edwardian-era buildings has often blurred their cultural contribution by removal

of detail. One exception among the mid 20th century developments, is the Carroll & Douglas building which still strongly expresses its construction period. In contrast to this, the previous decorated eras are still easily recognized above the new cantilever verandahs and aluminium-framed shopfronts. Each of the pre-Modern development periods can still be read through its surviving architecture and it is still this era which dominates certain parts of today's commercial area, particularly the east side of Nicholson Street (numbers 125-163) and the south side of Paisley Street (numbers 1-31). These streetscapes offer the best historical expression and are the most architecturally pretentious of the commercial buildings in the city.

### **Condition**

fair (disturbed, reasonably preserved)

### **Integrity**

partially intact/intrusions

Modernization of the surviving Victorian and Edwardian-era shops has been largely confined to ground level and is visually separated from the generally original upper facades by new cantilevering verandahs. Despite these changes, particularly now that the Nicholson St mall exists, reinstatement of the old post-supported verandahs and recessed-entry shopfronts offers great scope for sympathetic renewal of a largely neglected shopping precinct image. Among the once prestigious shop terraces (a collection of shops posing as one vast emporium), gradual free-holding of individual shops has led to visual segmentation of the grand rows: each passing shop owner/tenant introducing a new shopfront, new signs and painting the upper levels in contrasting colours to adjoining parts of the same row. The effect is visual clutter and denial of both the building's cultural expression and its potential part in a corporate retail promotion image.

### **Context**

Early church, municipal and government reserves in Hyde Street, at the end of Napier Street, within the old Footscray village provide one contextual focus, with the new railway routes which wiped out the north-west corner of the intended village providing the impetus for a new commercial centre to the north. Town lots fronting Napier and Parker which followed the dray tracks to the river gave way to those formed around the two railway routes (Bendigo and Williamstown) which set the development emphasis to the north-west through large land parcels which had been purchased by the Railways Department at a relatively low cost to the old town lots.

### **Threats:**

Vehicle traffic, new roads, unrelated development, changes to original fabric and new signs.

### **History**

The heart of Footscray's retail district is a product of the population expansion of the 1870s and 1880s. Charlie Lovett recalled that, until well into the 1870s, all business in Footscray was

carried out 'between the railway line and the Saltwater river', with Moreland, Napier, Hopkins and Hyde Streets boasting many businesses. In the 1870s and 1880s Nicholson Street and Barkly Street began to fill with shops, among them Hooper's Drapery, which gradually spread from one store in 1885, to an expansive emporium in Barkly Street in the first decade of the twentieth century { Barnard, 2000}.

Footscray Station was the only station on the line, apart from Williamstown and Williamstown Pier, that was opened for traffic in 1859. ... The main Footscray Station was originally located in a different position from its current one ... being located between Napier Street and Bunbury Street. It was moved and rebuilt in 1899 so that both Williamstown and Bendigo lines could be joined at the one junction station { Barnard, 2000}. This fact, in turn, meant a marked change in the retailing centre of Footscray.

Retail establishments spread into Paisley and Leeds streets in the early decades of the twentieth century . By the mid-twentieth century Footscray shopping centre was the largest suburban shopping centre in metropolitan Melbourne. The creation of the Nicholson Street mall in the 1970s was an attempt to forestall competition from Highpoint West. While the shopping centre has survived competition such as this, its nature has altered significantly in recent decades, with the opening of Footscray market in the 1980s, the creation of the ring road (which necessitated the demolition of several historic buildings, including part of Hoopers store), the creation of a pedestrian mall between the old and new sections of Forges and the impact of the influx of Asian migrants and their distinctive shops and restaurants, particularly in Hopkins and Leeds Streets { Barnard, 2000}.

A large Crown Portion of 72 acres (1853), and another of 3 acres (1868) and some town lots, fronting Paisley Street, were the foci of the Footscray Commercial Precinct. The original government township of Footscray was at the intersection of the Williamstown and Geelong dray tracks where they crossed the river at the bottom of Bunbury Street, en-route to Melbourne. When the railway arrived this shifted the focus of the town development to the north west.

The church, municipal and government reserves in Hyde Street, at the end of Napier Street, created another focus. Meanwhile the new railway routes wiped out the north-west corner of the town survey. Small lots fronting Napier and Parker, presumably anticipated that the commercial strips would form there, based on the dray tracks, but the two railway routes (Bendigo and Williamstown) set the emphasis elsewhere to the north-west through large land parcels which had been purchased by the Railways Department at a lesser frontage rate than the old town lots.

Subdivisions under General Law land tenure proceeded to create an alternative town along

Nicholson Street, closer to both rail routes. The 1877 Borough Plan showed Paisley, Pickett and Raleigh Streets in their extended form, complete with town lots. The Chambers' 1868 allotment was also carved into minute commercial allotments facing an internal Chambers Street, as well as Nicholson and Hopkins. Few buildings existed here, except near the Bendigo line station; instead they were clustered along Albert Street, between Pickett and Paisley, as another product of the same subdivision. By 1910, Nicholson Street was densely lined with commercial rows, as was Barkly, Hopkins and Paisley Streets. This was at the peak development period of the present centre where almost every one of today's commercial lots had been built upon in a substantial manner. This is the end of the mainstream period of the precinct's development.

Tenders called by architects in this area predominate in the late 1880s, early 1890s period. Local architect Charles Polain, called a large number of tenders for proprietors such as J.W. Smith and the Yewers Brothers (demolished). Other building owners were S. Bennett, A. Osbaldeston, J.H. Hooper & Co., W.M. Fehon and L. Miller, Esq. Edward Blythe's new Nicholson Street cash drapery brought 'great results' once complete, in 1891, with its native flowers, kangaroos and a coat-of-arms illuminated by the electric light. A contemporary commentator in the 'Advertiser' noted that it was 'in character' with the old portion of the business and '...a very picturesque architectural whole.' Polain was the architect.

Yewers Brothers' new butchers shop was near complete with a 'pretty ironed top balcony' with splendid views. There were 14 private rooms in the residence, ventilated cellars linked by a tunnel to their Albert Street premises and provision for a future large theatre and arcade. The result, said the 'Advertiser', '...vies with even portions of Collins Street, Melbourne, in its superb architecture'. This architectural showpiece (numbers 158-160 Nicholson Street) lauded at its creation and pictured with pride in 'Footscray's First Fifty Years' (1909), has since been demolished. Other owners of speculative shop rows in the late 1880s were Hugh Morris, Dallaway trustees and A. & H. Marks (Barkly Street); Matilda Coward (Albert Street); James Harris, Peter Brown, James Mealey, Tasman Smith, G.H. Bracher and Esther Smith (Nicholson Street); Sarah Walden, Ellen Blyth and Solomon Fabian (Hopkins Street). Many of these family names were still linked with the area in 1900, despite the intervening financial recession.

The Paisley Street section of today's commercial area (east of Nicholson) is dominantly of the Edwardian era. This is confirmed by Melbourne street directories which record no businesses in this block in 1900, with only the Christian Meeting House listed. By c1904, new buildings existed or were in construction, feeding from the new railway station complex at the junction of the Bendigo and Geelong lines. Tailor, J. G. Armstrong, was noted in 1909 for his foresight in erecting two shops in this block on '...a large area of vacant land' once the railway emphasis had shifted. Mrs. Hilda Douglas (confectioner) and Ellen Collins' Bijou dining rooms were the first among a whole new row of mostly vacant shops in c1904. Over 16 commercial premises filled

this space by c1909, including dentists (Stokes, Scholl), boot makers (Anstey) and fancy goods sellers (Waters Holmberg & Co., Woods). The Friendly Societies' hall (upstairs) and a leased-out shop (downstairs) was at the Nicholson Street end (number 31, 1904). Opposite was the Footscray Grand theatre. The continuous Victorian and Edwardian shop and residence rows, described above, remained paramount until the 1930s when the new Modernist architectural stylism introduced some contrasting non-decorated buildings. The stylish jeweller's shop at 117 Nicholson Street is the best example of this inter-war era. Previous new buildings of the 1920s, such as the Court House Hotel, had followed or reinterpreted the Victorian era architecture but the 1930s was all new.

However major redevelopment did not occur until after the Second War and substantially so in the 1950s. Forge's (c1945), Carroll & Douglas, Coles (1959) and Fletcher Jones (formerly number 196-8 Barkly Street) were among the larger examples, most replacing substantial Victorian era buildings. The Footscray Traders' Association was also formed in this era (1957) and, perhaps the greatest visual change, there was Australia's first conversion of an existing retail street, Nicholson Street, to a pedestrian mall in 1971.

### Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme Developing local, regional and national economies

PAHT Subtheme Marketing & retailing

Local Theme(s) Footscray and Yarraville Shopping Centres

### Cultural Significance

The Footscray Commercial Precinct is significant historically and aesthetically within the City because:

- the identified commercial buildings (particularly the upper level facades) within the precinct are the City's best expression of its two major commercial growth eras, the precinct being largely built up by World War One with a consistent visual character made up of:
  - attached one and two storey cemented and face brick Edwardian and Victorian era shops and residences over,
  - some individually significant inter-war examples and landmark buildings,
  - all built to the street frontage,
  - typically a trabeated façade evocative of Italianate design influences,
  - near universal parapeted form,
  - a repeating module determined by the Victorian-era shopfronts of 5-6m, and
  - no provision for on site motor vehicle parking as an indication of the pre-motor era. (Criterion A4)
- of the significant architectural contribution of individual developments such as the Barkly Hotel, Royal Hotel, Griffith's jeweller's shop and Carroll & Douglas (number 234-6 Barkly Street)

which provide major focal points within the streetscape (Criterion F1);

- of the visual continuity and architectural ornament of the upper facades in Nicholson Street east and Paisley Street south, highlighted by individually notable examples such as number 155-7 Nicholson Street (Criterion E1) ;
- of the precinct's historical expression of the physical effect of a shift in major traffic routes and outlets, specifically the railway (Criterion A4) and
- it was the commercial centre of the former City of Footscray and the region over a long period (Criterion G1).

### Comparative Examples:

Comparatively, Footscray's centre is not strictly of the traditional 19th century transport route strip shopping centres such as in Auburn Road, Camberwell Junction and Glenferrie Rd. The initial construction and then the reconstructions of the railway have introduced atypical factors to its development, added to the pre-existence of the adjoining government town subdivision, its isolation by the river and the gradual emergence, in differing locations, of bridges. Given these diverse factors, another unusual element was the diamond-shaped government subdivision, to the north west, with its central Droop Street axis driving a wedge into the existing main road junctions (Nicholson, Hopkins). Different influences at work in different eras have stretched the centre across many blocks and created chronologically separate strips, with differing streets representing their role as main feeders to the centre at successive periods (i.e.. Hopkins, Barkly, Nicholson, Paisley and Leeds chronologically listed).

The result is not unlike the later middle suburb centres such as Kew and Camberwell junctions and Hawthorn's Glenferrie Road but stretched over a longer development period. Nevertheless it is among the most substantial examples of late 19th and early 20th century commercial development in the City and the Region.

### Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register

Register of the National Estate:

National Trust Register:

Other Heritage Listings

Planning Scheme Protection

External Paint Controls Apply?:

Internal Alteration Controls Apply?:

Tree Controls Apply?:

Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act:

Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?:

Prohibited Uses may be Permitted

## Recommendations:

The boundaries of the existing Heritage Overlay HA 5, 6 & 7 in the City of Maribyrnong Planning Scheme should be adjusted to the revised boundaries to make up nearly one commercial precinct (refer map) which now includes the major corner buildings at the Geelong Road & Barkly St crossing, the east side of Nicholson St north of Paisley St, part of the west side of Nicholson St south of Paisley St, and a group of related shops & residences at the east end in Hopkins St (numbers 90-122).

The following objectives have been drawn from the Statement of Significance where contributory places or elements are generally those which derive from the Edwardian & Victorian-eras including:

- attached one and two storey cemented and face brick Edwardian and Victorian era shops and residences over,
- some individually significant inter-war examples and landmark buildings,
- buildings to the street frontage,
- typically a trabeated façade evocative of Italianate design influences;
- near universal parapeted form;
- a repeating module determined by the Victorian-era shopfronts of 5-6m; and
- no provision for on site motor vehicle parking as an indication of the pre-motor era.

It is recommended:

- to conserve and enhance the identified contributory elements in the precinct and individually significant places outside of that era where elements include buildings, objects, landscape, land and street works and enhancement includes the reinstatement of missing original elements;
- to conserve and enhance the visual relationship between contributory elements in the precinct;
- to conserve and enhance the public view of these contributory elements;
- to conserve and enhance key places such as the Barkly Hotel, Royal Hotel, Griffith's jeweller's shop and Carroll & Douglas (234-6 Barkly Street);
- to conserve and enhance the amenity of the precinct to aid in its heritage conservation and encourage continuation of the traditional combination of residential and commercial uses;
- to ensure that new elements within the precinct are recessive and related to the precinct's contributory elements in roof and plan form, external materials, front and side setbacks from property boundaries, and building bulk as viewed from public areas; and
- that Council investigate the preparation of an incorporated plan for the precinct which will embody the above objectives.

## Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

Historic Places - Urban Conservation Areas & Individual Places in the former City of Footscray

*A4 Importance for their association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, state, region or community.*

the upper level facades within the precinct express more than any of the City's commercial areas, the two major growth eras of the City, the area being built up by World War One

*E1 Importance for a community for aesthetic characteristics held in high esteem or otherwise valued by the community.*

the visual continuity and architectural ornament of the upper facades in Nicholson Street east and Paisley Street south, highlighted by individually notable examples such as 155-7 Nicholson Street;

*F1 Importance for their technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement.*

significant architectural contribution of individual developments such as the Barkly Hotel, Royal Hotel, Griffith's jeweller's shop and Carroll & Douglas (234-6 Barkly Street)

*G1 Importance as places highly valued by a community for reasons of religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations.*

the commercial centre of Footscray and the region's residents over a long period

historical significanc  architectural significan  social significance  scientific significanc

## Documentation

### References

Barnard , 2000, Historic Places Review Vol 2 Environmental History, City of Maribyrnong  
Butler , 1989, City of Footscray Urban Conservation Study, Vol. 3:20

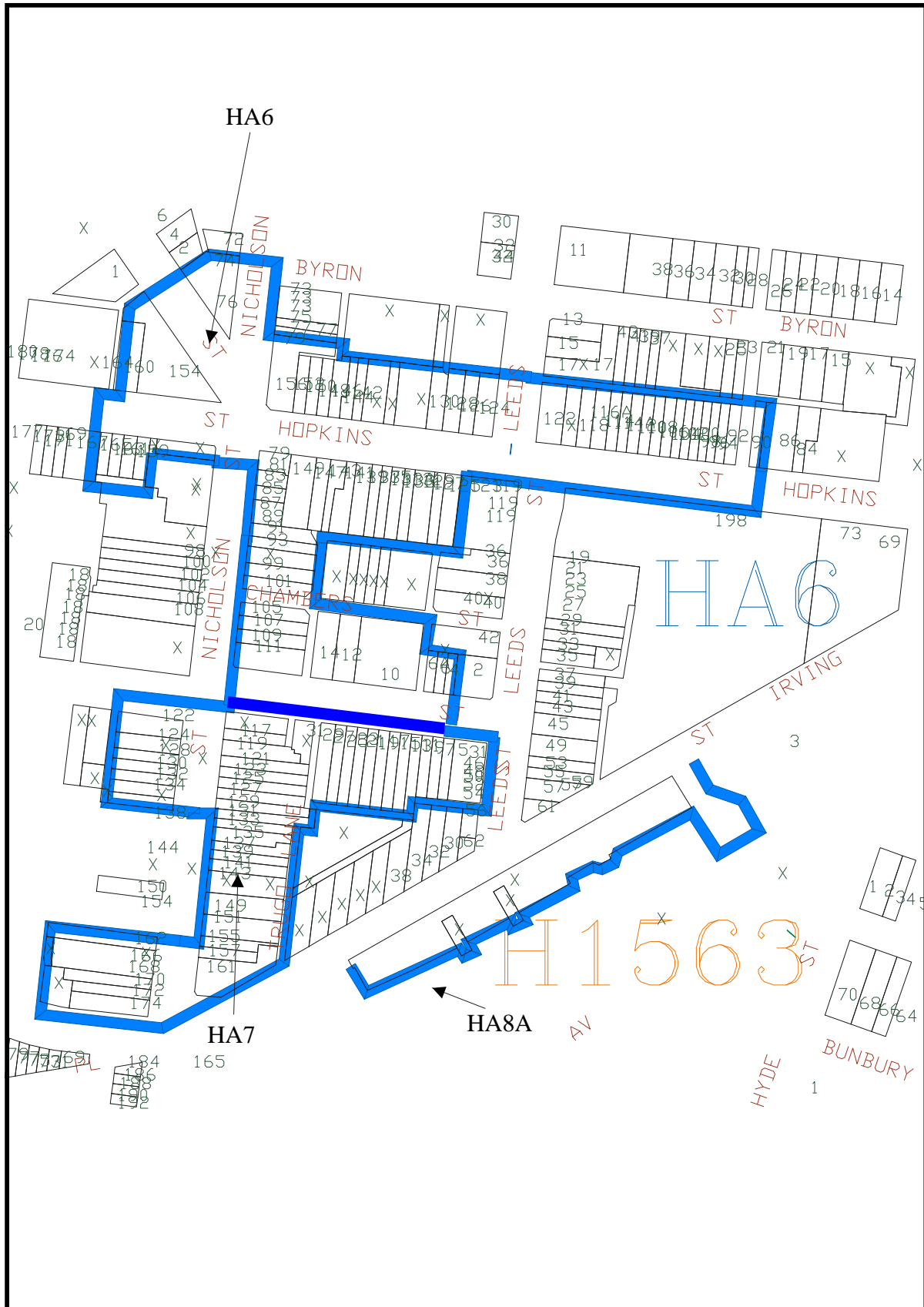
## Data recording

Assessed By:

Assessed Date:







HAs 6-7: Footscray Commercial Precinct