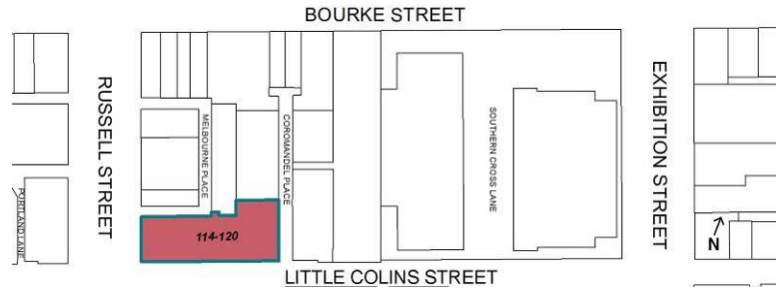


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: Former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building (114-120 Russell Street, Melbourne), April 2022

Heritage Place: Former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building



PS ref no: HO1374



What is significant?

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at 114-120 Russell Street, Melbourne, originally constructed as a nine-storey telephone exchange and postal hall in 1948-54 is significant.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The building's original external form and scale

- Original pattern of fenestration, including projecting glazed terracotta (faience) clad horizontal and vertical frames to window openings and horizontal bands of glazing
- Recessed entry on the Russell Street frontage including a faience-clad lintel supported by circular columns clad in granite
- Original steel/aluminium frame windows
- Bas relief sculpture to the Russell Street façade at the ground level.

Later alterations are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at 114-120 Russell Street is of historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Russell Street Telephone Exchange and Postal Building, opened in 1954, is historically significant for the evidence it provides of the broadening of Commonwealth powers after World War Two, a shift that resulted in increased construction of Commonwealth buildings in city centres including Melbourne. The former Russell Street Telephone Exchange and Postal Building is historically significant as one of the first large buildings constructed in the city after World War Two, and is the last to express the solid masonry, architectural traditions typical of the era prior to World War Two. The building also reputedly contained the first air-conditioned postal hall in Australia.

(Criterion A)

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building is significant as a largely intact example of a substantial public building in central Melbourne built to the 40 metre (132 foot) height limit then in force. The interwar Functionalist style adopted for the building was popular during the interwar and early postwar periods, often for low rise industrial buildings, schools and institutional buildings, for its modern, progressive aesthetic. Designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works, which was responsible for a number of high quality major public buildings during the period (such as the telephone exchange building at 376-382 Flinders Lane), the building demonstrates a commitment to the high-quality architectural design for major public buildings by the Commonwealth Department of Works. (Criterion D)

The former Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building has several unique features that contribute to its aesthetic significance. Although built following World War Two, the building exhibits elements of the interwar Functionalist style that are characteristic of a pre-World War Two modernist character. This includes its large and dramatic recessed entry space on the Russell Street frontage, surmounted by glazed terracotta lintel and supported on three circular granite columns adjacent to a bass relief sculpture attached to the facade. (Criterion E)

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020) (updated March 2022)