



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

10 August 2017

City of Melbourne
City Planning and Infrastructure,
PO Box 1603
Melbourne Vic 3001
planning@melbourne.vic.gov.au
Ministry code: PA1700206

Re: TPMR-2017-8, 28 Clarendon Street, Southbank. Demolition and construction of a multi-level building

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria's Heritage Committee strongly opposes the above application and endorses the submission of Melbourne Heritage Action, supported by the National Trust of Victoria. The RHSV urges the City of Melbourne and the Planning Minister to reject the application outright.

The Robur Tea Building is listed on the Victoria Heritage Register (H0526) as significant to the state of Victoria on a number of grounds—scientific, architectural and historical. The lengthy citation on the register is evidence of the building's importance. Built between 1887 and 1888, the Robur Tea Building is important scientifically for 'several innovative techniques employed in its construction', namely a system of ironbark piles and concrete rafts to support the construction of a six-storey building on swampy ground. There are no comparable contemporary buildings of this kind because 'such difficult foundations were not tackled again until after WWI'. Architecturally, the tea house is significant as a noted work of Nahum Barnet, prominent in Melbourne's architectural history for forty years from this period; it is also one of the finest examples of a 19th-century warehouse in Melbourne and, indeed, Australia. The building is of seminal historical importance too as 'one of the few remaining traces of the industrial and warehousing establishments that until the 1970s and 1980s dominated the south bank of the Yarra', now swamped by luxury apartment developments.

The proposed construction of a 39-level tower at 145m, to include 38 luxury apartments and 312 hotel suites that appear to cantilever over the tea house will dwarf this important heritage building. The new development abuts the south face of the Robur Tea Building, completely obscuring it, and reducing the building itself to a quaint shell for retail spaces, a hotel lobby and a restaurant. Its unique landmark status in this area would be lost if this very tall and encroaching tower were to be built. It would indeed become a footnote to a huge and overwhelming black glass structure.

The Heritage Act does not sufficiently cover issues of curtilage, and the local heritage controls that apply in Southbank are the same as those for the CBD, now recognised as grossly inadequate. This means there is little consideration of the dominating effects of new imposing developments on adjacent heritage buildings.



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The inadequacy of these existing CBD heritage controls is widely recognised, and vastly improved new guidelines are now on exhibition. While they do not cover all situations and especially fail to deal with the issue of domination by adjacent buildings, they do, however, contain quite a few admirable recommendations, especially in the injunctions to be 'Be respectful of the heritage place' in terms of 'character and appearance, scale, materials, style and architectural expression', and 'Not [to] dominate or visually disrupt the appreciation of the building as it presents to the streetscape'.

We strongly urge that these principles be applied in the case of the Tea House, which should maintain its dominance in this area if its heritage value is to be preserved. We thus urge that the proposed development be rejected outright.

Yours sincerely

Dr Judith Smart
For the RHSV Heritage Committee