

ROYAL TERRACE

The subject of this submission is the Heritage Listed Royal Terrace. (ten individual dwellings), 50-68 Nicholson Street, Melbourne, VIC 3065, a bluestone building with parapet, window aedicules, quoining and string courses of sandstone. All in all an attractive and elegant building. It is located opposite the World Heritage Royal Exhibition Buildings opposite from Royal Terrace.

Briefly the Terrace was in the ownership of the same family since it was built in 1854 until 1958 when it was transferred to the Salvation Army. They in turn sold it to developers in 1979 and in 1981 the individual properties were sold and largely renovated. Only one remains in multiple tenancy.

Comments and suggestions relevant to improvement in how we conserve and improve our Heritage buildings are **highlighted**.

Conversion to Office.

- About 15 years ago one owner applied for a change of use permit to convert a dwelling (No 64) to offices. The grounds for this relied on a clause in the Act governing heritage buildings allowing a change to a non-conforming use, (ie allowing a commercial use in a residential area) if the continued preservation of the building was thereby secured. My recollection of this is that a Heritage Permit was not required .
- One owner stated that if the permit were granted, all owners should have the benefit of this change of use.
- The Council rejected this permit application.
- It is obvious that a group of dwellings under the same Heritage Preservation Notice is under threat if one of the dwellings can secure a permit for a change which alters the nature of the group.
- A Heritage Permit may not be required for a change of use, so a Council permit may be in a position of being *a de facto* determinant of the Heritage future of a building.
- **The law should be clarified so that**
 - **one Heritage Preservation Notice determines identical categorisation of all dwellings etc under the same notice (ie residential, commercial etc).**
 - **Council should not have the power to issue a a permit in a single dwelling (or part) of a group of Heritage Listed buildings allowing a change to a non-conforming use.**

Pavement

About 15 years ago a gas main was laid to No 64 when the gas company jackhammered the flagged pavement dating from 1854 or so. This is a typical approach by utility companies, basically a lack of understanding and a lack of care.

Since then repeated representations to Council realised a complete renovation of the pavement and its Heritage Listing.

One resident has since secured a three phase electricity supply from the street which involved lifting slabs, cutting a trench and sinking a termination pit in the pavement. Heritage Victoria have not covered themselves with glory in this instance.

- One owner told Heritage Victoria that the owner was sure that all properties had 3 phase power and they ought to investigate. The owner was requested to do this rather than asking City Power to look behind the owner's switchboard.
- Royal Terrace has a non-standard, privately owned reticulation from a single street supply, so City Power have no detailed knowledge of the detail.
- A Heritage Permit was advertised requesting flagstones to be lifted.
- I objected in detail but nevertheless said that if any work was authorised, the pavement should be restored to such a condition that no trace of the work should remain.
- Unbeknown to me, Heritage Victoria was not satisfied with the notice posted on the gate and advertised in the press. They asked for the inclusion of the inspection pit in the notice and this was done.
- Meanwhile my objection has been submitted and I had no knowledge of the inspection pit to be put into the pavement.
- **In the case of a modification of the statutory notices in the property and the press, the notice for objection should at the least restart as from the date the modified notice was posted and objectors should be notified immediately in writing of the modified notice.**
- I witnessed the electrical inspector determining that all owners had 3 phase power but unfortunately a permit had already been granted.
- An attempt was made for Yarra Council as owners of the pavement to rescind their permission for the work to be done. They agreed.
- Nevertheless the work proceeded because City Power maintained that VicRoads now had authority over this road and pavement. Yarra Council did not press that in fact they were still the owners of the pavement and that **their permission was still needed for Heritage work** even though their permission was not needed for any other road and pavement work. They had already stopped the work and were not game to risk a costly mistake if they no longer had authority over Heritage Property.
- All along City Power were quite happy for the inspection pit to be located just inside the customer's property boundary.
- **Heritage Victoria should be given the power to cancel a permit** if the reason for needing the permit no longer applies. This whole sorry episode could then have been avoided.
- **Heritage Victoria should be able to vary the permit conditions, ie to require the inspection pit to be located inside the property line.**

Restoration

All of the stonework on the Nicholson Street facade on nine of the ten dwellings is now being restored. Despite the modest grant towards the work from Melbourne Heritage the cost of this restoration is a significant burden to the owners. The following observations are made.

- The work being done is much more extensive than that needed for essential repairs.
- Considerable aesthetic improvements are being made, back to the original appearance, by removing the paint on the sandstone and patching the sandstone where water penetration under the paint has caused accelerated stone decay.
- **There is a limit to how far private owners can afford extensive aesthetic work on their properties.** This building is within a significant World Heritage precinct where its enhancement is to the benefit of a very wide audience, local and international.
- Until recently tax concessions were available to approved restoration works. **A significant tax rebate should be re-established.**
- **Significant grants to carry out restoration work should be a major part of enhancing our precinct.** The owner of the end dwelling in Royal Terrace has a side facing on to Gertrude Street. The restoration of this imposes an impossible burden on a private owner. If it were in public ownership no doubt money would be found. It is too much to expect a private owner to pay \$150/200,000 to aesthetically restore the facade to its original condition.
- The verandah has been raised by one course some time in the past. **No doubt the original integrity of Royal Terrace would be improved by realising the original intentions and taking the verandah back down to its original level.**
- **In addition, restoration of the rustication on the verandah side walls, on those dwellings where it has been removed, would be an important improvement.**
- **Heritage Victoria should have access to much more expert restoration advice.** For example, on our restoration project, we were totally at sea when dealing with whether stonework is or is not protected by paint. We now know that it is highly deleterious. It would appear that one only finds this out when the right architect and stonemason have been engaged. We should have known earlier.