

**conservation
studio**

Heritage Impact Statement

Forum Theatre H0438 – Urgent Makesafe Works

150-162 Flinders Street, Melbourne

Prepared for



Date: 27/11/2023

Revision: A

Revision	Date	Comments
A	27/11/2023	Permit Application

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1. Project overview

1.1 Introduction

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) has been prepared for the Marriner Group in support of a permit application for urgent make-safe works to the tower of the Forum Theatre H0438.

The proposed works include the urgent dismantling and temporary propping of the following elements located on the south (Flinders St) and east (Russell St) elevations of the tower and building.

The proposed works include:

- Dismantling of the canted bay mashrabiyyah screens and columns on the south and east elevations.
- Removal of the bird guano and debris buildup inside the canted bays.
- Propping of the cantilevering concrete onion dome from the cantilevering base of the bay structure.
- Removal of all crenelations from the tower balcony parapet.
- Removal of a number (approx 12) crenelations from extant east and south elevations.

The proposed works were recommended works included in the Condition Assessment Report prepared by Conservation Studio dated September 2023 and form part of a response to the Show Cause Notice Ref X10100 from Heritage Victoria outlining concerns about the condition of the Forum Theatre (former State Theatre). The removal of these elements is also supported by Quatrefoil Consulting in their memorandum date 25 October 2023. A copy of this advice is attached to this HIS for reference.

We also refer to Heritage Victoria’s correspondence dated 31 October 2023 in relation to the process of application for a permit related to these works.

1.1.1 Drawings for approval

The following drawings showing the extent of the proposed dismantling works with detailed description of the works methodology and onsite storage of elements, prepared by Conservation Studio and dated 26 November 2023 are included in this application for a permit.

- 23025.00 Cover page
- 23025.01 Elevations and details



Figure 1
Aerial image of Melbourne CBD indicating the location of the Forum Theatre.

1.2 The Site

The Forum Theatre is located on the corner of Flinders and Russell Streets, Melbourne. The theatre comprises two morish inspired facades, with the primary entrance and façade facing Flinders Street. The Russell Street façade is detailed in much the same way as the Flinders Street façade; however, it differs with the back of stage areas and plant room located at the northern edge of the site. The southeast corner is accentuated by a tall tower with an expressed balcony, and clocktower rising above, capped with a copper clad onion dome dotted with lights in white shades resembling a pearl studded turban.

The Flinders Street facade returns up Hosier Lane, however it is less ornate and becomes utilitarian as it extends northward. The north elevation is primarily a blank wall, that is painted.

The Flinders and Russell Streets elevations are wrapped by a cantilevering canopy.

For the purposes of this HIS, the subject site is limited to the parapet of the south and east elevations – specifically the crenelations; the tower balcony parapet crenelations and the two canted bay structures on the tower. Refer to Figure 8 below indicating the location of these elements.

All elements identified as the subject site have been found to be in poor condition and pose a serious risk of detachment from the building. As such their removal is recommended as an urgent action.

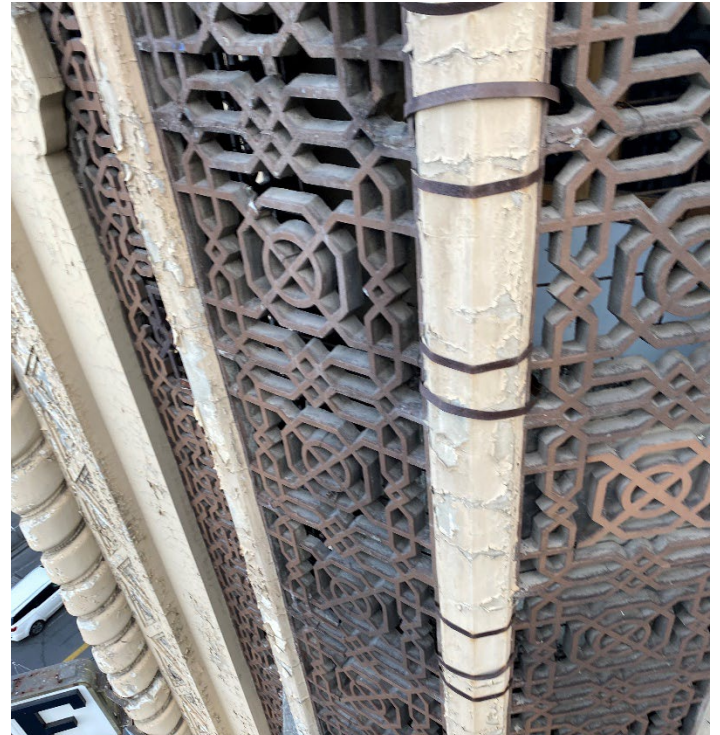


Figure 2

Past remediation strapping on the canted bay providing little to no structural support to the columns



Figure 3

Crenelations cracked through and wrapped in mesh, also note 1981 replacement adjacent.



Figure 4
Parapet crenelations in poor condition and cracked through in a number of locations.



Figure 5
Spalling and cracker crenelations on the tower parapet.



Figure 6
Dilapidated canted bay structure. Columns are vertically split due to corrosion of reinforcing and sills are spalling.



Figure 7
Canted bay columns busting apart as a result of corrosion of reinforcing.

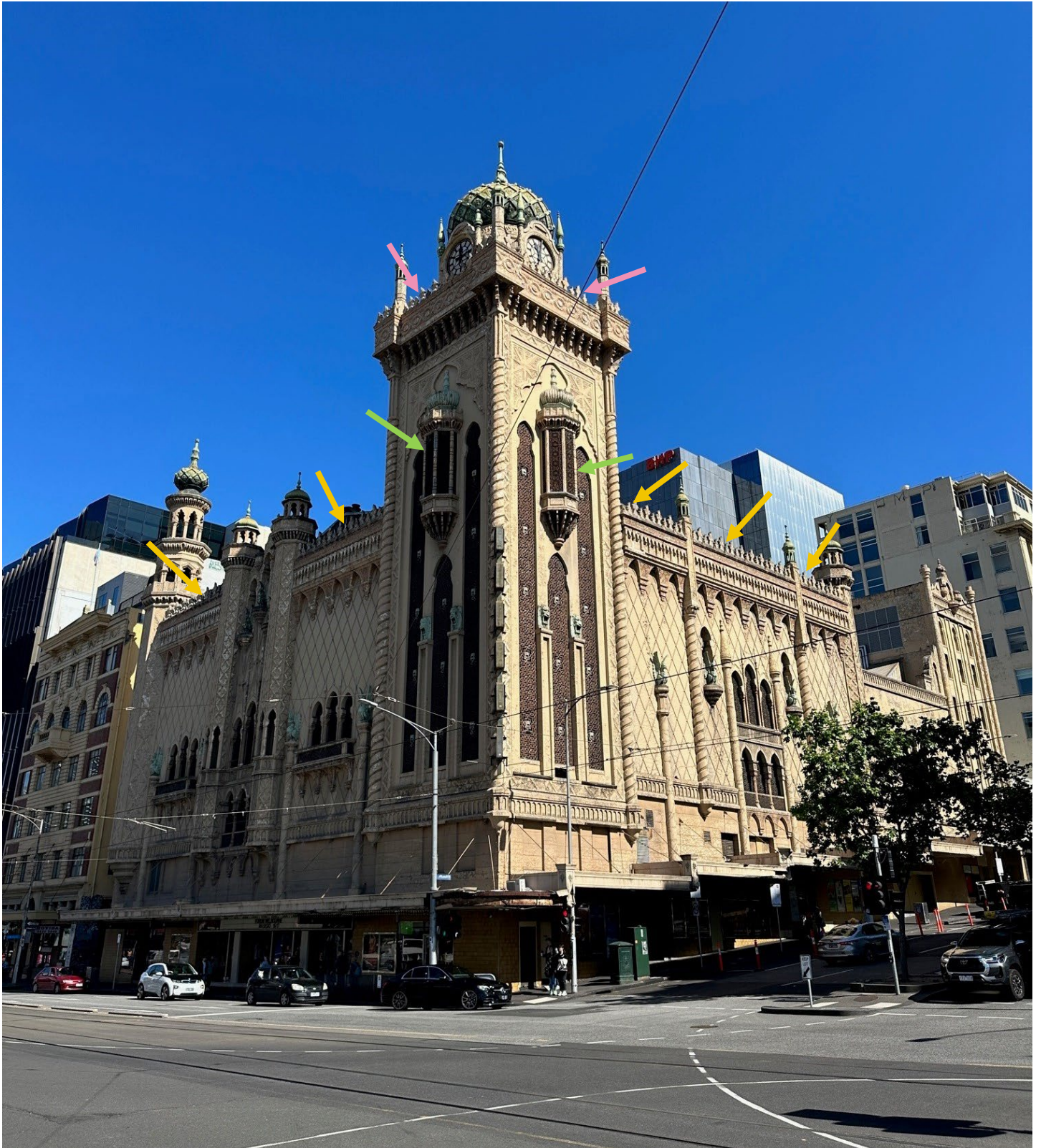


Figure 8

View of the Forum Theatre – green arrow showing canted bays – pink arrow showing tower crenellations – yellow arrow showing crenellations generally.

2. Heritage considerations

2.1 Overview

The heritage considerations that are relevant to the site can be summarised in the table below:

Name	Authority	Identifier	Statutory Controls
Statutory Controls Apply			
Former State Theatre, 150-162 Flinders Street, Melbourne	Victorian Heritage Register	H0438	Yes
Former State Theatre, 150-162 Flinders Street, Melbourne	City of Melbourne	HO653	Yes, superseded by listing on the VHR

2.2 Statutory controls

The following Statutory controls apply to the Forum Theatre.

2.2.1 Victorian Heritage Register

The Forum Theatre is included as H0438 on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) to the extent of:

Extent of Registration

AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 438.

The Former State Theatre, 154 Flinders Street, Melbourne, City of Melbourne.

(The extent of:

- 1. All of the building known as the former State Theatre.*
- 2. All of the land marked L1 on Plan 602820 being the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 5456 Folio 1091132 signed by the Chairperson, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council.*

This registration is subject to the provisions of the Heritage Act 2017 and a permit is required to undertake works on the site including interior, all buildings and all of the land that forms the extent of registration.

It is noted that most of the canopy sits outside of the title boundary of the land that forms the extent of registration. The canopy is perhaps captured in the extent described as All of the building known as the former State Theare.

2.2.2 City of Melbourne

The Forum Theatre is individually listed as HO653 in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Melbourne Planning Scheme.

The provisions of Clause 43.01 – Heritage Overlay in the City of Melbourne Planning Scheme is superseded by the inclusion of the Heritage Place on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Heritage Act 2017.

There is no Statement of Significance for the place’s inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay for the City of Melbourne Planning Scheme.

2.3 Statement of Significance

The following Statement of Significance is taken form the VHR Citation for the former State Theatre (Forum Theatre). The Statement identifies the place to be of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria:

What is significant?

The Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, formerly the State Theatre, were designed by the American cinema architect John Eberson in association with the prominent Melbourne architects Bohringer, Taylor and Johnson in 1928. It was built at the climax of the boom years in cinema construction, and was operated by Union Theatres. It had the largest capacity of any cinema in the country with 3371 seats. Unlike most picture palaces, this form of

cinema design attempted to create the illusion of an exotic walled garden in the auditorium, complete with appropriate statuary, a blue ceiling, twinkling stars and projected clouds. The interior incorporates elements of Italian medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and Spanish Mission styles combined with bold classical Roman and Renaissance architectural forms to create a lush, impossibly exotic atmosphere. Externally the building is a Moorish fantasy with a jewelled clock tower with a copper clad Saracenic dome, minarets and barley sugar columns and rich pressed cement decoration. Construction is steel frame and brick.

How is it significant?

The Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, formerly the State Theatre, is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Forum and Rapallo Cinemas, formerly the State Theatre is architecturally significant to the State of Victoria for its influence in the development of the atmospheric style. It is the only remaining atmospheric cinema surviving in Victoria. Though the interior is modified, the visual and atmospheric impact of the design are still clearly discernible. The miniature plaster versions of well known Greco-Roman sculptures and bas relief wall panels combined with mock palace facades, villa facades and the liberal use of architectural structural elements set out under a blue sky as if in a fantasy garden, mark out the interior as one of the most unusual in the State.

The former State Theatre is of historically significant to the State of Victoria for demonstrating the extravagance and confidence of the 1920s boom. The entertainment provided at the cinema was a highly popular social and cultural activity in which thousands regularly participated. The enclosure of the balcony section in 1962 to create two separate cinemas, the Forum and the Rapallo, is important as the first example of such twinning in Australia, and demonstrates the start of the decline of the large film theatres.

3. Assessment of impacts

3.1 Description of the works

The works include the removal and dismantling of elements of the exterior of the Forum Theatre that are in a highly dilapidated state and pose a high potential of collapse or detachment from the building.

The crenelations are in poor condition as a result of corrosion of the reinforcing bars within, as such, it is proposed to remove all crenelations from the tower and localised crenelations from the south and east elevations by cutting the base of the crenelation and removing it in a single piece that will be stored onsite inside the tower until future works to remediate the building can occur.

Many crenelations on the tower and the facades have cracked in multiple locations, such that they cannot be removed in one single section and will ultimately break apart into several sections. In some cases, the crenelations have already spalled and lost significant material.

The crenelations that collapse during their removal will be disposed of as these will need to be replaced in future works.

It is proposed that all crenelations be removed from the tower, as these are in very poor condition, and that a localised number of crenelations be removed from the south and east elevations (approximately 12 across the two elevations). The crenelations located across the top of this parapet are in moderate – poor condition, we propose to remove those that are in poor condition.

The works also include the dismantling of the two canted bay structures on the south and east elevations of the tower. The canted bay structures are made up of four main components including the cantilevering base structure, comprising the corbelled floor and the onion dome roof. Both these structures will remain in situ and will include props between the floor and roof as a temporary measure to prevent and potential movement in the structure.

The other two components of the structure include the mashrabiyyah screens and columns. The mashrabiyyah screens are a pre-cast unit approximately 800mm high and will be labelled, their location recorded and removed as a single piece, and stored onsite in the tower.

The columns and plinth are heavily cracked and spalling. These elements cannot be removed as a single piece due to their condition and will break apart in the process of removal. It is proposed to accurately record the mouldings, which are based on the point cloud scan that we have commissioned to assist with these works, and once accurately recorded will be disposed of.

3.2 Reason for the works

The works are needed for public protection and to prevent the high potential of outward collapse of the canted bay structures and the high potential of loss of a whole crenelation, which are likely to weigh in the vicinity of 40kg - 60kg depending on their size. (there are two sizes).

It is noted that the construction of the canted bay means that its collapse would occur in an outward manner and upon collapse, the disbursement of material would far exceed the proposed public protection gantry (3m wide) recently approved by way of permit exemption P38972.

We note that the investigation, documentation and remediation works do not form part of this application for a permit, which as this stage the application is limited to the labelling, removal and storage or disposal of the deleterious materials as appropriate based on their condition.

3.3 Assessment of impacts

The following Section makes assessments of the proposed works against Section 101(2)(a) of the Heritage Act 2018 – the extent to which the application affects the cultural heritage significance of the place or the object.

The Statement of Significance identifies that the Forum Theatre is of architectural and historical significance on the basis of the following:

- Architecturally for its influence in the development of the atmospheric style. It is the only remaining atmospheric cinema surviving in Victoria, which is founded in both the ongoing use of the theatre and the fabric of the interior, which contributes to the atmospheric experience of going to the movies.
- The theatre is of historical significance as a result of its continued use as a theatre and related to entertainment provided at the cinema as a highly popular social and cultural activity in which thousands regularly participated.; and for the enclosure of the balcony section in 1962 to create two separate cinemas, which is the first example of such twinning in Australia.

The Statement of Significance is generally silent on the values of the morish inspired exterior and focuses on the experiential value of the interior and use.

It is considered that the exterior of the building contributes to the playful nature of the atmospheric theatre and it presents in the manner in which the place is constructed – using a variety of applied finishes, it is generally a decorated box.

The proposed works will result in the temporary removal of existing fabric, some of which is original, whilst other elements are replacements dating from the last major conservation works in 1981–82. Many elements proposed to be removed, will be salvaged, their location recorded and stored onsite for future works to remediate the building.

Whilst this will result in loss of some decorative features from the building, that contribute to the overall understanding of the architectural values, it is considered that this is temporary, and where elements can be removed and salvaged, like individual crenelations and the mashrabiyyah screens, they will be reinstated.

The works are needed urgently to avoid the potential for further detachment or loss of fabric that presents a high risk to the safety of persons and property, which outweighs the value of the retention of the fabric in-situ.

Propping and remediation of the fabric in-situ has been considered in consultation with Quatrefoil Consulting (structural engineer) and it is determined that even the remediation of the canted bay would need to result in the structure being dismantled in order to repair it. The level of dilapidation in the supporting columns is too great to continue to repair and patch these in situ. It is also recognised that the depth and profile of the columns is under sized, and any future reinstatement will need to consider retrospective strengthening details.

The removal of the crenelations is also an essential part of the urgent makesafe works. The corroding reinforcement within the crenelations and the method used in the manufacture of the original crenelations, being pressed and not cast, means that the later replacements differ in their appearance. The fixing method of the 1980s replacement is also considered inadequate and relies on grout combined with a poorly bolted and rusted fixing located behind the crenelation. Many bolt fixings are rusting through and blowing apart the render coping such that they are not securely fixed.

The proposed works include salvaging the crenelations where their condition permits, for future reinstatement or reproduction as needed to enable restoration of the parapets.

It is considered that the works will have a minor impact on the architectural cultural heritage value of the place, and that this is temporary until the elements can be reinstated in a secure manner as part of a larger package of works that focuses on the conservation and restoration of the exterior of the Forum Theatre (former State Theatre).

The impact is unavoidable; however, considerable thought has been given to ensuring that original or significant fabric can be salvaged so that it can be repaired and reinstated; and consideration has been given to removal of only those elements that must be removed in order to makesafe.

The risk associated with not proceeding with these works is high and the potential for loss of whole elements is high, such that removal is needed. It is therefore considered that these works should be approved by way of a permit, and we respectfully request that the permit contain a condition related to the reinstatement of elements with a manageable timeframe, given the various stakeholders and engagement needed to receive the various approvals from other authorities, such as VicRoads and Yarra Trams.

We respectfully request a permit validity of 2 years to complete the works, noting from our previous discussion that significant testing, investigation and design works are needed to support the reinstatement works.

We note that any testing and destructive analysis will form part of a separate application for a permit exemption, which is pending finalisation of the materials testing team's brief.

We propose the following permit conditions be included on the permit:

1. Should further minor changes in accordance with the intent and approach of the endorsed documentation become necessary, correspondence and supporting documentation must be prepared and lodged in accordance with the permit condition for endorsement by the Executive Director Heritage Victoria. If the Executive Director considers that the changes are not minor, an amendment to the permit or a new application will be required.

2. Within 6 months of the date of this permit, documentation outlining the proposed reinstatement and associated conservation and repair of the canted bay structure is to be lodged in accordance with the permit condition for endorsement by the Executive Director Heritage Victoria. Once endorsed the documentation will form part of the permit.
3. Within 9 months of the date of this permit, documentation outlining the proposed reinstatement and associated conservation and repair for the crenelations is to be lodged in accordance with the permit condition for endorsement by the Executive Director Heritage Victoria. Once endorsed the documentation will form part of the permit.
4. The canted bay and the crenelations are to be reinstated to the Forum Theatre (former State Theatre) in accordance with the documentation endorsed by Conditions 3 and 4 within the validity of this permit.

Materials that are removed and cannot be reinstated will be used for destructive testing to understand the composition and strength of the original pressed cement crenelations and the concrete composition of the canted bay columns including aggregate distribution, compressive strength, depth of carbonation, which is expected to yield a full depth result, along with chloride testing to understand salt content. Given the build-up of guano, this is expected to produce high levels of chloride, the particulars of which can be identified.

4. Conclusion

The proposed works comprising the dismantling and salvaging of the two canted bay structures and the removal of the crenelations to the tower and a localised number along the east and south elevations results in the temporary removal of fabric from the place.

It is essential that the fabric be dismantled in order to repair the structure and to address issues of structural inadequacy, which can facilitate structural upgrades and remediation as part of reinstatement. Salvaging as much of the material proposed to be removed as possible will ensure accurate reinstatement and the restoration of original material reducing the loss of significant fabric. These elements will be stored onsite for reinstatement as part of future works.

We note that the investigation, documentation and remediation works do not form part of this application for a permit, which at this stage the application is limited to the labelling, removal and storage or disposal of the deleterious materials as appropriate based on their condition.

On this basis, the impact on the architectural cultural heritage values of the place, largely related to the interior, is minimal.

These works are needed as part of makesafe works to avoid the highly likely risk of detachment of deleterious material and structural collapse of the canted bays.

On this basis, we respectfully request that a permit with a 2 year validity be granted for these works including requested conditions outlined above.

Appendix A – Quatrefoil Consulting Memo



MEMORANDUM 01

Project: Forum Theatre – Flinders St Melbourne
Date: 25.10.23
Pages: 4 + 6 = 10
Our ref: 7865m01 000000 structural priority works.docx

Distribution	To: →	Copy: ✓	Attention	Email
✓	Quatrefoil Consulting		File	
→	Conservation Studio		Dan Blake	dan@conservationstudio.com.au

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RE: PRELIMINARY STRUCTURAL PRIORITY ADVICE

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

At the request of Conservation Studio, a general site review of specific areas of the building elevations was made on 19.10.23. The brief, visual inspection was aimed at providing an overview of primary issues raised in the Conservation Studio report: “*Condition Assessment, Forum Theatre H0438, Flinders St Melbourne (Revision 02)*”, dated 22.09.23.

The inspection was not a detailed full building inspection but was intended to enable an opinion to be formed on the recommended works contained in the Conservation Studio Condition Assessment and the preferred priority from a structural perspective. The areas viewed were therefore as highlighted in the Conservation Studio report, ie:

- The area around the canted bay balconies on the main tower.
- The upper cornice area from behind the parapet.
- Pressed cement crenelations.

Additionally, reference has been made to other works recommended in the Conservation Studio report.

2.0 AVAILABLE DOCUMENTATION

No drawings of the building have been viewed. If it has not already been done, a thorough search of available archive sources for original drawings of the building is recommended. Various details of cladding support and structural systems are unclear from a visual investigation and original drawing details may shed light on these and save investigation effort and guesswork.

3.0 CANTED BAY BALCONIES

The structural system supporting these balconies is unclear and further measurement and investigation is required. Site observations suggest a support system as shown in Figure 01, ie:

Consulting Civil &
Structural Engineers
Heritage Engineers
Forensic Engineers
Building Evaluation
Expert Witness

DIRECTOR:
David Hogg



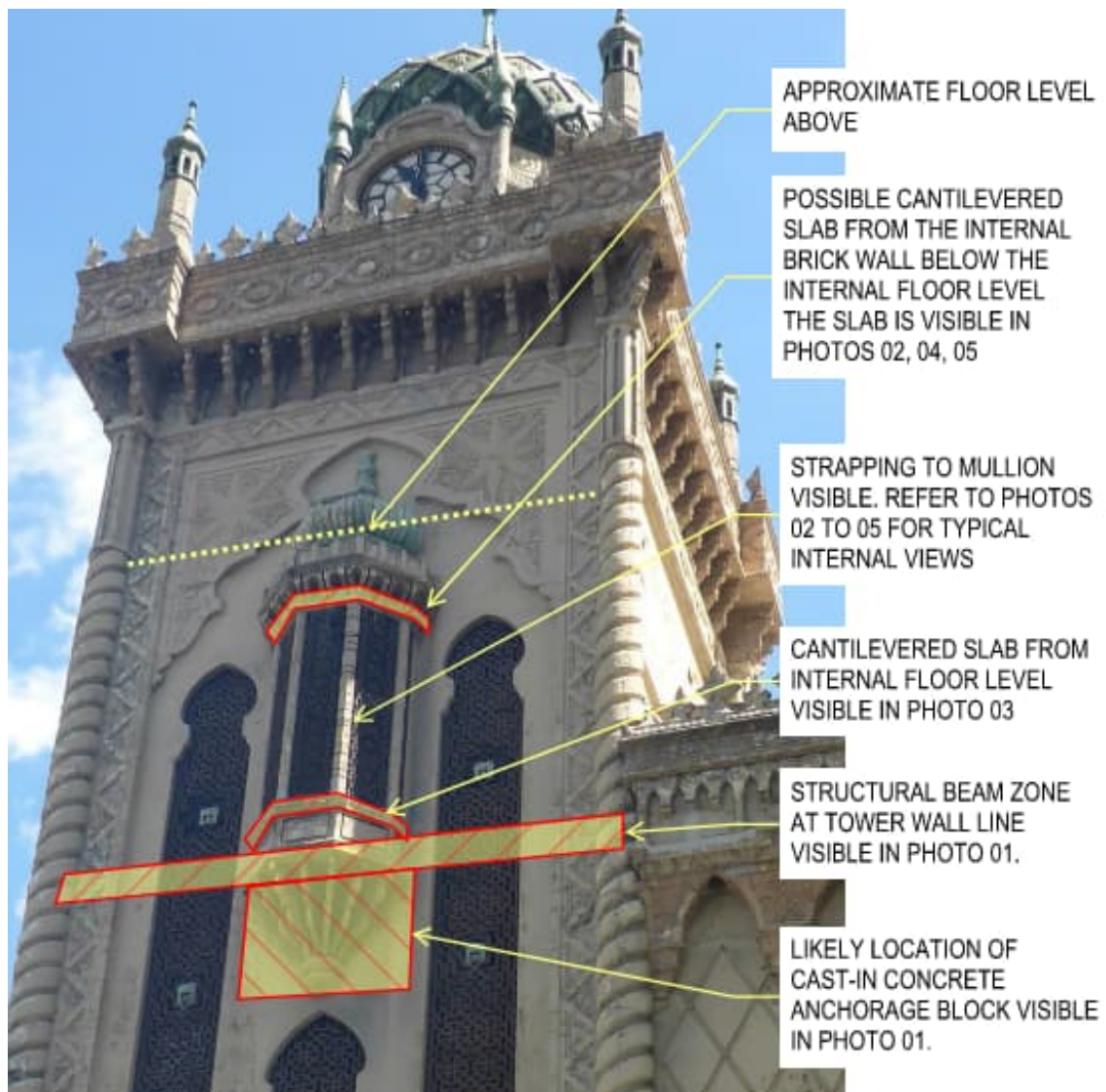


Figure 01: Eastern Canted Bay Window

At the top of the bay window screen, the soffit of a slab is visible that appears to cantilever from the brickwork wall below the upper floor slab and beam level. (Refer Photos 02 & 04). This also supports the upper corbels and copper dome.

At the base of the screen, a structural beam zone aligns with likely parapet and roof support to the north. From this a slab appears to cantilever out, perhaps from floor level but this has not been confirmed. This supports the base of the mullions and screen as visible in Photo 03. Within the tower, immediately below the balcony, a large cast in concrete block is built within the masonry, likely to support the precast concrete corbels. Whether these corbels are load bearing or decorative is unclear at present.

The condition of the concrete mullions is very poor. Extensive internal corrosion and spalling is evident to both the mullions and the underside of the upper slab, with additional external spalling of the base of the balustrade also visible. At some point in the past – potentially during the 1980's refurbishment – acrow props have been provided between the upper and lower slabs behind each mullion and light metal strapping provided to laterally support the mullion.

The acrow props provide additional vertical tying between the upper and lower slabs, but do little to stabilise the mullion, slab and corbel fabric against spalling and loss of sections of concrete. Spalling is evident and exposed reinforcement is visible in the mullions. The mullions themselves appear to be precast elements and are very slender. Repairing them in-

situ will be difficult and involve removal of the screens, further temporary support installation and extensive insitu repairs. The repairs will need to expose mullion reinforcement where corroded or in spalled areas, clean back to sound and unaffected material, repair or supplement reinforcement and reinstate adequate cover to the bars. The extent of existing concrete removal will be extensive and likely to be on all sides. The existing concrete will likely be fully carbonated so even if an area of reinforcement is not currently spalling, there will be no long-term protection against future potential water ingress and corrosion.

Figure 17 & 18 of the Conservation Studio report also show cracking and spalling of concrete on the outer face of the balcony and mullions.

On the basis of the above observations, the danger of spalled sections of concrete falling is considered high and the probability of successfully executing a long-term repair of the mullions, balustrade and slabs in-situ in a safe and effective manner is considered to be very low. I therefore support the Conservation Studio recommendation that the canted balconies be immediately dismantled and rebuilt, reinstating as much of the original corbel, screen, dome and other elements as possible. New mullions should be fabricated or poured in situ to details to be confirmed after demolition. Slabs may be able to be repaired but this needs to be confirmed at the time of the works.

4.0 UPPER TOWER AND PARAPET CONCRETE FAÇADE SUPPORT

Internally, the tower structure presents as a loadbearing masonry structure with concrete floors. Structural beams are either encased rivetted steel beams – as is visible in one location - or reinforced concrete beams, or a combination of the two.

Externally, there are various areas of supplementary cladding noted in the Conservation Studio report as likely to be precast elements tied to or supported within the brickwork masonry. Refer to Figure 02 below. How these embellishments are supported is unclear at present and should be confirmed. Cracking and local spalling around bolt heads along the bottom of the panels is visible and it may be that supplementary support has previously been installed.

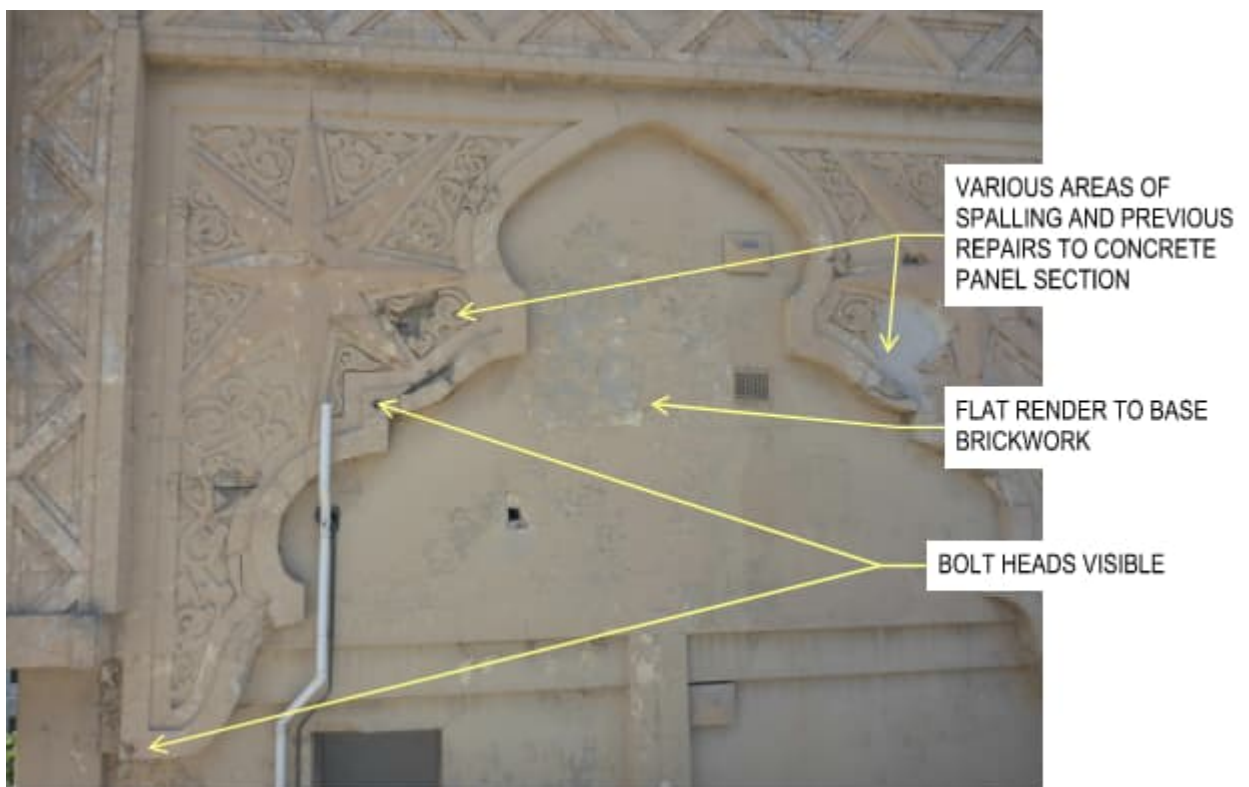
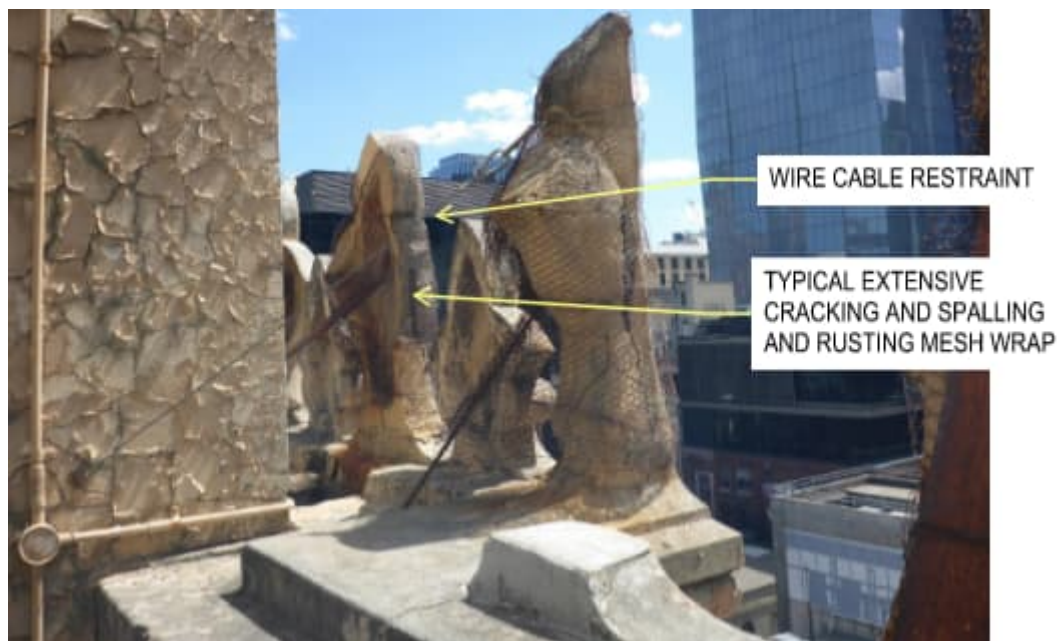


Figure 02: Typical concrete panel embellishments

If the panels are simply tied back to the base brickwork with metal anchors of some form, then it is possible that the support is compromised, given the corrosion to the general reinforcement. Investigation is recommended into the panel support as a priority, along with at least temporary stabilization or removal of spalling surface layers.

5.0 CRENELATIONS

Photos 06 to 11 show various typical views of a pressed cement crenelations along the tower upper balustrade. Many, or most of these have been provided with supplementary metal support and wrapped in a light wire mesh. One or two have been tied back with a short cable as shown in Figure 03 below. The temporary support and mesh is past end of life and the units have continued to deteriorate since it was installed. The stability of these units is parlous both in terms of local spalling and overall stability and they are considered dangerous. I support the Conservation Studio recommendation to remove and store for replication and reinstatement as an urgent priority matter.



6.0 CANOPY

It is understood that the canopy is the subject of a Show Cause notice from Heritage Victoria. The canopy was not reviewed in detail as part of this brief inspection; however review of the Conservation Studio report and available information regarding the canopy suggests that, while the canopy does need to be reviewed and remediated, the urgency for canopy remediation is secondary to the issues outlined above.

Please call if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully

DAVID HOGG

On behalf of Quatrefoil Consulting Pty Ltd



Photo 01



Photo 02



Photo 03



Photo 04



Photo 05



Photo 06



Photo 07



Photo 08

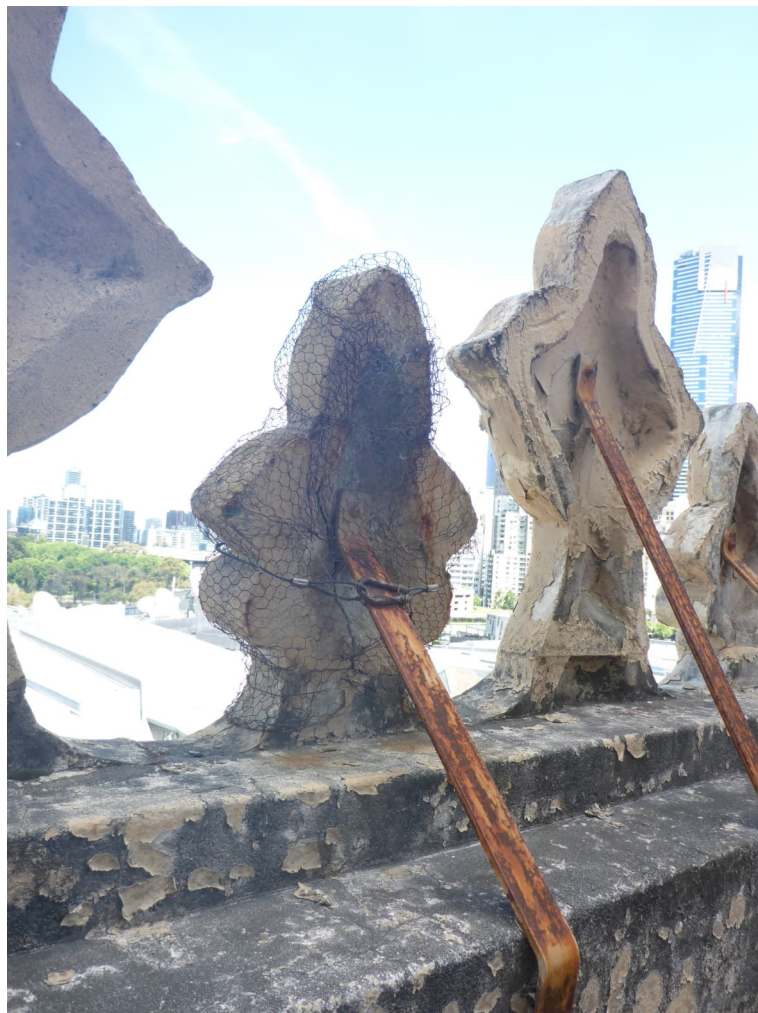


Photo 09



Photo 10



Photo 11

