

Hydro Electric Commission Building

Address Corner of Davey & Elizabeth Streets, Hobart, Tasmania

Practice A & K Henderson & Partners, (Melbourne)

Designed 1938 Completed 1940

History & Description The Hydro Electric Commission Building (HEC Building) addresses the corner of Davey & Elizabeth Streets across the street from Franklin Square. As the headquarters & public face of the Hydro Electric Commission, the building reflects the Commission's prominence as the State's largest enterprise of the period. The 6 storey (plus tower) steel framed building is an excellent example of the Art Deco style of architecture with its vertical emphasis, stepped skyline, use of stylised high-relief electrical insulator ornament & monumental entry combined with a simplified classical form including the minor entablature in a raised scalloped band to first floor. Clad in stone-coat painted masonry walls, & resting on a polished granite base, the building was initially layered in the manner of a piano nobile with two stepped back upper levels, & the ground floor raised. The hierarchy of layered volumes contains references of ancient & modern derivation. The building is symbolic of a major phase of the State's development when electricity was synonymous with industrial development & progress. It was one of the earliest multi-storey buildings in Hobart, & the first located between the city centre & the port; it reflected a new period of growth & prosperity within the state. The architects took advantage of the corner site, opposite the park, to express a three-dimensional quality in massing & detail which can be appreciated from both close up & a greater distance. The prominence of the building led to its use as a landmark for marking cultural, social & community events, including a 'v' for victory sign above the corner during the second world war, & a large illuminated crown during for the inaugural visit of Queen Elizabeth 11 in 1953. Since the mid 1990's the Hobart City Council resides in the building, having reinstated the corner entry and returning the foyer to a place of public engagement.

A & K Henderson & Partners was a prominent architecture firm before the WWII in Melbourne specializing in commercial office buildings. Kingsley Anketell Henderson CMG (1883-1942) was the son of the architect Anketell Matthew Henderson (1853 - 1922). Kingsley was prominent in Melbourne society, Australian politics & the architecture profession & was awarded a Companion of The Order of St Michael and St George in 1938. He died two years after the completion of the HEC Building.

Statement of Significance The Hydro Electric Commission Building is a significant example of the Art Deco style of architecture with its vertical emphasis, stepped skyline, use of stylised high-relief electrical insulator ornament, monumental entry & minor entablature in a raised scalloped band first floor. The urban setting is distinctive of the planning intentions of the state authorities expressing the progress of the state at the time. The setting & the architecture combine to produce a building of integrity, illustrative of modern architecture. This approach was innovative at that time in Australia.

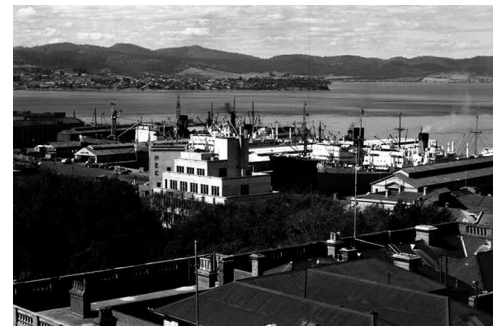
Criteria Applicable N1 Important heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design.
N3 Important heritage value in establishing a high degree of creative achievement.
N4 Important monumental and symbolic heritage value to the development of Architecture and the history of Architecture.



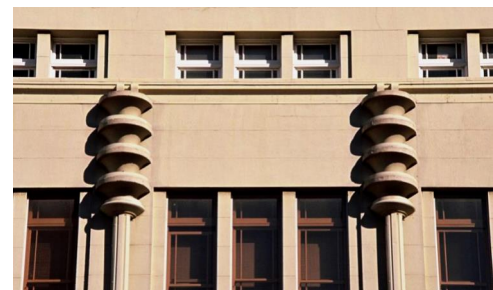
North view along Davey Street
Source: Leigh Woolley



Façade illumination c 1940.



West view with Sullivan's Cove
working docks beyond.



Façade detail showing stylised high-relief electrical insulator ornament.
Source: Leigh Woolley