

Attachment D

**Former Taxi Club – 40-42 Flinders Street,
Darlinghurst – Heritage Assessment**



Former Taxi Club 40-42 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst

Heritage assessment



Prepared for City of Sydney

September 2025

TKD Architects acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands in which we practise, and we pay our respects to Elders and express our gratitude for sharing of knowledge and culture.

We recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded and acknowledge the continuing unbroken connection to the land, water, and sky.

Cover

40-42 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst, 2025.

Authorship

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Image credits

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1 Introduction

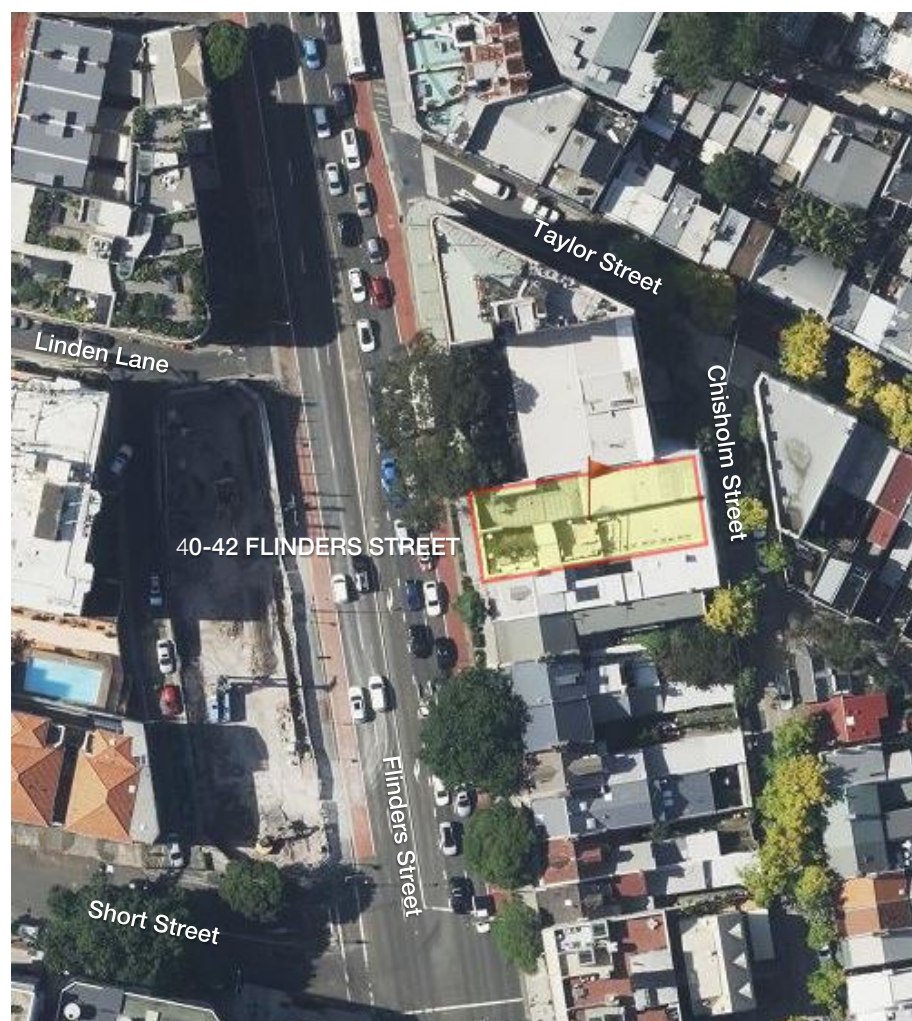
1.1 Background and purpose of report

This report has been prepared on behalf of the City of Sydney to assess the heritage significance of the former Taxi Club at 40-42 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst. The property was identified as a potential heritage item in the Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Heritage Study (TKD Architects, 2024). 40-42 Flinders Street is located within the Paddington Urban Conservation Area (C50).

The assessment of heritage significance has been undertaken using the guidelines and criteria contained in *Assessing heritage significance – Guidelines for assessing places and objects against the Heritage Council of NSW criteria* (Environment and Heritage Group, NSW Department of Planning and Environment, 2023).

1.2 Site description

The site is located on the eastern side of Flinders Street between Taylor Street to the north and Hannam Street to the south. It is bounded on the east by Chisholm Street. The site, which contains two cojoined buildings, is identified as Lot 1 Deposited Plan 773206.



1 Location of 40-42 Flinders Street.
Source: SIX Maps with TKD overlay.

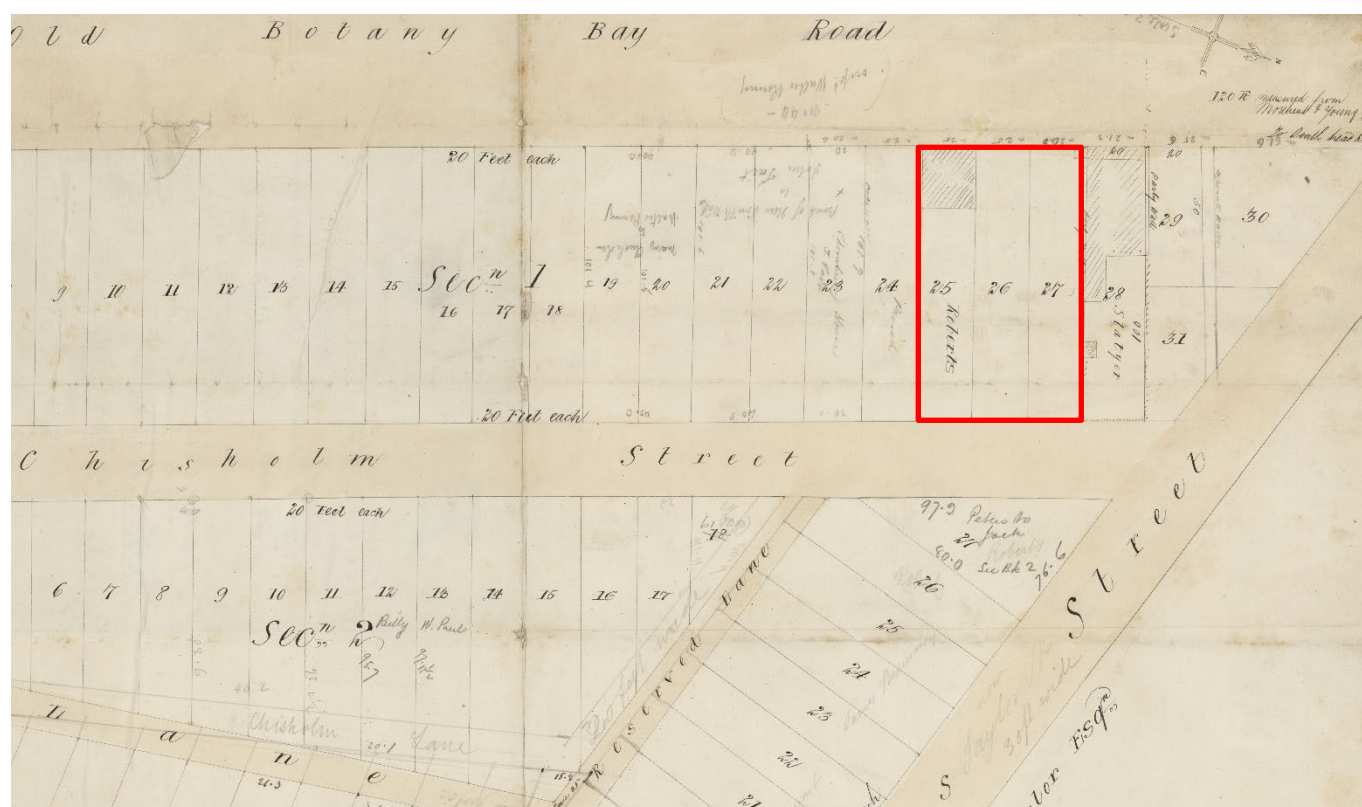


2 Historical overview

2.1 History

The site of 40-42 Flinders Street occupies part of 70 acres (28.33 hectares) of land granted to commissary John Palmer in April 1794. Palmer was forced to sell his estate to meet his debts and his Surry Hills Estate was sold in October 1814. The allotment of land that was to include the site of 40-42 Flinders Street was sold to Corporal James Chisholm of the NSW Corps (1772-1837), who became a prosperous merchant in the colony of NSW. Although he sold most of his Surry Hills purchase almost immediately, Chisholm retained a triangular section bounded by the South Head Road (later Oxford Street), Botany Street (later renamed Flinders Street) and the edge of the Sydney Common. After his death Chisholm's property was placed under the jurisdiction of trustees but his widow Mary was given power of sale.

On 30 May 1854, Mary Chisholm conveyed the title of Lot 25 Section 1 of the so-called Chisholm Estate, bounded by Botany Street and Chisholm Street, to contractor John Roberts.¹ He constructed a house on the block of land. Roberts is noted as the head of a household at 40 Botany Street (later 42 Flinders Street) in the 1858 edition of *Sands and Kenny's Commercial and General Sydney Directory for 1858-59*. Some years later Roberts and his wife Sarah acquired the adjoining Lots 26 and 27 of Section 1, which was conveyed to them by Mary Chisholm on 7 April 1869.²



- 2 Portion of an undated (circa 1850s) drawing of the Chisholm Estate. John and Sarah Roberts three allotments are highlighted. A house is indicated on Lot 25.
Source: State Library of NSW FL8732784.

¹ HLRV NSW Old Systems Title Book 37 Number 913.
² HLRV NSW Old Systems Title Book 113 Number 260.

Sarah Roberts died in October 1873, followed by her husband in January 1875. In March 1882 John Roberts, presumably Roberts' son, settled a substantial amount (if not all) of the property on his wife Rose. By the mid-1880s Lot 25 of Section 1, which by then had been renumbered 42 Botany Street, was mostly covered by buildings. A two storey brick house fronted Botany Street and a large timber shed occupying about half the allotment faced Chisholm Street. Lot 26 remained largely undeveloped apart from a timber shed on Chisholm Street and Lot 27 had been sold. Botany Street was renamed Flinders Street during 1893.

On 26 March 1903, Rose Roberts conveyed the title of 42 Flinders Street to Mrs Mary Gordon. This was followed by the conveyance of 40 Flinders Street to Mrs Gordon on 18 May 1903.³ Mary Gordon was married to importer and piano merchant James Gordon, who established his business around 1884 and whose premises were at this time located at 379 Bourke Street, just to the south of Oxford Street. 40 Flinders Street was quickly developed after it was purchased by the Gordons, and by the end of 1904 the business relocated from Bourke Street into a new three storey building⁴:

The large and commodious premises occupied by Gordon's pianos, at 40 Flinders Street, near Oxford Street, is proof positive of the extensive business done by them. A visit of inspection is regarded by the sight of one of the largest and best assorted stocks in the city, comprising as it does pianofortes by all the leading makers, at prices which only inspection will convince.⁵

James Gordon died in March 1908. A year later his widow Mary married Edward Barrett and apparently went by the name of Mary Gordon Barrett. The piano business was evidently prospering, as young architect Reginald Prevost was commissioned to design and document alterations and additions to 40 Flinders Street, which included a matching extension at 42 Flinders Street. Plans were lodged with Council in April 1911 and approved, but the works did not proceed.⁶

In May 1920 plans were approved for a two storey garage at the rear of 42 Flinders Street for Mrs Gordon Barrett. The drawing was lodged with Council by William M Ahern and the approved building was subsequently constructed.⁷

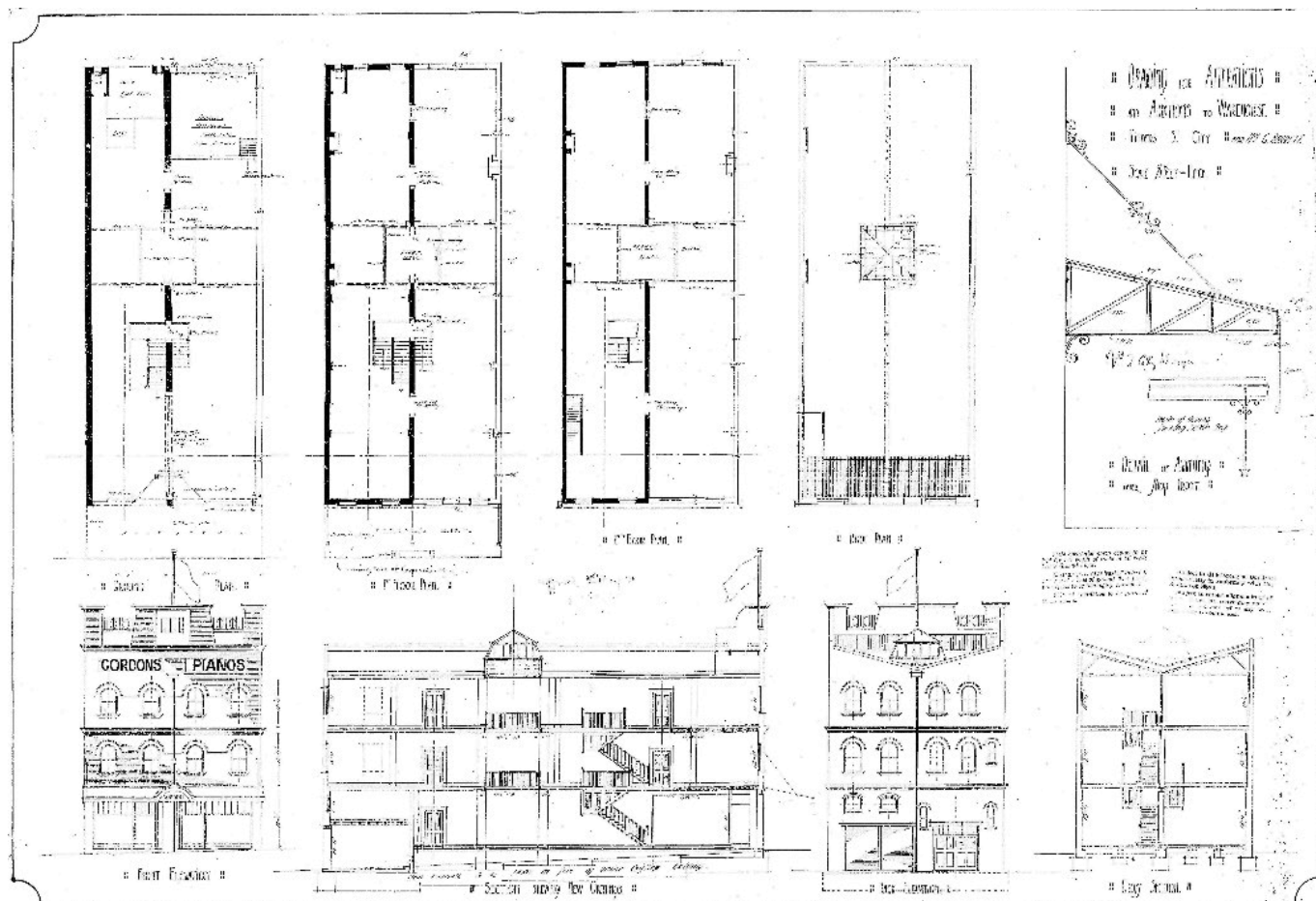
Leases on parts of the property, most probably 40 Flinders Street, were taken out by manufacturer Arnold Bertolotti in September 1920 and April 1921. Gordon's Pianos occupied at least a part of the building until 1924.⁸ At this time 42 Flinders Street was leased to Mrs Kate Carroll, who occupied the house until the early 1930s. For the rest of the 1920s and into the 1930s 40 Flinders Street was leased to various small companies.



3 Portion of a survey showing the footprint of development at 40-42 Flinders Street.
Source: City of Sydney Archives, Rygate & West 1888, Sheet 31.



3 HLRV NSW Old Systems Titles Book 732 Number 478 and Book 735 Number 736.
4 Advertisements, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 December 1904, p.7 and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1904, p.3.
5 "Other Shops", *Evening News*, 22 December 1905, p.2.
6 City of Sydney Archives Building Application 330/11
7 City of Sydney Archives Building Application 362/20.
8 There is no entry for Gordon's Pianos in the 1926 edition of Sands Sydney and suburban directory, indicating that the business was no longer occupying any of the building by 1925.



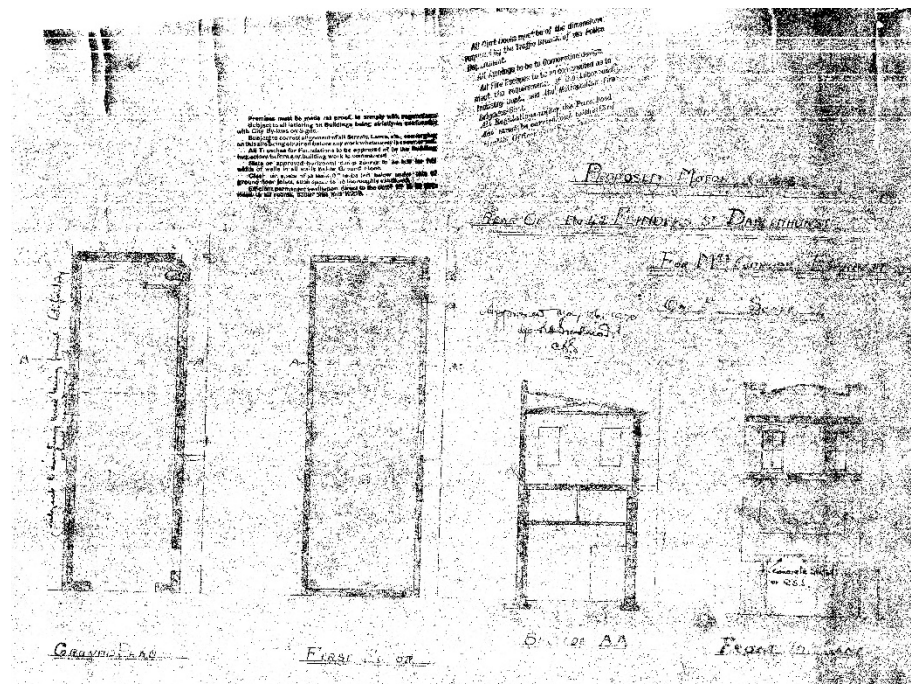
- 4 Architectural drawing by Reginald Prevost describing alterations and additions to 40 Flinders Street, 1911.

Source: City of Sydney Archives Building Application 330/11.



- 5 Portions of photographs taken on 11 August 1916 showing 40-42 Flinders Street and adjacent development.

Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00040561 (Hall & Co photograph) and Unique ID A-00040550.



6 Architectural drawing describing the two storey garage at the rear of 42 Flinders Street, 1920.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Building Application 362/20.

Listings in Wise's *New South Wales Post Office Commercial Directory* published from 1933 onwards do not include entries for 42 Flinders Street. However, the Band of Hope, a temperance organisation, was listed in the 1933 and 1934 editions at 40 Flinders Street. This was followed by the Social Service Committee, which may have been affiliated with the Band of Hope and was listed until the late 1940s.

Mary Gordon died in June 1940 and 40-42 Flinders Street subsequently came under the jurisdiction of the Perpetual Trustee Company. It sold 42 Flinders Street to P Page & Company in March 1945 and 40 Flinders Street to Repins Pty Limited in January 1948.⁹ The nature of P Page & Company's business has not been ascertained. Repins Pty Limited controlled a chain of coffee shops in Sydney established by Russian émigré Ivan Repin (1888-1949) during 1930. Repins applied to convert 40 Flinders Street to a factory and store and may have roasted coffee beans there. 42 Flinders Street appears to have been acquired for investment purposes and was tenanted.¹⁰

The architectural firm of Edwards Madigan & Torzillo was engaged by P Page & Company in 1955 to design and document alterations and additions to 42 Flinders Street, which effectively removed the evidence of earlier residential use. These included a Modernist style façade addressing Flinders Street.¹¹ In March 1956 Repins Pty Limited transferred the title to 40 Flinders Street to shopkeepers Chales Sailer and Allan Pitt.¹²



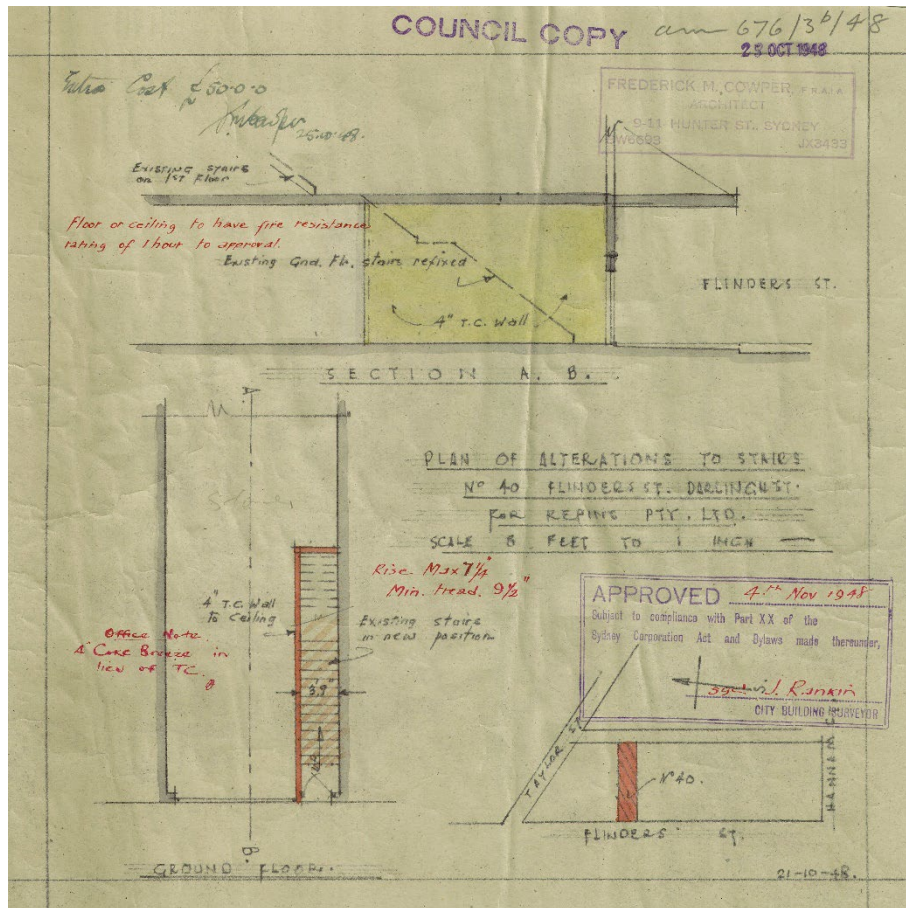
7 Portion of a circa 1941 photograph showing the facades of 40-42 Flinders Street.
Source: State Library of NSW Home and Away – 23521.

9 HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 1518 Folio 203.

10 Wise's *New South Wales Post Office Commercial Directory* 1950, p.38

11 Edwards Madigan & Torzillo (later Edwards Madigan Torzillo & Briggs) was formed in 1948. It remained a small practice during the 1950s, with projects for the Joint Coal Board and the Government Architects Branch of the Public Works Department. The practice went on to design highly regarded and award-winning projects including Warringah Library and Civic Centre at Dee Why (1967, 1973), the High Court of Australia (1980) and the National Gallery of Australia (1981), both in Canberra. (Angelo Candelapas, "Edwards Madigan Torzillo & Briggs (now HBO + EMBT)" in Philip Goad and Julie Willis, (editors), *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.225-226.

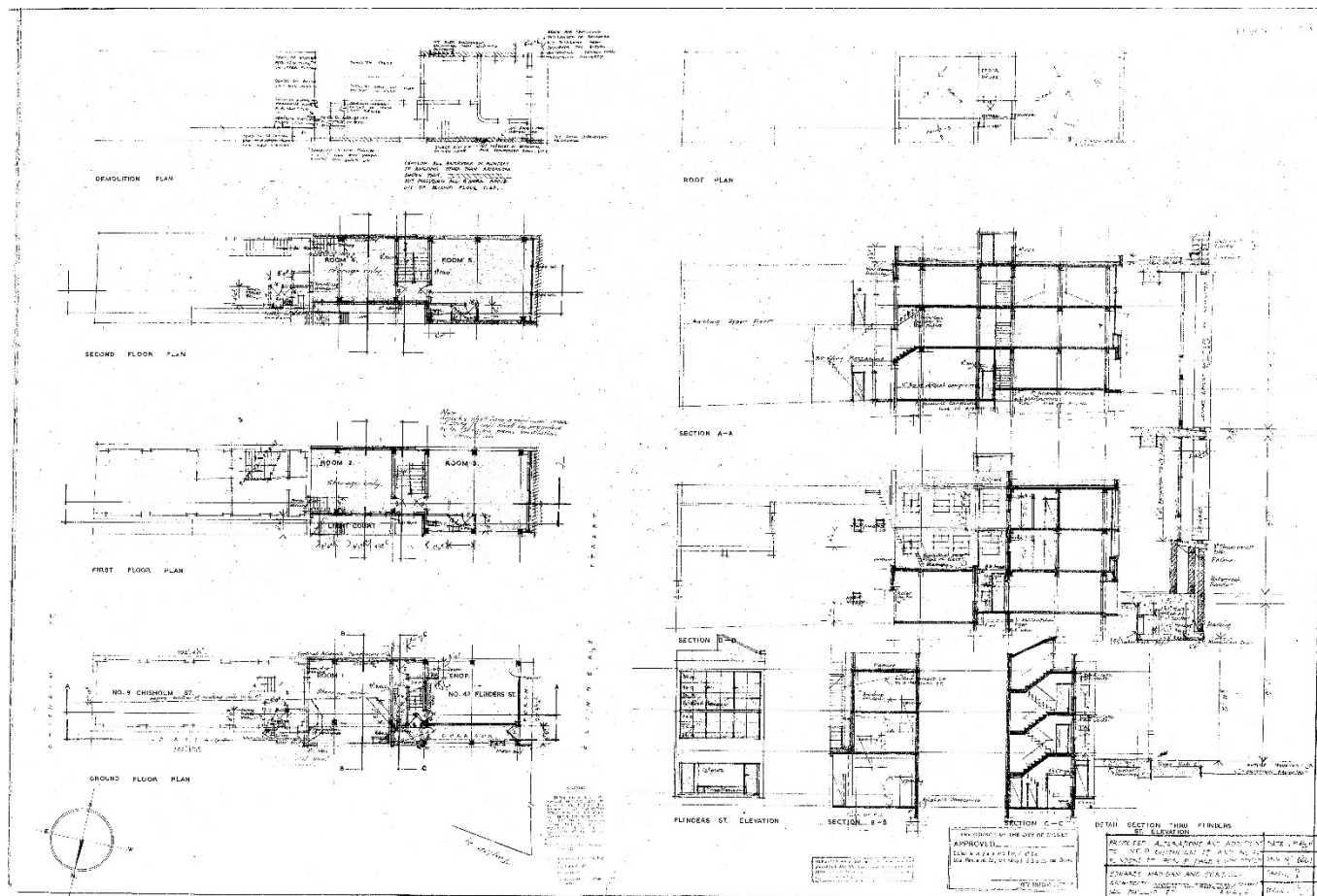
12 HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 5990 Folio 172.



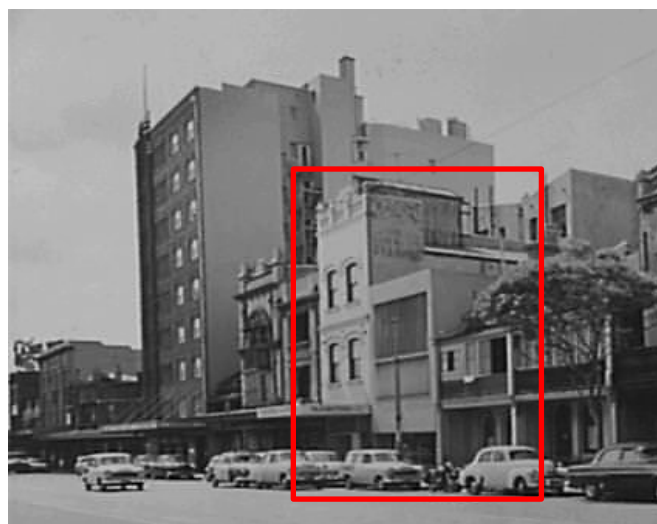
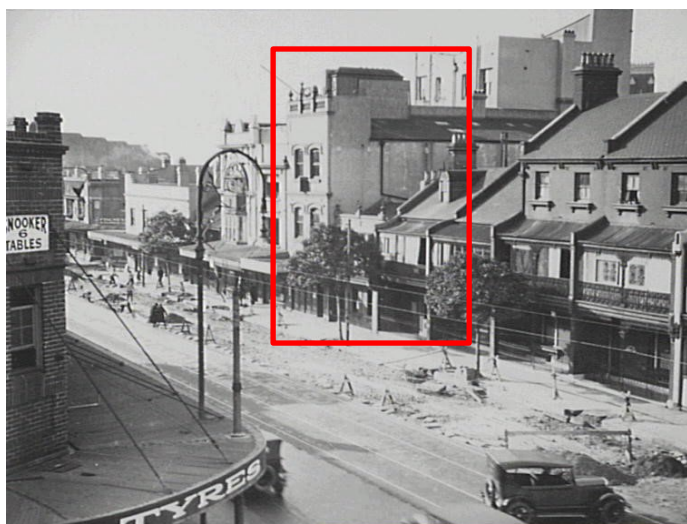
- 8 Minor alterations to 40 Flinders Street for Repins, 1948.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Building Application 676/48.



- 9 Footprint of development at 40-42 Flinders Street in 1949.
Source: City of Sydney Archives.



10 Drawing by architects Edwards Madigan & Torzillo describing alterations and additions to 42 Flinders Street, 1955.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Building Application 532/55.



11 Photographs looking north along Flinders Street taken in 1929 (left) and a portion of one taken in 1960 (right). Facades are highlighted.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00054974, Herbert Small photograph (1929) and Unique ID A-00012126.

The Grosvenor Club Ltd applied to the City of Sydney to use the first and second floors of 40 Flinders Street as its premises in August 1956. A lease was signed with Charles Sailer and Allan Pitt for occupancy and use of the two floors of the building on 5 November 1956.¹³ The Club applied to carry out various alterations in 1957. In subsequent years it became known as the Taxi Club and as an LGBTIQ+ venue. It is claimed to be Sydney's oldest such venue.¹⁴

The Grosvenor Club was originally a licensed 24-hour social club for taxi drivers. It followed changes to legislation that allowed far more licensed clubs in NSW in 1946 than then existed. There is some confusion about clubs for taxi drivers during the second half of the 1940s. It was claimed during 1948 that an Eastern Suburbs Transport Club at Bondi club was managed as a service to taxi drivers and used as "a kind of clearing house between shifts and while waiting to take over their cabs."¹⁵ There was evidently a Taxi Drivers Club in Oxford Street, Darlinghurst and another at Paddington, which was described as a "disorderly house". The Grosvenor Club, which was also known as the Taxi Club, was first established at 35 Flinders Street in 1949.

The Grosvenor Club's association with the LGBTIQ+ community was established in the first half of the 1960s and accompanied the rise of a flourishing drag scene in Sydney. Performers from the drag cabaret Les Girls came to the Club after their shows had finished, attracted by its long opening hours and in turn attracting a homosexual clientele. At that time there were very few recreational venues available to Sydney's drag or transgender community, let alone the lesbian and gay male communities. Les Girls opened in 1963 in a purpose-built venue at 32 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, commissioned by Abe Saffron and Sammy Lee. It was known as the Carousel Club. Les Girls ran until 1994.¹⁶

P Page and Company sold 42 Flinders Street to Membrana Pty Limited around the beginning of 1981.¹⁷ This was followed by the sale of 40 Flinders Street to a company called Aora Pty Limited in 1983. Aora subsequently sold the building to Membrana Pty Limited around the beginning of 1988.¹⁸ In the meantime a building application had been approved in May 1982 for alterations to the buildings that allowed the Taxi Club to expand into the first floor of 42 Flinders Street.¹⁹

At some time between 1982 and 1996 the facade of 42 Flinders Street was modified so that details of the façade of 40 Flinders Street were replicated. The exact date this took place has not been ascertained. As well, the third level added to 42 Flinders Street in the mid-1950s was apparently removed to provide a trafficable open area.²⁰

The Taxi Club went into voluntary administration in April 2012 and closed the following month. Attempts to amalgamate with another club were unsuccessful. Following this the owners of the building, Oxford Commercial Real Estate, would not enter a long-term lease arrangement so that the Club was forced to close. At that time it had around 3,000 members (and 32 poker machines).²¹

13 HLRV NSW Certificate of Title 7161 Folio 111.

14 "Taxi Club Forced to Vacate", *Star Observer*, 7 May 2012 at <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/new-south-wales-news/taxi-club-forced-to-close-doors/77002>, accessed 6 December 2012.

15 "Club Man Fined for Beer Sale", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 1947, p.15.

16 "Les Girls" at https://dictionaryofsydney.org/organisation/les_girls#ref-uuid=dce0725d-7c42-4428-ae3-131c5e92760f, accessed 1 May 2025.

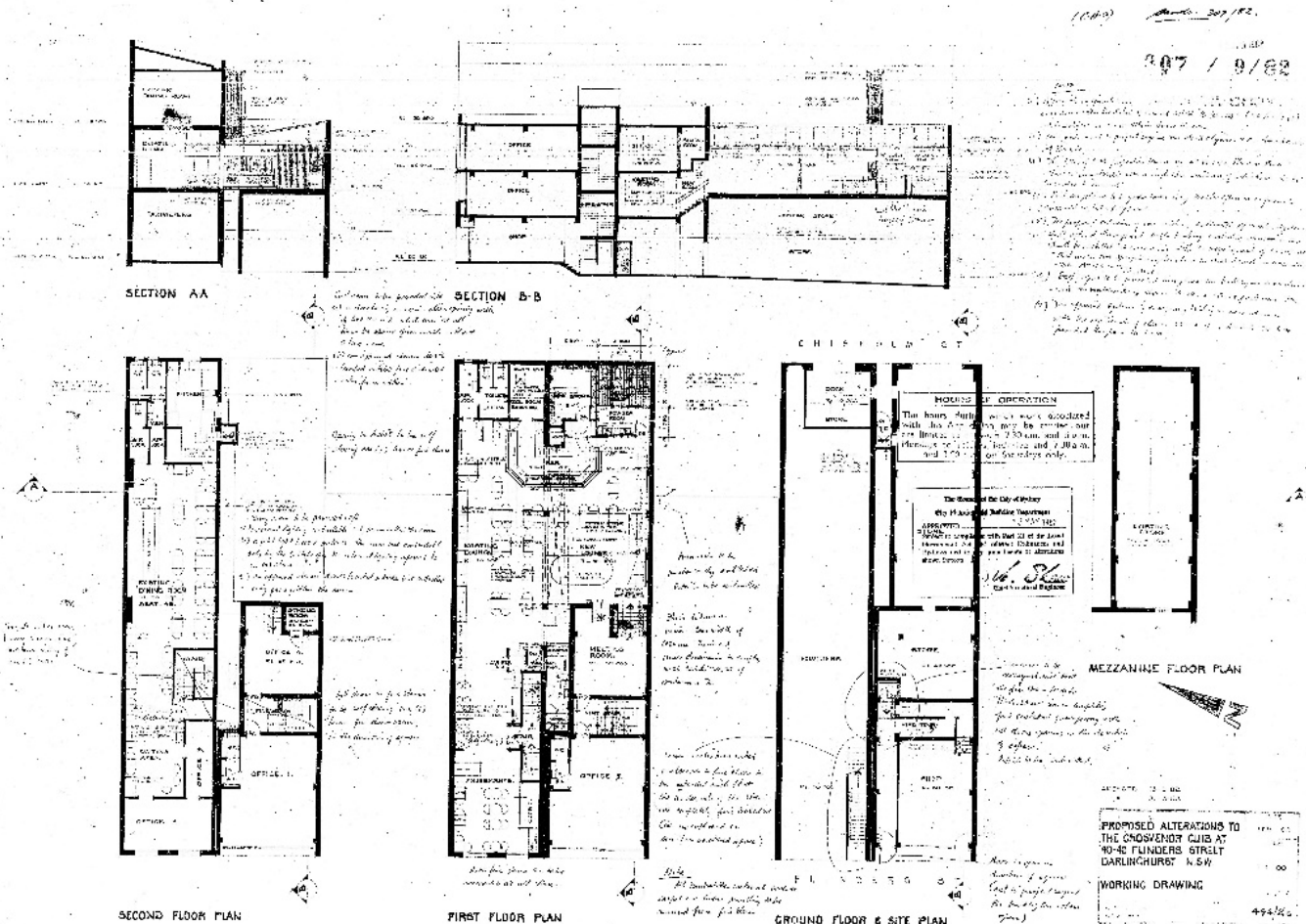
17 HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 5529 Folio 20.

18 HLRV NSW Certificate of Title Volume 7161 Folio 111.

19 City of Sydney Archives Building Application 307/82.

20 Drawings describing the modified façade at 432 Flinders Street are contained in the file relating to a 1996 Development Application (DA 402/96) for modifications to the building, including the reconfiguration of the ground floor level of the buildings' facades, which was approved in 1997.

21 Kelsy Munro and Nick Ralston, "Now that's a drag – lights dim for the Taxi Club", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 2011, accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/now-thats-a-drag--lights-dim-for-the-taxi-club-20111104-1mzyn.html>



12 Architectural drawing describing alterations to 40-42 Flinders Street, 1982
Source: City of Sydney Archives Building Application 307/82.



13 Flinders Street and Chisholm Street facades of 40-42 Flinders Street photographed on 8 April 2012, just before the Taxi Club entered into voluntary administration.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00074626 and Unique ID A-00074710, Mark Stevens photographs

3 Physical evidence

40-42 Flinders Street is a moderately prominent landmark in this section of the street. It comprises the three storey 40 Flinders Street on the northern section of the site and the two storey 42 Flinders Street on the southern side of the site, which have been amalgamated into one building. The Flinders Street façade of the building, most particularly that of 40 Flinders Street, is a modest and relatively late example of the Victorian Free Classical style, although it has been modified by the removal of the uppermost section of the parapet. The façade of 42 Flinders Street, while replicating that of its neighbour, resulted from modification to the 1950s façade around 1990. Elements of the facades that reflect the Free Classical influence include the stucco wall lining, decorative mouldings and cornice at parapet level (40 Flinders Street), the label moulds above window openings and the details of window sills. Comparison of the double hung windows with those appearing in archival photographs indicates that the existing windows are not original. Circular metal plaques associated with a suspended awning remain in place adjacent to label moulds of first floor windows at 40 Flinders Street.

The awning over Flinders Street is relatively recent in construction, as are the shopfronts.

Elevations on Chisholm Street are utilitarian - plain rendered wall surfaces, regularly spaced double hung windows and wide vehicular openings at street level. The parapet of 42 Flinders Street, however, has a gently curved profile, confined by squat piers at either end. Double hung windows in the rear elevation of 40-42 Flinders Street are not original. The roof over 40 Flinders Street is a skillion covered by metal sheeting while much of the roof over 42 Flinders appears to be trafficable.

The interior of the building was not inspected. Internal photographs have been taken from real estate agents' websites available on the internet. They indicate that the original timber floor structure of 40 Flinders Street remained in place in 2021 and was exposed.



14 Second floor plan of 40 Flinders Street.

Source:

<https://www.realcommercial.com.au/leased/property-level-2-40-42-flinders-street-darlinghurst-nsw-2010-504370060>



15 Looking south along Flinders Street towards 40-42 Flinders Street.



17 Façade of 40-42 Flinders Street, taken in 2023.



16 40-42 Flinders Street viewed from the south-west.



18 Shopfronts at 40-42 Flinders Street.



- 20 Roof terrace on the western side of 42 Flinders Street.
- Source:
<https://www.realcommercial.com.au/leased/property-level-2-40-42-flinders-street-darlinghurst-nsw-2010-504370060>



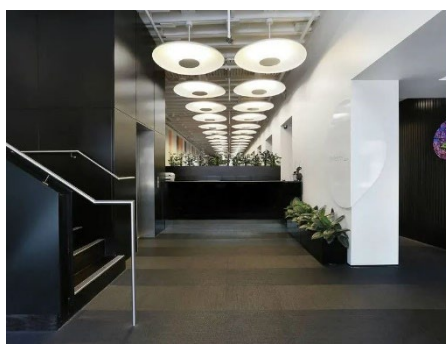
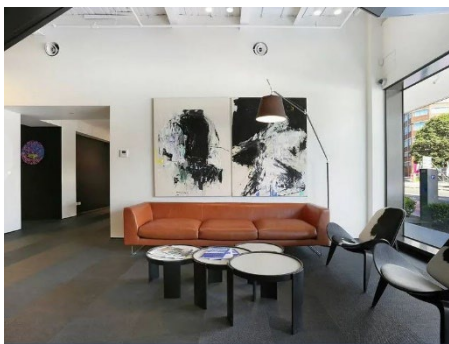
- 19 Looking south (left) and north (right) along Chisholm Street towards the rear of 40-42 Flinders Street.



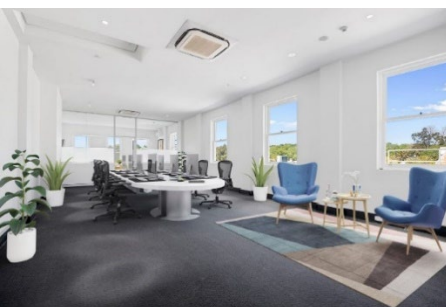
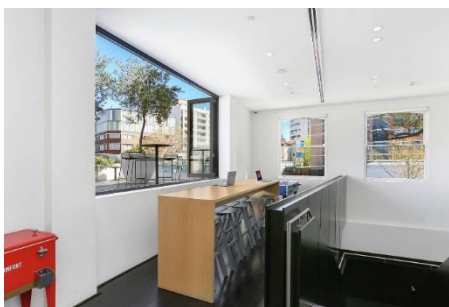
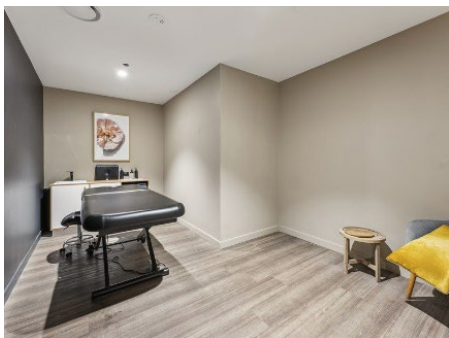
- 21 Rear elevation of 40-42 Flinders Street, on Chisholm Street.
- Source:
<https://www.commercialrealestate.com.au/property/ground-floor-40-42-flinders-street-darlinghurst-nsw-2010-14280325>



22 Detail view of the rear elevation of 40-42 Flinders Street.



23 Internal photographs taken in 2021 of the ground floor interior of 40-42 Flinders Street. The present interior fitout was designed by architectural firm Smart Design Studio.
The exposed first floor timber structure can be seen in the top images.
Source:
<https://www.commercialrealestate.com.au/property/ground-floor-40-42-flinders-street-darlinghurst-nsw-2010-14280325>



24 Internal photographs taken in 2024 of the second floor interior of 40-42 Flinders Street.
Source:
<https://www.realcommercial.com.au/leased/property-level-2-40-42-flinders-street-darlinghurst-nsw-2010-504370060>

4 Comparative analysis

4.1 Piano importers on Flinders Street

At the time 40 Flinders Street was constructed for James Gordon around 1904, there were 31 other pianoforte and importers' warehousemen listed in *Sands Sydney and suburban directory* (1905 edition). Of these, three others were located in close proximity to Gordon's establishment: Anderson & Son at 29 Flinders Street (subsequently Eiler Anderson & Sons), John Estens at 55 Flinders Street and Powell & Co at 57 Flinders Street.

John Estens' building was purpose designed and it was completed in 1899 to the design of architects Lindsay Thompson and Laidley. Its confident, up-to-date brick and terracotta façade was considered "a handsome addition to the architecture of the neighbourhood".²² It would have made the façade of James Gordon's establishment look staid and somewhat old-fashioned. Powell & Co's building was constructed in the early 1880s and subsequently adapted for retailing purposes, as evidenced by the masonry balustrading extending across first floor balcony that appears in archival photographs of the building. The widening of Flinders Street around 1916 ensured their demolition.



- 25 The premises of Eiler Anderson & Sons at 29 Flinders Street (left); the grand three storey premises of John Estens at 55 Flinders Street and rather more modest two storey premises of Powell and Co at 57 Flinders Street (right). Both photographs were taken on 11 August 1916, prior to their demolition.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00040555 and Unique ID A-00040574.

At the time Gordon's piano business vacated 40 Flinders Street there were 49 other pianoforte and importers' warehousemen listed in *Sands Sydney and suburban directory* (1924 edition). There were three in the vicinity of 40 Flinders Street: Eiler Anderson & Sons at 9 Flinders Street, EJ Powell & Co at 36 Flinders Street and C Randall at 38 Flinders Street. The resumption and demolition of properties on the western side of Flinders Street necessitated the relocation of businesses to the eastern side of the street. By the early 1930s numbers had reduced to 37 across metropolitan Sydney (*Sands Sydney and suburban directory*, 1932/33).

²² "Building and Construction", *Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1899, p.3.

4.2 Architectural style

The Victorian Free Classical style façade of 40 Flinders Street is architecturally the most significant element of the building. However, it appears anachronistic when compared to the Federation Free Style and Arts and Crafts buildings on the north side of Oxford Street that were constructed during the second decade of the twentieth century and followed resumption of properties by the Municipal Council of Sydney and the widening of the street. However, there are several building facades along Oxford Street that share references to the Victorian Free Classical style rather than more up to date architectural styles of the early twentieth century.



26 1940s photograph of buildings on the northern side of Oxford Street following resumption and widening during the first and second decades of the twentieth century.

Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00007319.

The florid commercial architecture associated with the later years of the Victorian era is effectively summarised by the 1891 building erected for drapers and clothiers Riley Bros. at 163-169 Oxford Street, which in the late 1960s became home to the celebrated LGBTIQ+ venue Capriccio's. Termed Victorian Mannerist, it takes the permissive interpretation of classical architecture to be found in the Victorian Free Classical style a step further, combining disparate details, scales and textures to produce eye-catching elements within the streetscape. This is particularly apparent in the treatment of the parapet, rich embellishments and shifts in scale along the second floor level of the façade.

Examples of building facades that are or were similar in character to 140-142 Flinders Street in the locality include the following.

- The Brighton Hotel at 75-77 Oxford Street (corner Riley Street), which underwent substantial modifications in 1899-1900. Evidence suggests the earlier two storey hotel was demolished and replaced with the existing three storey masonry structure. According to one contemporary report, its "external decorations are exceedingly handsome".²³ The cement rendered façade, embellished by classical pilasters, cornices and other mouldings, mirrors the confidence of 163-169 Oxford Street.



27 Façade of 163-169 Oxford Street.

Source:

<https://www.realcommercial.com.au/sold/property-163-169-oxford-street-darlinghurst-nsw-2010-502815898>

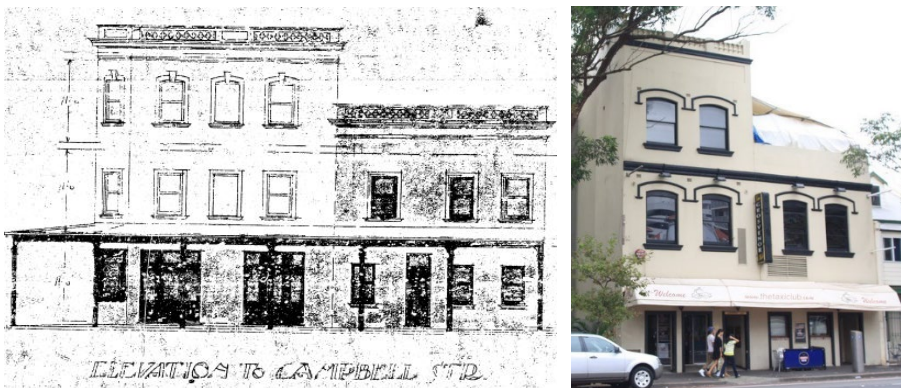
23 "Mayman's Brighton Hotel", Sunday Times, 23 December 1900, p.12.

- The building known as Kinselas at 383-387 Bourke Street was originally constructed in 1910-1911 for drapers Fraser & Hughes. In the 1930s it was adapted for use by funeral director Charles Kinsela.



- 28 Left: the Brighton Hotel at 75-77 Oxford Street, photographed circa 1936.
Right: Bourke Street façade of 383-387 Bourke Street (Kinselas), photographed in August 1969.
Source: State Library of NSW digital order number a6877016h, Arthur E Foster photograph; City of Sydney Unique ID A-00051665.

The Queens Arms Hotel, on the opposite corner of Bourke (289 Bourke Street) and Campbell Streets to Kinselas, was built circa 1885. The licence of the hotel was revoked in 1922 and the building demolished some years later. Although predating 40 Flinders Street by about 20 years, the disposition of its fenestration, parapet detailing and limited use of decorative mouldings was quite similar to the later building.



- 29 Left Campbell Street facade of the Queens Arms Hotel.
Right: façade of 40-42 Flinders Street. 1940s photograph of buildings on the northern side of Oxford Street following resumption and widening during the first and second decades of the twentieth century.
Sources: City of Sydney Unique ID A-00556296; TKD Architects.

4.3 Club context

Sydney has a relatively long history of social clubs. The earliest were quite exclusive.

The Australian Club, established in 1838, has a long history on Macquarie Street in Sydney. It is reputedly the oldest gentlemen's club in the southern hemisphere. It began with a clubhouse at Pulteney Hotel in Bent Street before relocating to its current location, the corner of Bent and Macquarie Streets (165-169 Macquarie Street), between 1889 and 1891. The club was designed by architect John Kirkpatrick but replaced at the beginning of the 1970s by the present building at 165-169 Macquarie Street designed by Hanson Todd & Partners,²⁴ which contained club facilities and office space.

24 City of Sydney Archives Building Application 284/70.

The Union Club was established in 1857 and resided at 25 Bent Street. In 1955 members decided to sell their clubhouse and land to resolve financial difficulties and moved into new premises at the intersection of Bent and Phillip Streets in May 1958. The significance of the building is thus historical and social rather than architectural.

The NSW Club was founded in 1883 and its elegant premises built between 1884 and 1887 to the design of William Wardell at 31 Bligh Street. The design was based on Sir Charles Barry's London Club. The building remained in Club use until the late 1960's when the site was sold. The main block was refurbished and a new high rise development was constructed at the rear of the building. The club itself amalgamated with the Australian Club in 1969²⁵

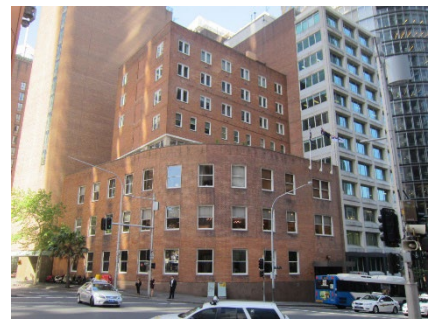
An exclusive women's club was established in the early years of the twentieth century. The Queen's Club takes its name from its first home in the 1891 building designed by Varney Parkes known as St James Chambers, which stood on the corner of Macquarie and King Streets facing Queens Square. The lease was purchased from St James Church in 1911. The Club was formally inaugurated on 1 February 1912. In the 1950's, the Club was advised that the State Government planned to resume the building for a new Supreme Court. It purchased the St James Hotel at the corner of Market and Elizabeth Streets in June 1959. On 1 January 1975, The Queen's Club formally merged with the Macquarie Club.²⁶

Changes to legislation regulating the sale of liquor in NSW during 1946 provided for the issue of 360 licenses for clubs, across the state which were to be operated on non-proprietary lines. At that time there were 85 clubs in NSW, a number that hadn't changed since 1908.²⁷ According to Professor Harry Margalit

The status of registered clubs in New South Wales is defined by several conditions. Clubs may be established for social, cultural or sporting reasons, but they are not-for-profit and need to provide a social benefit or objective. They are owned by members, but cannot distribute dividends to those members.... New South Wales clubs are further distinguished by one important attribute: their virtual monopoly on non-racecourse gambling for most of the 20th century through ownership of gaming [poker] machines²⁸

In 1954 the quota on club numbers was lifted and by 1962 registered club numbers in NSW had increased by 223%.²⁹ This was probably facilitated by legalising of gaming machines, which took place in 1956. The proliferation of clubs included RSL clubs, golf clubs, bowling clubs, leagues clubs and clubs to serve the needs of various migrant and special interest groups. The clubs convincingly competed with the monopoly on public recreation formerly held by hotels.

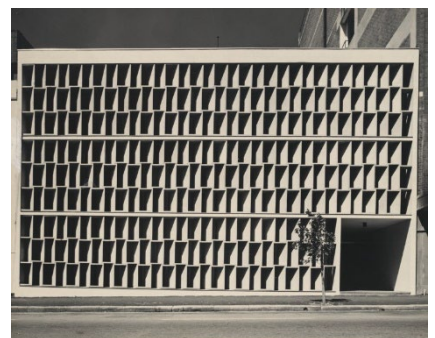
Unlike the Queens Club and the Taxi Club, which occupied an existing building that was modified to suit its needs, several purpose-designed clubs were built in Sydney during the 1950s and 1960s. Architect Harry Seidler's advanced Modernist building for the Printers' Union at 22-26 Regent Street was designed in 1957-58.³⁰ It contained the Union's offices, an assembly hall, kitchen, club rooms, bar, billiards and games rooms. The building's two facades, facing east and west, had full height glazing but the floor slabs projected beyond the glazing line and a unique



30 The Union Club's building at the intersection of Bent and Phillip Streets.



31 St James Chambers at the intersection of King and Macquarie Streets, home to the Queens Club for almost 50 years.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-00043824



32 Regent Street façade of the Printers' Union Building designed by Harry Seidler.
Source: National Gallery of Australia Accession Number 2001.232. Max Dupain photograph, copyright Penelope Seidler.

25 <https://archival.slnsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110319424>

26 <https://www.queensclub.com.au/history-heritage#:~:text=The%20Queen%27s%20Club%20takes%20its,yearly%20rental%20of%20C2%A3412.>

27 "New Clubs Allowed", *Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 1946, p.11. The relevant legislation was Act no 34, 1946, the Liquor Amendment Act

28 Harry Margalit, "The Leagues Club: a working-class palace" in Paul Hogben and Judith O'Callaghan (editors), *Leisure Space: The transformation of Sydney 1945-1970*, (UNSW Press, 2014), pp.180-181.

29 Catherine Evans and Tracie Harvison, "Golf: a changing landscape" in Hogben and O'Callaghan, p.166.

30 Seidler lodged DA 206/58 on 25 March 1958. The contractor lodged the BA at the same time.

brise soleil of splayed precast off-form finished concrete blocks designed to prevent the sun penetrating the building during the hot summer months.³¹ The building has since been demolished.

The City Bowling Club in Cook Park, just one of several bowling clubs that were established in the City of Sydney, undertook additions to its premises during 1959.³² The completed building was a single storey high, low and horizontal, with vast expanses of glass facing the bowling green shaded by a deep canopy below a striking red parapet. It has since been demolished. The Bowler's Club at 95-99 York Street, which was designed during the second half of the 1960s and completed in 1971,³³ was a multi-storey structure with a range of facilities for members such as bars, a dining room and well-equipped auditorium,³⁴ and a concrete facade with curved window openings and decorative spandrel panels.



33 Left: the City Bowling Club in Cook Park. Right the Bowler's Club in York Street (right). Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID: A-00024636 and Unique ID A-00024510.

Another club building constructed during the 1950s is of greater social and historical rather than architectural significance. The Hellenic Club was formed in the middle of the 1920s. After acquiring 251-253 Elizabeth Street the prominent architectural firm of Robertson & Marks, which had made a major contribution to Sydney's architecture during the first four decades of the twentieth century, was engaged and a functional structure was designed during 1956. The Hellenic Club was officially opened by Premier Cahill on 19 October 1959.³⁵

4.4 An LGBTIQ+ venue

The Taxi Club occupied an unusual position in the venues that appeared and flourished from the 1960s onwards.

According to one source published not long before the Taxi Club closed,

"It's always been a place where the transgender community can feel safe and accepted," Ms Mancini [the club's secretary-manager] said. "Whilst a lot more venues now are adapting to all parts of the [gay, lesbian and transgender] community, this was an exclusive place where they could feel that way. [Now] we're very diverse ... it doesn't matter who you are."

A regular at the Taxi Club for more than 25 years, Paul Hurst, said he doubts the sense of community that has existed at the site could be recreated at a new venue. "There's a lot of people who come in here who see this as their home," he said.



34 The Hellenic Club, 251-253 Elizabeth Street, Sydney.



31 "The Latest Work of Harry Seidler: Office and Club Building", *Architecture and Arts*, June 1959, p.29.

32 BA 359/59 was lodged on 18 February 1959.

33 The development application was lodged in December 1966, but the building application was not lodged until March 1969.

34 Bill Dunbar, "Bowls", *The Canberra Times*, 8 December 1971, p.34.

35 <http://www.hellenicclub.net.au/information/our-history/>, accessed 6 November 2013; BA 1070/56, lodged on 8 June 1956.

Sitting on the second floor bar with about a dozen people on Thursday night, Mr Hurst said, "It's now hard to believe this place used to be packed."

The head of Clubs NSW, Anthony Ball, said: "Hopefully with a successful amalgamation, it'll go on supporting the community for many years to come. It's surely the only place where drag shows and bingo co-exist."³⁶

- 35 Petra, Monique and Yvette, the 1991 Golden Girls show at The Taxi Club in Darlinghurst.
Source: City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-01155391 Star Observer Collection, Jamie Dunbar photograph.

Part of the popularity of the Grosvenor Club is attributed to hotel closing at 10.00 pm. The restrictions imposed by 6 o'clock closing ended in February 1955 with the introduction of later closing at 10.00 pm. Because it traded much later than this in the evening it attracted a mixed late-night crowd of what have been described as marginal people that included a criminal element. It acquired the reputation of a "blood bath", with bouncers throwing people down the steep stairs leading to the first floor club premises³⁷. The Club appears to have mellowed over time and has been noted as a safe and accepting place for members of the transgender community.

Although the Taxi Club remained a popular venue for several decades, changes to trading hours, lifting of restrictions on Sunday trading (December 1979) and the evolution of LGBTIQ+ venues offered the community greater options. During the late 1970s and early 1980s hotel trading hours were extended and nightclubs began opening along Oxford Street. An evening out in 1978 could start with drinks at hotels such as the Cricketers Arms on Fitzroy Street and then continue into the early hours at Oxford Street nightclubs such as Capriccios or Patchs. The Taxi Club thus became a venue for its members or a place to go to after the nightclubs had closed. However, since the early 1980s permitted trading hours and licencing allowed venues to operate throughout the night and into the morning.

4.5 Conclusions

40-42 Flinders Street, notwithstanding extensive modifications to its fabric, remains as a surviving example of the piano warehouses and showrooms that were once a feature of early twentieth century Sydney. The conservative architecture of its façade reflects the continuity of architectural styles from the Victorian era into the Federation era.

Socially the building marks the emergence of popular licensed clubs in the post-World War II era. Its particular origins as a place of recreation for taxi cab drivers, appears to have given it special status as a venue that was open for long hours. This in turn appears to have made attractive to members of the LGBTIQ+ community during the 1960s, when hotel and other venue licenses restricted trading hours. It occupies a distinctive place in the realm of LGBTIQ+ venues.

36 Kelsy Munro and Nick Ralston "Now that's a drag - lights dim for the Taxi Club", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 2011

37 David Williams, "Known Camp Bars – The Taxi Club" at <https://www.pridehistory.org.au/spaces/known-camp-bars/#itemId=5f7a9eefbb9a9f741d79873e> accessed 14 August 2025.

5 Assessment of heritage significance

The buildings at 40-52 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst, are assessed below in accordance with the guidelines contained in Assessing heritage significance: Guidelines for assessing places and objects against the Heritage Council of NSW criteria (NSW Department of Planning and Environment, 2023).

Historical significance

Criterion A An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

40 Flinders Street has some historical significance as a surviving purpose built piano warehouse in the locality. A comparatively large number were established in Oxford Street, Paddington, and the northern end of Flinders Street in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The slightly earlier and architecturally superior warehouse at 55 Flinders Street, completed in 1899, was demolished less than 20 years later.

40 Flinders Street became the home of the Grosvenor Club, a recreational facility for taxi drivers, and mirrors the growth and consolidation of licensed clubs in NSW following amendments to legislation in 1954. Its patronage by drag queens following the opening of Les Girls in 1963 because of its 24 hour licence and final closure in 2012 make it a very early and enduring LGBTIQA+ recreational venue.

40-42 Flinders Street meets the threshold for listing at a Local level.

Historical associations

Criterion B An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance to NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

40-42 Flinders Street is not associated with any individual of importance to the cultural history of Sydney or NSW. However, it has associations with Sydney's gay drag and transgender communities, who are of importance to the cultural history of Sydney.

40-42 Flinders Street meets the threshold for listing at a Local level.

Aesthetic significance

Criterion C An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area).

The exterior of 40 Flinders Street is a modest and late example of the Victorian Free Classical style. The façade of 42 Flinders Street was modified to match the façade of 40 Flinders Street circa 1990 and does not have significance. The buildings have been extensively modified and do not demonstrate a high degree of creativity or technical achievement, nor are they outstanding examples of an architectural style. There are far better examples of the Victorian Free Classical style elsewhere in Sydney.

40-42 Flinders Street does not meet the threshold for listing at a State or Local level.

Social significance

Criterion D An item has strong or special associations with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

40-42 Flinders Street, when functioning as the Taxi Club, is likely to have significance for Sydney's LGBTIQ+ community, although further research is required to confirm this.

40-42 Flinders Street is likely to meet the threshold for listing at a Local level.

Research potential

Criterion E An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

40-42 Flinders Street does not fulfil this criterion because of extensive modifications to the buildings' fabric.

40-42 Flinders Street does not meet the threshold for listing at a State or Local level.

Rarity

Criterion F An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

Despite extensive modifications, 40 Flinders Street is a rare surviving example of a purpose-designed piano warehouse. However, there is little to suggest that it would have been greatly different to other suburban warehouses constructed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

40-42 Flinders Street is not considered to be a rare example of a post-World War II licensed club as there is no evidence in the building fabric to allow interpretation of this use. However, its early, enduring and distinctive use as a venue frequented by the LGBTIQ+ community is considered to be rare.

40-42 Flinders Street meets the threshold for listing at a State or Local level.

Representativeness

Criterion G An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's (or local area's) cultural or natural places, or cultural or natural environment.

40 Flinders Street may be representative of an early twentieth century warehouse, in this case one devoted to the sale of musical instruments. However, evidence of this use has been removed through ongoing alterations and refurbishment. Its façade is representative of the Victorian Free Classical style.

40-42 Flinders Street does not meet this criterion at a State or Local level. Although the façade of 40 Flinders Street is stylistically representative, there are far better examples of the Victorian Free Classical style in Sydney.

6 Conclusions

40-42 Flinders Street fulfils the NSW Heritage Council's criteria for historical, historical association, social significance and rarity at a local level. It therefore warrants consideration for listing as a heritage item in Schedule 5 of Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.