

# Heritage inventory sheet

Based on the NSW Heritage Office State Heritage Inventory sheet

ITEM DETAILS			
<b>Name of Item</b>	<b>The Bookshop</b>		
<b>Former name</b>			
<b>Item type</b>	<b>Built</b>		
<b>Address</b>	Number <b>207</b>	Street <b>Oxford Street</b>	Suburb <b>Darlinghurst</b>
<b>Property description</b>	Lot <b>1</b>		<b>174698.</b>
<b>Use</b>	Current <b>Retail</b>		Former <b>Retail/residential</b>
<b>Statement of significance</b>	<p>The building at 207 Oxford Street has significance as the site of The Bookshop, a long-running bookshop devoted to the sales of gay and lesbian books, journals and publications. The Bookshop has been an important hub of community interaction relating to events such as the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. Documentary and oral evidence indicates that The Bookshop has strong and special associations with members of Sydney's LGBTIQ+ community resulting from its forty plus year occupation of 207 Oxford Street. It is the oldest exclusive bookshop devoted to the LGBTIQ+ community in NSW and Australia.</p> <p>Although evidence strongly suggests that 207 Oxford Street is part of a group of four buildings designed by the prominent architect John Burcham Clamp, further research is required to confirm this provenance. 207 Oxford Street has strong and definite associations with Les McDonald, who with his then partner Wayne Harrison co-founded The Bookshop in the early 1980s and then owned and operated the business until retiring in 2024. Les McDonald in particular is considered an important figure in the LGBTIQ+ community because of his continuous associations with The Bookshop from 1982 to his retirement.</p> <p>The façade of 203-209 Oxford Street, including 207 Oxford Street, notwithstanding unsympathetic modifications and accretions, is a representative and distinctively detailed example of the Federation Free Classical style that makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Oxford Street between Flinders and South Dowling Street. It is representative of the mixed retail and residential buildings constructed along major thoroughfares such as Oxford Street in the Sydney local government area during the Federation era.</p>		
<b>Level of significance</b>	State: No	Local: Yes	
<b>Heritage listings</b>	Included in the Oxford Street Heritage Conservation Area.		
DESCRIPTION			
<b>Designer</b>	Attributed to John Burcham Clamp.		
<b>Builder</b>	Attributed to G P Jones.		
<b>Construction years</b>	Circa 1907		

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<p><b>Physical Description</b></p>	<p>The building at 207 Oxford Street is part of a group of four two storey buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street. The upper section of the façade is a good example of the Federation Free Classical style, which was commonly used for commercial architecture. Characteristics of the style evident in the façade include symmetry (distorted by changes in level along the street), classical details that are simplified or distorted such as the columns associated with balconies, parapet mouldings and exaggerated brackets below the parapet, and the exaggerated semi-circular “pediment” above the centre of the building containing a large cartouche. The combination of face brick walls and sandstone decorative elements and details is also characteristic of the Federation period. The balcony of 207 Oxford Street has been enclosed. A light well extends along the western side of the rear of the building. Air conditioning units are located above the Oxford Street awning.</p> <p>As with many shops, the ground and first floor levels are separated by a suspended awning, the linings of which are recent. The shopfront installed circa 1964, which contains a central entry porch flanked on each side by display windows, remains in place. However, vertical surfaces have been painted and the porch floor has been finished with cement.</p> <p>There is little remaining evidence of original internal planning. The ground floor is open, the narrow rear (southern) section rising one step above the front of the shop. Evidence of early finishes and planning is limited to the pressed metal ceiling over the front retailing section on the ground floor. The relieving arches in the party walls remain exposed. Wall surfaces are lined with cement render/plaster and are painted. The floor consists of wide timber boards, which may be early if not original. A stair at the south-western corner of the main shop gives access to the first floor. It also has a timber floor and painted plaster walls. Windows allow natural light into the rear of the building. A small bathroom is adjacent to the stair.</p> <p>The roof of the building contains an open trafficable terrace with a small skillion roofed structure, presumably the original laundry, at its southern end.</p>
<p><b>Physical condition</b></p>	<p>The building appears to be in good condition.</p>
<p><b>Modification and Dates</b></p>	<p>The building has undergone several changes of use including bookshops, restaurants and other retailing activities.</p> <p>Applications for modifications to the building listed in City of Sydney Street Cards include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1929 – alterations to shop.</li> <li>• 1964 – new shopfront.</li> <li>• 1968 – alterations to awning.</li> <li>• 1976 – new stair.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Archaeological potential</b></p>	<p>Not ascertained.</p>

## HISTORY

The coastal regions of Sydney between Port Jackson and Botany Bay are the ancestral territories of the Eora people. The traditional owners of the land now within the Woollahra Council area were the Cadigal (Gadigal) people. In common with other tribes living by Sydney Harbour, the Cadigal lived in harmony with the natural resources within their country, fishing from canoes or hunting the animals that lived in surroundings. The tribe appears to have moved within their territory in response to the seasons and family connections. Shell middens and other archaeological remains in the area provide material evidence of many centuries of sustained connection to the land that also sustained them. The arrival of white settlers caused the wholesale disruption of traditional life and the cultural practices of the Eora people

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generally. Despite enormous challenges, today many Indigenous people identify as Eora and maintain cultural practices and a connection to Country.

The site of 207 Oxford 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 207 Oxford Street was purchased by Corporal James Chisholm. Although he sold most of his purchase almost immediately, Chisholm retained a triangular section bounded by the South Head Road, Botany Road (later renamed Flinders Street) and the edge of the Sydney Common.

A sizeable amount of land bounded in part by New South Head Road (now Oxford Street) is understood to have been purchased from Chisholm by coachbuilder Thomas Moore in December 1860. Moore, who built, sold and leased cabs, arrived in NSW during 1851. He died at the age of 82 in July 1912. The site of 207 Oxford Street remained undeveloped during the 1850s. Although there is an entry for 207 New South Head Road in the 1858 edition of *Sands Directory*, it does not appear in later editions until the 1870s, the earliest reference being umbrella maker S Robinson in the 1873 edition of the *Directory*. Thomas Moore occupied parts of his land from about 1862 onwards.

Moore applied to bring the property onto Torrens Title, which took place during February 1905. On 21 June 1906 Moore transferred the title to a portion of the land along Oxford Street to York Buildings Limited.

There is evidence suggesting that prominent architect John Burcham Clamp designed the building at 203-209 Oxford Street, of which 207 Oxford Street is a part. It was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* in August 1907 that Clamp accepted the tender of builder G P Jones "for the erection of seven shops and residences, Oxford-street, for the York Buildings, Ltd." This fits timing for the acquisition of the site by York Buildings Limited and the commissioning and production of documentation for development across the site. The Municipal Council of Sydney's Building Application Register for 1907 notes the lodgement of an application in April that year by York Buildings Limited for seven shops and residences adjacent to 211 Oxford Street. A subsequent notation states that four buildings only were completed and the other three would proceed in due course. Further evidence for Clamp's involvement includes entries on Council's street cards for Oxford Street for 1907 and 1911, which link Clamp's name to works on buildings associated with York Buildings Limited.

John Burcham Clamp (1869-1931) In 1883 he was articled to H. C. Kent, a leading Sydney architect, and attended evening classes at the University of Sydney and the Sydney Technical College, where he was an outstanding student. Clamp worked for Kent until he joined T. M. Smith in partnership in 1899. In 1901 he set up on his own and became known for efficient planning, competent design and secure construction. Clamp's meeting with Walter Burley Griffin in the United States of America led to a brief partnership with him in Sydney in 1914. He was subsequently joined by architect Crawford. H. Mackellar and they designed several factories and other buildings between 1918 and 1924. An active Anglican and prominent Freemason, Clamp was building surveyor for the diocese of Sydney and exercised considerable influence in ecclesiastical architecture. He was a member of the Town Planning Association of New South Wales, fortunate to practise during two boom periods in 1901-14 and 1920-28, Clamp provided a bridge between the nineteenth-century romantic and twentieth-century functionalist styles, presenting an originality of design which combined character with sound commercial possibilities. At the time that 203-209 Oxford Street was built, Clamp was a sole practitioner producing major buildings such as Wyoming at 175-183 Hunter Street, Sydney, which was completed in 1911. However, buildings such as 203-209 Oxford Street, containing ground floor shops and first floor residences, were a mainstay of his practice at this time.

Council assessment records for Flinders Ward from 1907 confirm that the existing buildings had not yet been constructed. They were certainly in place by the time the 1911 assessment records were produced. York Buildings Limited subdivided the property during 1917 and 207 Oxford Street became part of Lot C on Deposited Plan 9258, which comprised 207 to 211 Oxford Street.

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York Buildings Limited transferred the title of Lot C to Mrs Ida Kelsey, who resided in London, in April 1922. Not long after, Mrs Kelsey transferred the property title to Dr Hamilton Speirs Kirkland in November 1922. From August 1923 Dr Kirkland sold the three buildings in Lot C to separate buyers. On 29 October 1923 the title to 207 Oxford Street was transferred to George Laridis, described on title documents as a confectioner. Laridis changed his surname to Laird at the beginning of September 1924.

In 1929 a company called Tjannes & Co applied for alterations to the shop at 207 Oxford Street, in conjunction with its use as the "London Fish Saloon." Alterations were carried out under the supervision of architect Henry S Standen. Modifications included relocation of the internal stairs and conversion of the retail and residential components of the building on both floors to a café.

George Laridis sold 207 Oxford Street to storekeeper Maurice Harry Rosen, the transfer of title taking place in December 1949. Rosen died in May 1972 and the property passed to Bernard Wolf Rosen the following year.

According to one source,

During the 1960s and 1970s, 207 Oxford Street was home to (Mrs) Whitty's wine bar. It is claimed to have been the "real heart" of the musical scene in the local area, featuring bands such as the Starving Wild Dogs and the Original Batterseas Heroes.

However, the building may have served other purposes as well. Applications were lodged to use (at least part) of the building as a gift shop and pawn broker in 1964, installation of a new shopfront (1964), use the building as a bookshop and install a new stair (1976), use the two levels of the building as refreshment rooms and the ground floor for retailing purposes (1983).

Exiles Bookshop opened at 207 Oxford Street in February 1979. Established by actor Susumu Hirayanagi and bookseller Nicholas Pounder, Exiles was notable for hosting poetry readings and was something of a centre for the local poetry scene in the early 1980s. It also sold LGBTIQ+ publications. A gallery was located on the first floor, where exhibitions including photography and political cartoons were staged. Exiles Bookshop featured in the 1981 John Duigan film, *Winter of our Dreams*, as the bookshop owned by Brian Brown's character, Rob. Exiles Bookshop closed in late 1982.

The next bookshop to occupy the building proved to be rather more enduring. The Bookshop opened at 207 Oxford Street on 11 February 1985, relocating from premises in Crown Street where it first opened in 1982. It was established by Les McDonald and his then-partner Wayne Harrison. A development application for the use of 207 Oxford Street as a bookshop was lodged on 7 January 1985 by a company called Stilono Pty Ltd. A branch at Newtown opened in March 1986 and closed in 1998.

The genesis of The Bookshop was Les McDonald and Wayne Harrison's trip to the United States of America during the 1970s, where they noticed LGBTIQ+ books were advertised in the gay press. This was something that was not happening in Sydney. On their return McDonald started to order American LGBTIQ+ books and selling them through mail order, promoting the business through advertising and forming gay male and lesbian book clubs. In time the business became large enough to justify opening a bookshop in Crown Street. According to Les McDonald, "It was the time before computers and apps and all that sort of thing ... The bars were all really busy, the streets were teeming with people, and The Bookshop became a sort of a central meeting place in the heart of it."

The Bookshop was associated with two of McDonald and Harrison's other businesses, a mail order business known as Bull Dog Books providing people living beyond the inner-city with access to gay and lesbian related books and Southpaw Press, which published three editions of a gay guide, initially as *Sydney and Beyond* and then as *Australia and Beyond*.

During the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, The Bookshop became an important community resource, providing information, support and a safe space. According to Les McDonald, "When HIV/Aids happened, it became a lot more crucial to have a physical place that had information about that ... Titles about HIV/Aids were not being published in Australia, and we had to go to the US to

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find them." The Bookshop worked with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras during the 1980s, selling parade tickets and promoting fundraising events and rallies in association with the Aids Council of New South Wales. Dance party tickets could also be purchased from the shop. In the late 1980s the first floor was used for the first temporary Mardi Gras museum.

Bookshops selling gay books and magazines opened on Oxford Street during the 1970s, but none are named. The Feminist Bookshop, established at Eastwood in 1974, was the first shop in Australia to sell only women's and feminist texts. It also supported events such as the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. Another book store in Sydney where LGBTIQ+ publications were available was Interventions Bookshop, which from around 1975 was located in Haymarket. It closed down in 1987. The Bookshop, established in 1982, is still trading where earlier bookshops have closed, and is unique as a long-established community-oriented bookshop in Sydney. A very limited number of exclusively LGBTIQ+ bookshops are located in other state capitals. The International Bookshop in Melbourne was for several decades an important source of LGBTIQ+ literature. Established in 1933, during the 1970s. It became a significant seller of LGBTIQ+ publications after the acquisition of the stock of Adelaide's Dr Duncan Revolution Bookshop in 1977. The Dr Duncan Revolution Bookshop was claimed to be the first in Australia specialising in gay and feminist literature and established in June 1974. It closed in May 1977 and its stock was transferred to the International Bookshop in Melbourne, which closed in May 1993. Also in Melbourne, Hares & Hyenas opened in 1991 and continues to trade. Shelf Lovers was an LGBTIQ+ and romance bookshop founded in 2021. The store closed in April 2025 but may reopen as an online store.

According to Graeme Aitken, a buyer and manager of The Bookshop, it has played an important role as a community support system throughout the LGBTIQ+ rights movements of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The Bookshop has been noted as Australia's largest retailer of LGBTIQ+ books and other literature.

207 Oxford Street was sold in August 2014 but The Bookshop remained trading there. After more than 40 years' involvement with selling books and publications, Les McDonald retired in 2024 and the business was taken over by Charles Gregory. The Bookshop is now considered to be one of the last LGBTIQ+ bookstores in the world.

## HISTORICAL THEMES

Australian Theme	State theme	Local theme
3 Developing local, regional and national economies	Commerce	Retail development in Darlinghurst
4 Building settlements, towns and cities	Towns suburbs and villages	Growth and consolidation of Oxford Street in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
6 Education	Educating	Pivotal role of The Bookshop as a source of information for the LBGTQIA+ community
8 Developing Australia's cultural life	Creative Endeavour	Federation era architecture in the City of Sydney
9 Marking the phases of life	Persons	Potential associations with John Burcham Clamp; associations with Les McDonald

## HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

<p><b>Historic significance</b> SHR criteria (a)</p>	<p>The building at 207 Oxford Street has significance as the site of a long-running bookshop continuously devoted to the sales of gay and lesbian books, journals and publications since February 1985. Although not the first to do so, the bookshop has proved remarkably enduring and has been an important hub of community interaction for significant interaction relating to events such as the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s.</p> <p>The site at 207 Oxford Street fulfils this criterion at a Local level.</p>
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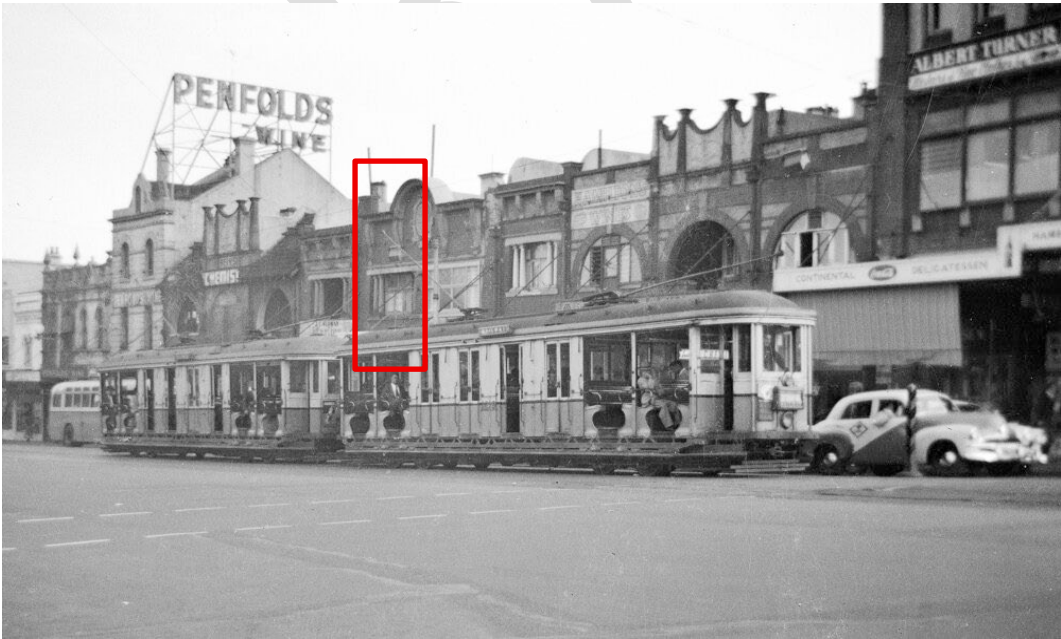
<p><b>Historical association</b> SHR criteria (b)</p>	<p>The building at 207 Oxford Street is a part of a group of four buildings that appears to have been designed by the prominent architect John Burcham Clamp, who designed several significant Federation era commercial buildings, along with private residences and buildings containing shops and residences. Although evidence uncovered during the preparation of this report strongly suggests Clamp as the building's architect, further research is required to confirm this provenance.</p> <p>The building at 207 Oxford Street has strong associations with Les McDonald, who with his then partner Wayne Harrison co-founded The Bookshop in the early 1980s and then owned and operated the business until retiring in 2024. Les McDonald ran The Bookshop for about 40 years, supporting and informing the LGBTIQ+ community, and is an important figure in the community in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.</p> <p>The group of buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street, including 207 Oxford Street may fulfil the criterion for listing at a Local level, but this is contingent in definitely establishing Burcham Clamp as the building's architect.</p>
<p><b>Aesthetic significance</b> SHR criteria (c)</p>	<p>The façade of 203-209 Oxford Street including 207 Oxford Street, notwithstanding unsympathetic modifications and accretions, is a fine and distinctively detailed example of the Federation Free Classical style that makes an important contribution to the streetscape of Oxford Street between Flinders and South Dowling Street.</p> <p>The group of buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street fulfils the criterion for listing at a Local level. It should be noted that the building is afforded protection by its inclusion in the Oxford Street Heritage Conservation Area.</p>
<p><b>Social significance</b> SHR criteria (d)</p>	<p>Documentary evidence and quotes from interviews provide evidence that 207 Oxford Street has strong and special associations with members of Sydney's LGBTIQ+ community resulting from its forty plus year occupation by The Bookshop. Over the years The Bookshop has been a strong community hub and a valuable source of published material not otherwise generally available to the public.</p> <p>The building at 207 Oxford Street is considered to fulfil this criterion at a Local level.</p>
<p><b>Technical/Research significance</b> SHR criteria (e)</p>	<p>The building at 207 Oxford Street is unlikely to fulfil this criterion. The information that it can yield can also be obtained from other sites in the local government area. Modifications undertaken to the building's interior have compromised its integrity.</p>
<p><b>Rarity</b> SHR criteria (f)</p>	<p>The row of buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street including 207 Oxford Street, as an example of a group of Federation era shop and residential buildings, is not rare.</p> <p>The row of buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street, including 207 Oxford Street, does not fulfil this criterion at a Local or State level.</p>
<p><b>Representativeness</b> SHR criteria (g)</p>	<p>The row of buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street is representative of the mixed retail and residential buildings constructed along major thoroughfares in the Sydney local government area such as Oxford Street and King Street, Newtown, during the Federation era. The façade of 203-209 Oxford Street is representative of Federation Free Classical style architecture.</p> <p>The row of buildings at 203-209 Oxford Street, including 207 Oxford Street, fulfils this criterion at a Local level.</p>

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<b>Integrity</b>	The overall integrity of the building has not been ascertained.			
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>				
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain and conserve the form and fabric of the building consistent with its existing contribution status in the conservation area (outward appearance).</li> <li>Continuation of the retail use is preferable but not required.</li> <li>The removal of intrusive accretions on the Oxford Street facade is encouraged. Unpainted fabric including brick and stone is best remaining unpainted.</li> <li>Alterations and additions consistent with the controls for the Oxford Street Creative and Cultural Precinct may occur and are to retain the building's contribution to the conservation area.</li> <li>Conserve the LGBTIQ+ historic and social significance of the place through interpretation on site.</li> </ul>			
<b>INFORMATION SOURCES</b>				
<b>Type</b>	<b>Author/Client</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Repository</b>
Written	TKD Architects	The Bookshop, 207 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst Heritage Assessment	2025	Woollahra Council

<b>AUTHOR OF THIS REPORT</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>
TKD Architects	16 September 2025

<b>IMAGES</b>			
<b>Image Caption</b>			
			
<b>Image Year</b>	1957	<b>Image author and Copyright Holder</b>	City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-01168694.

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## IMAGES

Image Caption



Image Year

1960

Image author and Copyright Holder

City of Sydney Archives Unique ID A-01170497 Vic Solomons collection.

## IMAGES

Image Caption

Susumu Hirayanagi outside Exiles Bookshop. The shopfront was approved by Council in 1964. Source:



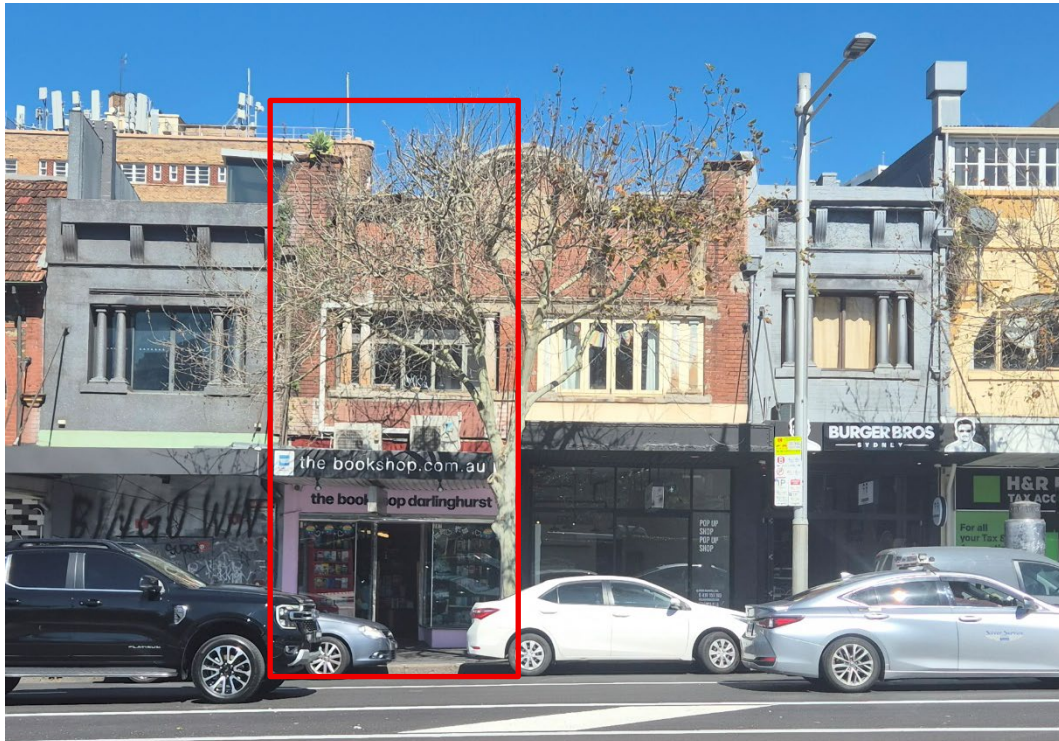
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<b>Image Year</b>	1980	<b>Image author and Copyright Holder</b>	Michael Shirley photograph; State Library of NSW PXE 997
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## IMAGES

**Image Caption** 203-209 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst. 207 Oxford Street is highlighted.



<b>Image Year</b>	2025	<b>Image author and Copyright Holder</b>	TKD Architects
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## IMAGES

Image Caption

Façade of 207 Oxford Street



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Year

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## IMAGES

**Image Caption**

Shopfront, 207 Oxford Street.



**Image Year**

2024

**Image author and Copyright Holder**

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