

AMA House (BMA House)

Address 135-137 Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

Practice Fowell & McConnel

Designed 1929 Completed 1930

History & Description The British Medical Association (BMA), founded in England in 1832 to promote the study of medicine & the protection of the medical profession, established branches in three Australian states in 1879-80. The BMA flourished in New South Wales in the period of 1908 to 1931 when its secretary was Dr Robert Todd, a prominent physician, barrister, clarinettist, university lecturer & medical administrator. The BMA commissioned the winners of a competition, Fowell & McConnel, & their contractors, Hutcherson Bros, to erect their prestigious 12 storey high-rise Art Deco building. The construction techniques & materials used were influenced by buildings of the time in the USA. The exterior exhibits elements of the Art Deco style including the emphatic vertical façade treatment with a concentration of ornament to the stepped skyline & stylised low-relief ornament to the main façade. The façade & the principal public interior spaces were clad with Faience terracotta panelling, manufactured by Wunderlich, including six full-size medieval knights in armour & two koalas perched high on the façade. The spectacular assembly hall was panelled with Queensland maple & with Colotex, which was affixed to battens on the concrete walls to enhance the acoustics & insulation. The building contained offices & the library of the BMA on the first floor, with rooms on other floors available for lease.

The building when completed was acclaimed, along with department store chain Grace Bros new building in King Street, in *Building* as "the first two local examples that can be said to really follow the dictates of skyscraper and modern American architecture generally". Its architects were the first recipients of the Royal Institute of British Architects Street medal and diploma in 1933.

In 1972 the BMA became the Australian Medical Association & in the 1980s the new body moved to AMA House in St Leonards. The original building is now leased, mainly to doctors and dentists.
(Adapted from NSW SHR database #5045731)

Statement of Significance AMA House is an excellent & rare example of an early Sydney skyscraper designed in an exuberant & idiosyncratic Art Deco style embellished with Medieval and Gothic decoration. AMA House is notable for its use of contemporary building technology - particularly the faience cladding by Wunderlich - & for its highly decorated main facade. The intactness of the original fabric & its finishes & detailing both externally & internally enhance the building's significance.
(Adapted from NSW SHR database #5045731)

Criteria Applicable **N1.** Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design
N2. Significant heritage value in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics



AMA House front façade on Macquarie Street.
(Source: S Watters, NSW Heritage Office)



Façade detail showing faience terracotta detailing.
(Source: S Watters, NSW Heritage Office)



The strong verticals of AMA House front facade finished in a mix of architectural decoration including knights in medieval armour & koalas.
(Source: S Watters, NSW Heritage Office)