

THE VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE MEDAL

The Royal Victorian Institute of Architects will announce the award of two medals during the Moomba Festival to the architects of buildings judged to be the best erected in Victoria in the past year. One award will go to a building in any category, the other to the best single house.

The two awards are known as "Victorian Architecture Medals" and they are given annually. In each case the building receives a bronze plaque which it is proud to wear in a prominent position, and the architect receives a bronze medal - smaller, but still not intended to be worn.

The object of the awards is to celebrate and honour publicly the more distinguished works of architecture performed in the city and its suburbs - as judged by the profession of architecture itself. All members of the five-man jury are architects. A different jury is elected each year. It selects from a number of buildings nominated to it, and it can add others to the list as it sees fit. The whole jury must visit any building which is seriously considered for an award, to ensure itself that the beauty is more than skin deep.

Although the Victorian Architecture Award is new - the first ones were awarded only last year - it is a direct descendant of an annual award first given in 1929 and called the "Victorian Street Architecture Medal". The change of name - the elimination

of the work "street" - is a comment on our development to a more mature architectural standpoint. The old awards were given - 14 of them until 1942 - purely on the artistic merits of the exterior, the flat facade of the building that was presented to the street. Today the problems of architecture are recognised as going a little deeper than that. Nonetheless many of Melbourne's finest buildings of this century are included in the list of award winners.

The first to be honoured, in 1929, was the sedate little white Georgian professional chambers in upper Collins Street known as Francis House, designed by Blakett and Forster. The Emily McPherson College by E. Evan Smith received the next. Lyric House, a minuscule Gothic facade in Collins Street near Swanston Street, by A. & K. Henderson won the 1931 award.

Two city office blocks of Depression times still wear their medals. These buildings seemed big in their time but now are dwarfed by new neighbours. They are the A.M.P., by Bates, Smart & McCutcheon, and the Port Authority Building by Smith, Ogg & Serpell. The enormous columns on the latter give no hint today to the economic stresses of 1932 when it was being built. Two more offices of happier boom days in the mid-thirties were also honoured: the Shell Building, by A. & K. Henderson, in Williams Street, and the Bank of New South Wales, by Godfrey and Spowers, in Collins Street.

The first of the award winning buildings that could be described as modern architecture, as we now know it, was the Christian Science Church at Camberwell, by Bates, Smart & McCutcheon, 1939. The following year, the outstandingly progressive factory of the Sanitarium Health Food Company at Warburton, by Edward F. Billson, took the award. The last award to be made before the Second World War was to another Collins Street building: the Western Branch of the National Bank on the William Street corner, by Meldrum and Noad. In 1954 the final award of the old Street Architecture medal was given to Grounds, Romberg & Boyd for flats in Hill Street, Toorak.

Last year when the new Victorian Architecture medal was introduced the jury selected the New Zealand Insurance Building in Bourke Street, by Bates, Smart & McCutcheon. It also commended the Green Room Club in Queens Road, by Yuncken Freeman, and the Siemens offices in Church Street, Richmond, by Gerd and Renate Block. Medals in the residential section were given to McGlashan and Everist, and to Guilford Bell and Neil Clerehan.

The R.V.I.A., Victorian Architecture Award is the highest distinction, indeed the only official distinction, that a Melbourne building can receive.