Class auction

A former school is to host a major sale of paintings, SALLY FISHER reports

THE bell at the old Hawksburn primary school in Prahran is to ring again, but not for its students.

It will peal today and tomorrow for the first time since the school closed three years ago to herald the first major art auction by the school's new owner, Leonard Joel.

The auction house is selling up to $3 million of Australian and European paintings in a sale which ushers in a new chapter in Joel's 77-year history.

Art director Jon Dwyer says the search for new premises took two years.

"We had our head office in St Kilda and an office in Armadale and did our sales at the Malvern Town Hall. We wanted to be in the one place," Mr Dwyer says.
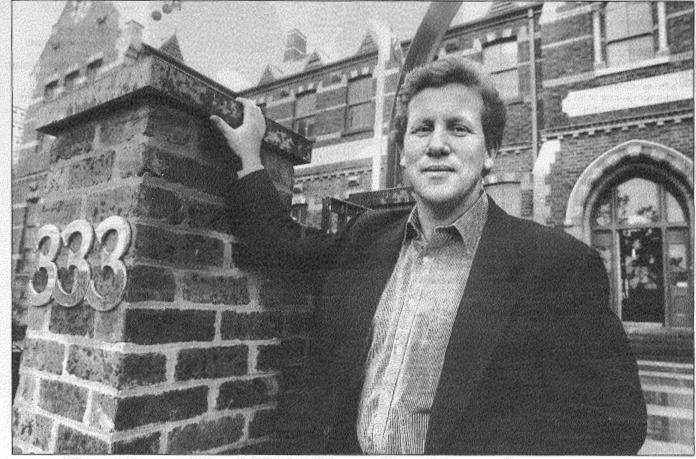
"We considered shifting to the old Red Tulip chocolate factory not far from here and we also looked at some old car lots."

But as soon as the company's principal, Warren Joel, saw the school he was keen to convert it.

He hired architecture firm Peter Latreille Pty Ltd, which had experience adapting old buildings for contemporary uses.

Latreille has made photographic studios out of old warehouses and converted the Seppelt's winery in Rutherglen.

But the Joel renovations, done within Historic Buildings Council guidelines, did not come cheap.

School's in: *Jon Dwyer at the former Hawksburn primary school, now auction house Leonard Joel's headquarters. Picture: DREW RYAN*

are mainly original. The end result is a complex building.

10 weeks ago the floorboards were still being stained and the walls painted.

garden is planted where cricket and footy were once played.

Leonard Joel's will save $27,000

town hall's average of 1300, "but that's the only real problem we have with the move".