

---

# EMILY MCPHERSON COLLEGE



EMILY MCPHERSON  
COLLEGE SOHE 2008



EMILY MCPHERSON  
COLLEGE SOHE 2008



1 emily mcpherson college  
russell street melbourne front  
view mar1985

---

## Location

379-405 RUSSELL STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1646

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO485

## VHR Registration

August 20, 1982

## Amendment to Registration

May 23, 1998

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 24, 1999

What is significant?

The Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy was established with the help of a bequest of £25,000 from Sir William McPherson and named after his wife. The two storey neo-classical building was designed by Public Works Department architect Evan Smith in 1926 and opened by the Duchess of York in April 1927. The rendered brick building was built by W. Bolger and features a prominent Doric portico. It was erected on part of the site of the Old Melbourne Gaol, and incorporated some of the bluestone gaol buildings, including the governor's residence, the administrative block and the prison chapel. These buildings date from the 1860s. The College is now part of the RMIT University.

How is it significant?

The Emily McPherson College is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Emily McPherson College is of historical significance as a reminder of earlier philosophies of educational provision, especially for girls and young women. Domestic Arts education developed in the years before and after WWI, at a time when there was a wider concerted push for 'scientific' mothering education. It was considered that mothering skills were not innate and needed to be taught, in the same way that domestic skills needed to be inculcated at school. The predecessors of this college were a College of Domestic Economy, established in 1906, and a Domestic Arts Hostel for the training of teachers, established in 1911. The College reflects a time when young women's access to post-secondary education was very limited, with a broader education largely only obtainable in the context of domestic training.

The Emily McPherson College is of historical significance for its associations with Sir William McPherson (1865-1932), Treasurer of Victoria from 1917 to 1923 and Premier and Treasurer from November 1928 to December 1929. It was largely thanks to McPherson's generosity that the College was built to replace its inadequate predecessor.

The Emily McPherson College is of architectural significance as a distinctive neo-classical building, the austerity and controlled simplicity of which reflected the kind of values to be imparted to the College's students. The building was awarded the RVIA street architecture award in 1930, an indication of the esteem with which the design was held at the time. The monumental Doric portico and classical composition emphasised sober traditionalism, appropriately enough for an institution of learning, while the regular colonial Georgian fenestration was reminiscent of popular domestic styles at the time, especially for the houses of the well-to-do in places like Toorak. The absence of extravagant ornamentation was most applauded, reflecting post-WWI trends toward more restrained and functional buildings.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Construction dates	1925,
Architect/Designer	Smith, Edwin Evan,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	5001
Property Number	

---

## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

The Emily McPherson College's predecessors were the College of Domestic Economy, at 450 Lonsdale Street, established in 1906, and a Domestic Arts Hostel, established at 217 Sydney Road, Parkville in 1911. The enrolment at the College was soon at a level that made the Lonsdale Street building inadequate, but it was not until 1923 that the site of the Old Melbourne Gaol was suggested to provide a replacement. The new building was commenced in 1925, after a generous donation by Sir William McPherson.

Parts of the gaol were demolished to make way for the college, but some gaol buildings were incorporated into the new institution. The governor's residence became a residential hostel, the old administrative block was converted into science and dietetic laboratories and a laundry, while the old prison chapel became the Art Centre.

The new building contained administrative offices and common rooms around the Ethel Osborne Hall, and there were classrooms for dressmaking, needlework, millinery, cookery and art.

The Ethel Margaret wing was added in 1948 and in 1965 a third floor was added to it. The student hostel was closed in 1962 and in 1967 the College became the Advanced College of Education. In 1975 it was amalgamated with RMIT.

Sir William McPherson was born in Melbourne on 19 September 1865. He entered his father's iron and machinery business and became President of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce. He served as a Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioner and represented Hawthorn in the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1913 to 1930. He was treasurer from November 1917 to November 1923, became leader of the Nationalist Party in 1927 and Premier and Treasurer in November 1928. He was defeated in a general election in December 1929.  
Associated People: Owner EDUCATION DEPARTMENT;

## Extent of Registration

Amendment of Register of Government Buildings

Melbourne City

Russell Street, City.

(iii) Emily McPherson College (including the Entrance Block, Two Wings, Chapel and Courtyard of the Old Melbourne Gaol)

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G39 12 October 1988 p3091]

Transferred to the Victorian Heritage Register 23 May 1998 (2 years after the proclamation of the Heritage Act 1995 pursuant to the transitional provisions of the Act)

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*