

# AUSTRAL BUILDINGS



AUSTRAL BUILDINGS  
SOHE 2008



1 austral building collins  
street melbourne front view



austral building collins street  
melbourne detail external top  
floor

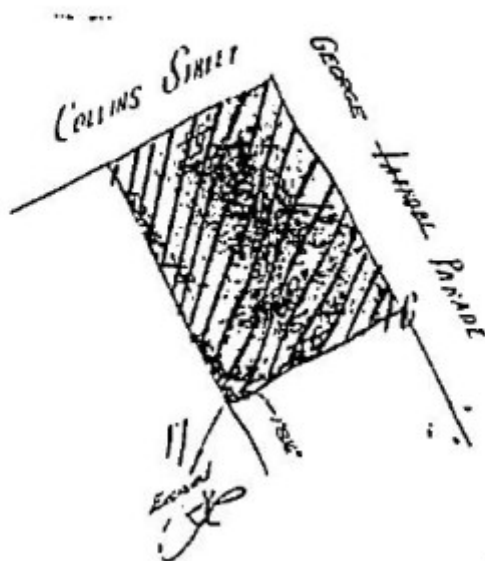


AUSTRAL BUILDINGS Nov  
2016



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## EXTENT OF DESIGNATION (SUMMARY)



h00472 plan h00472

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## Location

115-119 COLLINS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0472

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO575

## VHR Registration

August 27, 1980

## Amendment to Registration

February 22, 1989

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 9, 1999

What is significant?

The Austral Buildings was designed in 1890 by the noted Melbourne architect Nahum Barnet for Alexander McKinley, publisher of Melbourne Punch, and constructed in 1891 by J. and J. Baxter as shops and professional offices.

The building consists of four storeys plus an attic storey and was built of red brick with cement banding. Ground floor elliptical arches support oriels on either side of a recessed central bay that features mannerist elements, the whole capped with a mansard roof. The ground floor rolled-bronze shopfronts were added in 1909 and 1929. An additional studio, the East Studio, was added probably in the 1920s.

How is it significant?

The Austral Buildings is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Austral Buildings is of architectural significance for its innovative design, which marks a shift from the mannerist urbanity of the 1870s and 1880s to a more picturesque and expressive style of the early decades of

the 20th century. The Austral was one of the earliest examples of the English Queen Anne Revival style in Melbourne, and the use of red brick in particular was innovative and must have marked the building as very modern when it was built.

The Austral Buildings is of architectural significance as an early work of Nahum Barnet (1855-1931), and displays the kind of innovation that was to make him one of the most important designers of commercial buildings in the Federation period. The composition and exposed brickwork of the facade hint at his later works, such as the Auditorium Building, and reflect his view, adopted by many other architects in the early decades of the 20th century, that materials should express the colour and harmony of nature (hence red brick rather than render or bluestone), and that designers should pay more heed to local climatic conditions, freely adapting styles rather than simply copying given styles (hence the muted eclecticism of the Austral Buildings).

The Austral buildings is of historical significance as a centre for professional activity and innovation in medical, literary and artistic circles from its inception through most of the 20th century. The studios on the fourth floor were occupied by such noted artists as the photographer J.W. Lindt and the painters John Mather, Charles E. Gordon-Frazer, Leslie Wilkie and, in the 1920s, Alexander Colquhoun.

During the 1890s and later the building was the headquarters of the Austral Salon, a pioneer Victorian club for women dedicated to their intellectual and artistic advancement. The Arts and Crafts society of Melbourne was reputedly formed at the Austral Buildings around 1908. The building continued to be associated with artistic circles through the Melbourne Arts League from the 1940s to the 1980s. The league, organised by the eccentric elocutionist Lorimer Johnstone, encouraged young actors and artists, arranged theatrical productions, and, during the 1950s, exhibitions by such artists as Fred Williams, Donald Friend and the late Rupert Bunny. From its earliest days the Austral Buildings was expressive of the traditional occupation of the top of Collins Street by the medical fraternity. It also had important and enduring associations with Alexander McKinley, the publisher of Melbourne punch and a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

The Austral Buildings is of historical significance as a reminder of the character of inner Melbourne in the last decade of the 19th and first half of the 20th century. The diversity of its tenancies reflected a time when the CBD itself was a substantially more diverse place, with artists and theatre professionals living close to the theatres, and medical practitioners concentrated in this part of the city.

## 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	1890,
Architect/Designer	Barnet, Nahum,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	720
Property Number	

## History

### Contextual History:History of Place:

There were originally two artists' studios on the top floor of the Austral Buildings, located at the front of the building on the east and west sides of a caretaker's residence. A number of important artists used these studios, including the following:

John Mather (1848-1916), painter, etcher and teacher, occupied a studio from 1891 until c. 1912. He studied in Glasgow, at the National Gallery School in Edinburgh and in Paris, and arrived in Australia in 1878. He was a Trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria from 1893 to 1916, and President of the Victorian Artists' Society from 1893 to 1901, 1905 to 1910 and 1910 to 1911. He was a foundation member of the Australian Art Association in 1912. Mainly a painter of landscapes in a Scottish tradition, one of Mather's first commissions was to help decorate the dome of the Exhibition Buildings.

Charles E. Gordon-Frazer, who occupied a studio in the early 1890s, was a Colonial School landscape and portrait painter.

Leslie Andrew Wilkie (1879-1935), painter, teacher and gallery curator, occupied a studio during WW1 and into the early 1920s. Born in Melbourne, he studied at the National Gallery School from 1898 to 1901. Wilkie was art critic for the Age for a brief period and taught drawing at the National Gallery School in 1907-08. He later taught at the South Australian School of Art and was president of the RSASA.

The East Studio appears to have been occupied by Alexander Colquhoun (1862-1941), perhaps the most noted of the artists on the fourth floor, who was there during the 1920s. Colquhoun was born in Glasgow and migrated to Australia in 1876. He painted landscapes, church interiors and portraits and was highly respected as a critic. He attended the National Gallery School in 1877-1879 and 1882-1887. He was art critic for the Melbourne Herald from 1914 to 1922, correspondent for the Philadelphia Christian Science Monitor in 1916-17 and art critic for the Age from 1926 until his death in 1941.

The Melbourne Arts League occupied the East Studio from 1947 until the 1980s. Lorimer Johnstone used it for theatrical productions in the 1950s and for training young actors. Notable artists such as Fred Williams, Donald Friend and Rupert Bunny exhibited in Melbourne Arts League shows here in the 1950s.

Associated People: Assoc.People J W LINDT, JOHN MATHER, C E GORDON-FRAZER

## Extent of Registration

### AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 472:

Austral Buildings, 115-119 Collins Street, Melbourne.

(to the extent of the land and all of the buildings shown hatched which are included in the Register Book Certificate of Title Volume 2585 Folio 869.

[Victoria Government Gazette No.G8 22 February 1989 p.423]

*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/>*