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# HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE



HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE  
SOHE 2008



1 her majesty's theatre  
exhibition street melbourne  
front view



her majesty's theatre  
exhibition street melbourne  
detail of front entrance

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## Location

199-227 EXHIBITION STREET AND 84-98 LITTLE BOURKE STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0641

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO631

## VHR Registration

August 6, 1986

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 24, 1999

What is significant?

Her Majesty's Theatre was originally designed in 1886 by noted Melbourne architect Nahum Barnet. The theatre was the national flagship of American entrepreneur James C Williamson for nearly 40 years. In 1929 the interior was gutted by fire. Renovations in 1934 were designed by architects C N Hollinshead and Albion Walkley, leading Australian theatre specialists. H Vivian Taylor was employed as a sound consultant to the design. Significant technological advances were incorporated including heating, cooling and humidity control as well as cyclorama lighting effects managed from a central control board made by Siemens but developed by Williamson's engineer. Within three years of the re-opening the theatre had successfully staged musical comedy, grand opera, Gilbert & Sullivan opera and ballet. It was to become the Melbourne home of the Borovansky Company for 17 years, and was also used for the early seasons of the Australian Ballet and the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company (now the Australian Opera).

How is it significant?

Her Majesty's Theatre is of historical, social, architectural and technological significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Her Majesty's Theatre is historically significant as the traditional home of musical comedy in Melbourne. Most of its success was derived from more than one hundred musicals played since 1934, with a line-up to match any other theatre in the world. The theatre is additionally significant for its associations with performers such as Dame Nellie Melba, Anna Pavlova, Eduard Borovansky and Joan Sutherland.

Her Majesty's Theatre is of social significance for its continuing role in the theatrical life of Victoria and its place at the heart of the entertainment precinct of Melbourne.

Her Majesty's Theatre is architecturally significant as one of the earliest examples of the European Moderne style surviving in an Australian theatre interior. The styling was significant for heralding the countless Moderne style cinemas which proliferated in the later 1930s. The craftsmanship and detailing in Australian timbers is particularly notable. Externally the Second Empire style established the theatre as a local landmark and represents one of the very early red brick buildings in the city as well as one of the earliest works of the prolific architect Nahum Barnet.

Her Majesty's Theatre is technologically significant as the first theatre to employ an acoustic consultant. Excellent acoustics were achieved by the extensive use of veneered ply wall cladding. The theatre appears to be the first to provide air conditioning for a large interior in Victoria and the first in the state to achieve theatrical lighting effects on a cyclorama from a compact control board.

## 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](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

An enduring exemption to install temporary promotional signage for live theatre productions on the exterior of the theatre as described in the following:

Letter dated 26 October 2011 from Nigel Hordern, Operations Manager, Her Majesty's Theatre, Exhibition Street outlining the permit exemption is being sought to provide:

'quotes' to run along the face of the awning on both Little Bourke Street and the Exhibition Street sides

Four drop down banners will be fixed to the facade to keep them safe using existing small, subtle fixtures

Elevation showing locations

Side view of facade showing method of attachment for the Mesh Banners prepared by Nelsigns 2008.

Copy of Nigel Hordon's letter with accompanying drawing can be found in the attachment screen.

Construction dates	1886,
Architect/Designer	Barnet, Nahum,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	HER MAJESTYS,
Hermes Number	746
Property Number	

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## History

History of Place:

The theatre was commissioned by Jules Joubert in 1886. It opened the same year as the Alexandra Theatre. The very plain interior was soon changed in 1887 and later in 1891. Other alterations were designed by William Pitt. Early in the twentieth century the theatre was bought by American actor and entrepreneur James C Williamson. The auditorium was gutted by fire in 1929 but the theatre was still suitable as for use as a film studio in the early 1930s before being rebuilt internally in 1934. The 1930s interior was an excellent example of Art Deco and additionally reflected the design input of a pioneer acoustic consultant, H Vivian Taylor. His recommendations included the high-relief convex panels on the walls and balconies. The conversion also included the shop fronts and added the cantilevered balcony.

Associated People: Assoc.People ALFRED DAMPIER, J C WILLIAMSON

## Extent of Registration

#### AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 641 - Her Majesty's Theatre, 199-219 Exhibition Street, Melbourne (to the extent of all the buildings and all of the land in Vol. 6375 Folio 1274945, Vol. 4027 Folio 805267, Vol. 5642 Folio 1128275, Vol. 5644 Folio 11287738, Vol. 5600 Folio 1119983, Vol. 5861 Folio 1172104, Vol. 4027 Folio 805269, Vol. 5671 Folio 1134033).

[Victoria Government Gazette No. 67 6 August 1986 p. 3077]

*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/>*