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# FORMER MELBOURNE CORPORATION BATHS

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## Location

BIRRARUNG MARR PARK, MELBOURNE, VIC, 3004

## Municipality

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2418

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - January 3, 2023

### What is significant?

The site contains the archaeological potential to contain deposits, features and artefacts associated with the former Melbourne Free Corporation Baths (1872-1935) situated along the Yarra Bank Road, later Batman Avenue (renamed 1913), and now Birrarung Marr Park.

### How is it significant?

The Corporation Baths and the later redevelopment of the site into the Centenary Olympic Pool (Beaurepaire Pool) and the State Swimming Centre are historically and socially significant to the State of Victoria (Criterion A). The site has additional significance due to its association with Sir Frank Beaurepaire who fostered the building of municipal pools throughout the state and used the Olympic Pool as a venue for training instructors and swimmers as part of his 'Learn to Swim' campaign (Criterion H). Following the demolition of the State Swimming Centre in the late 1990's the site was extensively remodelled into the present day Birraung Marr Park. The high degree of disturbance from development activity has significantly compromised the sites archaeological integrity but there exists the possibility that archaeological remains might survive in the form of structural remnants and related artefact deposits (Criterion C).

### Why is it significant?

The former Corporation Baths and Centenary Olympic Pool along the northern banks of the Yarra, now Birrarung Marr Park, are both historically and socially significant as they chart the development of bathing facilities in Melbourne from a mid-19th century riverside swimming spot into an inter-war, municipal funded pool to an internationally important swimming venue (Criterion A). The pool's physical development over its 100 year plus operational history is also indicative of the local authority's evolving attitude to aquatic facilities from managing hygiene and moral concerns into the provision of a community amenity for recreational and sporting purposes.

The site is also important for its association with Olympic hero and Public Representative with Sir Frank Beaurepaire (1891–1956), who gave a lifetimes service to promoting safe swimming and was instrumental in bringing the 1956 Games to Melbourne (Criterion H). Any archaeological finds or features associated with the late 19th century Corporation Baths would be of significance in providing insight into the construction and operation of this early Municipally funded facility (Criterion C).

Interpretation of Site	Corporation Bath 1872-1935 Centenary Olympic Pool 1935-1956 Beaurepaire Pool 1956-1972 State Swimming Centre 1980-1997 Birrarung Marr Park
Other Names	Olympic Beaurepaire pool later State Swimming Centre,
Hermes Number	209335
Property Number	

## History

From contemporary reports the Corporation Baths were developed in 1872 as an outdoor bathing facility in response to the “annoyance been caused by boys and men bathing in the river, in some of the most frequented parts, and as the corporation wish to encourage cleanliness, combined with decency they undertook to erect a place into which - any man or boy will be entitled to go and perform the ablutions which society expects on the part of its members” . The designs prepared by the City Surveyor and built by contractors, Messrs. Beardall and Glencross at a cost of £1,500 involved constructing a bath 120 ft. x 60 ft increasing in depth from 3 ft. at one end to 7 ft. at the other and enclosed by fourteen inches of brickwork with a foot of puddling clay to the back. The walls were capped with Malmsbury coping and the promenades around the pool were laid with fine bluestone screenings. There was also provision for an office, keeper's room, urinals, and the site was surrounded by an eight feet high galvanised iron fence. On its opening in November 1872, one commentator, writing for The Age, had this to say regarding the architectural merit of the development: “Under Titus and Diocletian, magnificent edifices were erected in ancient Rome for bathing in, the ruins of which still remain. Under Alderman Wragge, who has conducted this movement on the part of the City Council, modern Melbourne has erected public baths simply of tin and wood, the architect of which, with a primitive simplicity, evidently took for his -model a rectangular iron water tank”. The baths were originally a men and boys only facility and free to use. The water was pumped directly from the river using a windmill as a request by the City Council to use Yan Yean water from the recently opened reservoir was refused. Throughout the late 19th century, the City Baths were unfavorably reviewed, a situation not helped due to its proximity to a tip and the City Morgue. One writer to the Argus described a visit thus “the approaches are mere dung heaps; the air was sickening with vile smells; inside, almost pandemonium. The water had not been changed for three whole days, and was as brown as thin coffee, and charged with every imaginable filth”. Based on the Melbourne Municipal Board of Works Plan (1895-1910) the Corporation Bath complex comprised an enclosed rectangular site orientated NE/SW with adjoining yards and ancillary buildings set back from the Yarra Bank Road to the south. To the east was the Morgue, to the north was a Railway Carriage Shed and multiple tracks, and to the west was a railway service road. In 1929 after years of neglect the baths were upgraded at the cost of £5,700. The new facility was ‘thoroughly up to date and pleasing’ boasting ‘a 80 by 60 feet newly tiled pool complete with filtration and chlorination system’. The revamped pool was home to the Railways and Catholic Young Men’s Society and was opened to males only every day from 7am to 10 pm every day. In 1933 in advance of the Centenary Year celebrations a debate was held as to whether the Batman Avenue Baths should be renovated or whether public money should be spent on a more ambitious redevelopment. The latter option, aided by the support of Sir Frank Beaurepaire and his Herald newspaper ‘Learn-to-Swim campaign’, prevailed and in January 1935, to much fanfare, the new open air, 50-metre Olympic-size pool was unveiled at the Batman Avenue site. The new complex, built at a cost of £30,000, had a Spanish Mission inspired Facade and internally had space for 1500 spectators on tiered stands. Facilities included 650 lockers in male and female dressing rooms, under-water lighting and a state of the art chlorination and filtration plant that daily battled air pollution from the nearby railway lines. From its inception the new pool was well patronised and a financial success and early additions that added to its amenity value included a cafe, children’s pools and a diver’s pool. In advance of what should have been its finest hour the facility was ruled out as a venue for the 1956 Olympic Games due to subsidence in the SE corner of the pool. Its role in hosting competitions was superseded by the development of Swimming Stadium in nearby Olympic Park. In 1956 the complex was re-

named the Sir Frank Beaurepaire Pool after its original patron, Olympian and former mayor. By 1972 the site was semi derelict but following capital investment was re-opened in 1980 rebranded as the State Swimming Centre. In 1997 after over 100 years of dedicated use to public swimming the pool finally closed its doors The original Corporation Baths and its replacement facility the Sir Frank Beaurepaire Pool later the State Swimming Center are now no longer extant, the site having been cleared and redeveloped into present day Birrarung Marr Park.

*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/>*