
Former High Court of Australia`

Location

442 - 460 Little Bourke Street,, MELBOURNE VIC 3000 - Property No B5176

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

National

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1476

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - March 3, 2008

The High Court of Australia was inaugurated on 6 October 1903. Melbourne was the nation's capital from Federation in 1901 until 1927, but a new High Court was only opened in Canberra in 1980. Until then this building, and others in the State capitals, continued to be used for sittings of the High Court. The original building was constructed between 1926 and 1928 and was occupied in 1928. John Smith Murdoch, then Director of Works and Chief Commonwealth Architect, was responsible for the design. Murdoch was a pioneering and highly significant figure in the development of Commonwealth architecture between 1904 and 1930. His public buildings: the provisional Parliament House (1927), and his government office buildings, hotels, hostels and schools, formed the background for life in Canberra. A second storey was added to the building in 1935 by H J Mackennal, Chief Architect of the Victorian Public Works Department, and further additions were made in 1946. In 1977 the building became the Melbourne premises of the Federal Court, and was used exclusively for this purpose after 1980. Further additions were made in 1991-2 and restoration work was carried out. Many legal cases of great importance to the constitutional history of Australia have been determined in the building.

The High Court is in a simplified classical style, which became virtually the standard Commonwealth Government style in the inter-war years. The style is a simplified version of classicism, with vestigial classical columns and entablature, but with minimal ornament and a strong horizontal emphasis. The 1926 building was single storeyed, with rusticated red brick walls on a coursed bluestone blockwork, and housed three court rooms, centrally placed between public rooms at the front and the library and Justices' rooms at the rear. It features a dressed basalt surround to the central projecting entrance porch and flat parapets resembling those on the old Parliament House in Canberra. The 1935 second storey used the same materials and style. Internally it features coffered ceilings,

timber panelling using Australian timbers, skylights and decorative grilles to vents.

How is it significant? The former High Court of Australia is significant for historical reasons at a National level and for aesthetic/architectural reasons at a State level.

Why is it significant? The former High Court is historically significant for its associations with the highest level of Australian legal administration over a lengthy period, and as a reminder of Melbourne's dominance of federal politics before the development of Canberra.

It is significant as the only building constructed for the exclusive use of the High Court of Australia until 1980. It is historically significant because of its association with an important phase in the constitutional history of Australia and with the many important legal cases that have been determined in the building.

The former High Court is architecturally significant as a fine and rare example in Victoria of the Inter-War Stripped Classical style of J S Murdoch, which became the standard Commonwealth Government style in the inter-war years.

Classified: 28/11/2005

Other Names Federal Court,

Hermes Number 65038

Property Number

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/>