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# Burke & Wills Monument - Charles Summers



B4324 Burke & Wills Monument

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## Location

Swanston Street, (City Square), MELBOURNE VIC 3000 - Property No B4324

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

National

## Heritage Listing

National Trust

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 16, 2007

Charles Summers' monument to Burke and Wills was the first major sculpture commission to be conceived and entirely executed in Australia. Since there were no bronze casting facilities at the time here, Summers set up a foundry in his Collins Street studio in Melbourne specifically for the casting of Burke and Wills. This initiative provided a tremendous boost to the local development and growing independence of the arts - in particular sculpture.

That it was indeed taken as a feat of national significance in its own time is demonstrated by the fact that the metals used were required to be exclusively Australian products, even though this involved a considerable delay in the working process.

In the stance and costume of the two explorers Summers obliterates time and place, adhering to the classisizing tradition of the heroic monument fashionable at that time in England and in Europe.

By contrast, in the four bronze reliefs depicting the main events of the expedition, vivid narrative references recreate the specific context for the achievements of the explorers as much as for their untimely death. The

sense of imminent tragic grandeur on a national scale was heightened by Summers' use of native flora (passion flowers and the nardoo plant) decorating the large bronze wreath which surrounded the stone plinth on which Burke and Wills stand.

Quite aside from its intrinsic artistic merit, Burke and Wills is of enduring significance in that it embodies the spirit of its age and symbolizes the search for an Australian pioneering spirit and their tragic fate in a quest to conquer the elemental forces of an untamed land has become part of Australian folklore.

Classified: 10/06/1992

Hermes Number 65718

Property Number

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*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/>*