
WATERSIDE WORKERS FEDERATION BANNER



front.jpg



front detail.jpg

Location

46-56 IRELAND STREET WEST MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2385

VHR Registration

April 12, 2018

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 22, 2025

What is significant?

The WWF Banner.

How is it significant?

The WWF Banner is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

Why is it significant?

The WWF Banner is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

Created in the late 1940s, the WWF Banner is a rare surviving union banner and a rare example of a banner produced at a time when few were being commissioned or created. It is the only known Banner painted by artist, cartoonist and Australia Labor Party (ALP) supporter Richard 'Dick' Ovenden.

(Criterion B)

The Waterside Workers' Federation Banner is a notable example of the class of union banners. It is fine and highly intact example of a mid twentieth century union banner and displays a large number of characteristics which are typical of the class including the materials, use of symbolic and political images and mottos, and the large scale and design. The design and sewing of the banner and the painting of the imagery and mottos are executed in a highly proficient manner.

(Criterion D)

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:

It should be noted that Permit Exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.49(3) of the *Heritage Act 2017*). Permit Exemptions can also be applied for and granted after registration (under s.92 of the *Heritage Act 2017*).

General Condition 1

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

General Condition 2

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

General Condition 3

All works should ideally be informed by the Collection Policy prepared for the object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Collection Policy, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Collection Policy.

General Condition 4

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

Conservation

Written notification is required for any proposed conservation activities. The applicant will be notified by the Executive Director whether the conservation activity requires permit approval pursuant to the *Heritage Act 2017*, or whether it is permit exempt.

Theme

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce 7. Governing Victorians 8. Building community life

Construction dates 1947,

Heritage Act Categories Registered object,

Other Names WATERSIDE WORKERS UNION - DICK OVERENDEN BANNER,

Hermes Number 117287

Property Number

History

The WWF Banner is a trade union banner which was created by artist Richard 'Dick' Ovenden in the late 1940s at a time when the popularity of banners and processions were declining. It was the last of a series of banners created for the WWF.

History of Banners

The tradition of parades where the banners of unions and friendly societies were displayed originated in Britain. The first parades and banners in Victoria focused on the Eight Hour Day Movement, but as unions were formed, banners were created as a means of identity. They were elaborately painted with imagery and wording, usually had tassels and fringing, and were of a large scale to allow for them to be displayed on horse drawn carts and later, trucks. The imagery included tools and emblems associated with the various trades, and mottos espousing the vision and beliefs of the particular union or organisation. Figures depicted were usually men and if women were included, they were usually representations of ideals such as truth and wisdom.

The development of waterside unions in Victoria

In the nineteenth century, shipping companies held immense power due to their virtual monopoly over trade. There was little government regulation of the industry which was known for its unsafe working conditions and notorious 'bull' hiring system where men were chosen for each day's work. As casual labour was cheaper than mechanical equipment, the poor working conditions remained relatively unchanged despite the development of new technologies.

In the early 1880s, a number of non-unionised small strikes were held on the Yarra River wharves. In 1885, shipowners refused to allow waterfront workers to attend Eight Hour Day celebrations, providing the catalyst for the establishment of the Melbourne Wharf Labourers' Union (MWLU) which was supported by Trades Hall. Plans for a national organisation were disrupted in the early 1890s when employers attempted to defeat the unions prompting an Australia wide strike which became known as the Maritime Strike. Due to the 1890s Depression, many workers were seeking employment, and the strikes were ultimately broken by the use of non-union labour as well as police and military force. Following the Maritime Strike, the union movement realised that political representation was required to bring about social change which ultimately resulted in the formation of what is now the ALP.

In 1902 the individual maritime unions amalgamated to become a national organisation known as the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia. It was organised by Billy Hughes (Prime Minister from 1915 to 1923) and the first committee was made up entirely of Labor Party members. A series of amalgamations between the WWF and other unions occurred between 1950 and 1993 when the WWF became known as the MUA.

Richard Ovenden (1897 - 1972)

Richard 'Dick' Ovenden, artist of the Waterside Workers' Federation Banner was born in 1897 into a family active in the Victorian Socialist Party and the Australian Labor Party. He was a painter, cartoonist, caricaturist and book illustrator and had works published in *The Labor Call: the official organ of the Political Labor Council of Victoria*, the *Australasian Seamen's Journal*, the *Argus* and the *Melbourne Herald*. He had strong links with Australian maritime unions and with the ALP and his art exhibitions were usually opened by ALP identities. In 1950, Ovenden was involved in the formation of the Fellowship of Australian Artists and was organiser and secretary for the exhibition of Australian art during the Royal Tour. From 1955 to 1964 he was librarian at the *Herald and Weekly Times*. The Waterside Workers' Federation Banner is the only banner that Dick Ovenden is known to have painted. KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT

Beasley, Margo (1996) *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation* Halstead Press/Australian National Maritime Museum

Reeves, Andrew (2005) Historical overview provided for nomination.

Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the following objects in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2385

Category: Heritage Object

Object: Waterside Workers Federation Banner

Location: 46-56 Ireland Street, West Melbourne, Melbourne City

Dated 12 April 2018

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

[Victoria Government Gazette G 15 12 April 2018 679]

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/>