

ST KILDA PUBLIC LIBRARY



IMG 1208



2025 St Kilda Public Library viewed from Carlisle Street



2025 Book feature that is part of the 1990s addition



2025 St Kilda Public Library Duke Street elevation



2024 St Kilda Public Library western courtyard



2024 pendant lights



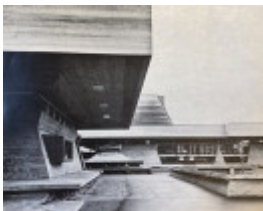
2024 Main reading room



1973 floorplan - Architect Magazine



2024 - Return chutes and display box - Carlisle Street elevation



1973 view of courtyard from Carlisle Street - Architect magazine - 1973



2024 - Duke Street elevation



c1973 interior - City of Port Phillip



2024 - Duke Street elevation



2024 - Return chutes and display box - Carlisle Street elevation



Aerial extent diagram

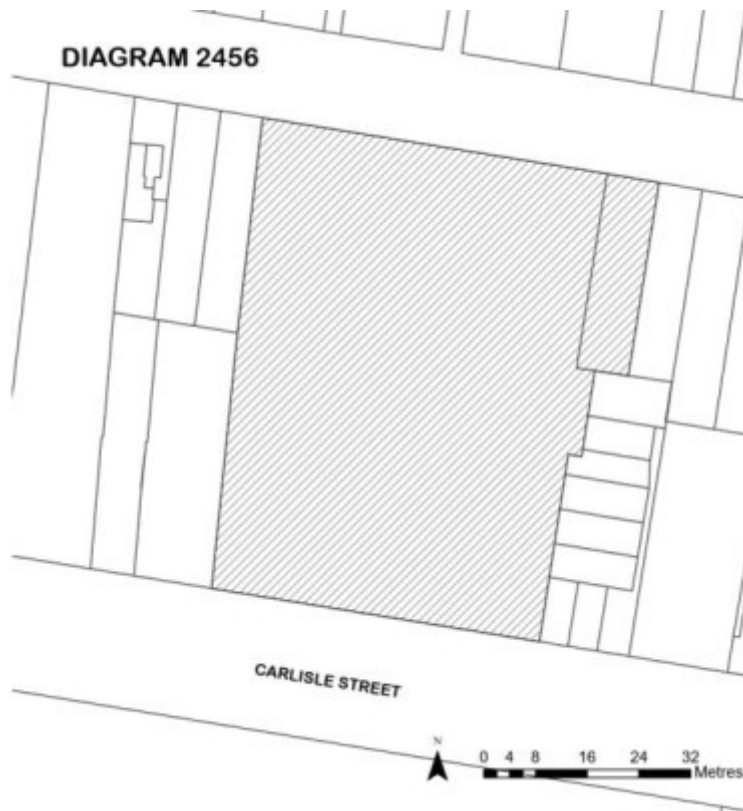


Diagram 2456



St Kilda Public Library floor plan - to be used in conjunction with permit exemptions

Location

150 CARLISLE STREET ST KILDA, PORT PHILLIP CITY

Municipality

PORT PHILLIP CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2456

VHR Registration

April 17, 2025

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 15, 2025

What is significant?

The St Kilda Public Library is a single-storey building of bold sculptural form completed in 1972. It was designed by Italian-born, Canberra-based architect Enrico Taglietti for the City of St Kilda to a brief developed by city librarian, Vida Horn. The building is distinguished by its inwardly sloping concrete walls, and oversized timber eaves and fascias. The interior public areas are largely open-plan, and both the interior and exterior feature original fixtures. The building was extended to designs by Ashton Raggatt McDougall in 1993, which include a feature on the Carlisle Street side of the building that resembles an open book. Objects integral to the place include furniture selected by Taglietti and a mural by Mirka Mora.

How is it significant?

The St Kilda Public Library is of architectural significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion D

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

Why is it significant?

St Kilda Public Library is significant as a notable example of a municipal public library from the post-1950 period. The St Kilda Public Library represents one of the most distinctive and architecturally fine libraries erected in

Victoria. The building has a striking external form and an innovative internal layout along with original library furniture and light fittings specified by the architect. At the time of completion, it was lauded as one of the finest and most modern libraries in Australia. It is an important work of eminent Italian-born, Canberra-based architect Enrico Taglietti and his most well-recognised work in Victoria.

(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:

Exempt works and activities

Refer to the diagram titled 'St Kilda Public Library floor plan - to be used in conjunction with permit exemptions' in images section to identify rooms.

Landscape

1. All subsurface works provided the landscape treatment is returned to its original appearance when works are complete.
2. Repairs and maintenance to hard landscape elements (for example, walls, paths and steps).
3. Gardening and soft landscape maintenance (for example, weeding, mulching, planting and tree lopping).
4. Replacement of trees where they pose a risk to people or property, with the same species or species with similar form.

Building exterior

5. All repairs and maintenance to roof and replacement of roof cladding and flashings etc. Note: this exemption does not apply to the pyramidal lantern.
6. Removal of metal cladding to the pyramidal lantern and reinstatement of original timber board cladding and undertaking necessary repairs to reinstate original appearance.
7. Repairs to cracking of concrete elements provided works are planned and carried out in consultation with an appropriately experienced Heritage Advisor.
8. Localised replacement of concrete blocks where repairs are no longer sufficient provided works are planned and carried out in consultation with an appropriately experienced Heritage Advisor.
9. Dismantling and rebuilding of bin storage area to north elevation providing it is carried out in like materials to the same form and scale.
10. Removal of coating to timber boards on fascia to re-instate original timber appearance.

Interior

11. All non-structural works within the basement.
12. All internal works within 1993 section (G.01-G.06) and staff work areas (G.08-G.28) provided they do not impact any elements of the original building (for example, joinery, glazing or door openings).
13. Works to and removal of modern cabinetry in meeting room (G.30).
14. All works within toilets and kitchens.
15. Replacement of floor coverings.
16. All works to services, plant and HVAC within existing locations.
17. Repairs to original light fittings being large, square fluorescent light covers and coloured pendant lights above children's area.
18. Replacement of non-original light fittings.

Objects integral

19. Repairs, maintenance and conservation to objects listed in the inventory of objects integral held by the Executive Director provided repairs are undertaken by an appropriately experienced furniture restorer, conservator or carpenter.
20. Relocation of movable furniture listed in the inventory of objects integral to the place within the St Kilda Public Library building.

Theme

8. Building community life 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates	1971,
Architect/Designer	Enrico Taglietti,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Other Names	ST KILDA LIBRARY, ST KILDA LIBRARY,
Hermes Number	212181
Property Number	

History

Municipal libraries in Victoria

The earliest libraries in Victoria were associated with Mechanics Institutes, the first being the Melbourne Mechanics Institute established in 1839. Mechanics Institutes, 'free libraries' and similar organisations proliferated throughout the colony and provided access to journals and books to paying subscribed members. The Melbourne Public Library (now, the State Library of Victoria) was established in 1856 and was the first free public library in Australia and one of the first in the world. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a small number of municipal councils established library services for public use.

In the 1930s, the Carnegie Corporation, established by American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, funded a survey of Australian libraries. The survey highlighted the many limitations of library services in Victoria. In response, a Library Service Board was established in 1940. Immediately following the end of World War II, there was a demand for community facilities of all types, as well as government support for community rebuilding. The establishment of dedicated local public libraries by municipal authorities began in a meaningful way in this period.

In Victoria, the Free Library Service Board Act was introduced in 1946 to oversee a new system of government funding for local libraries. This, combined with the demand for increased municipal services in the post-war period, led to a boom in the establishment of municipal public library services. In the immediate post-war period, most libraries were established in pre-existing buildings. Several purpose-built library buildings began to appear in regional centres in Victoria in the early 1950s, where funding for capital works was more easily accessed.

From the late 1950s, purpose-built municipal library buildings began to appear throughout metropolitan Melbourne. By 1966, public libraries were operated by 115 local authorities in Victoria. Purpose-built municipal libraries initially tended to be architecturally unremarkable but focused on internal planning and providing for the varied needs of library users. When the City of St Kilda commissioned Canberra-based Italian architect Enrico Taglietti to design their municipal library in 1970, it represented a particularly architecturally bold approach to library design.

St Kilda Public Library

In the post-war period, the councillors of the City of St Kilda were resistant to proposals for public and welfare services of all types, including a public library. In 1947, the Council's existing library collection, located in the Town Hall, was sold. In 1953, a group of St Kilda residents formed the St Kilda Library Promotion Committee to pressure the Council to provide a public library service without success. In the early 1960s, a group of concerned parents again mounted a sustained campaign for a public library, receiving little support from Council.

It was not until 1967 following Council elections that support emerged for a public library for the municipality and \$50,000 was allocated to fund the construction of a library building. A committee from the Council visited Canberra to inspect the recently completed Dickson Library (1969), designed by Taglietti. In 1970, Taglietti was approached to design a library for St Kilda. In the same year, Vida Horn (1925–2003) was appointed Chief Librarian and began preparing a detailed design brief for the library. She later recalled that this at times brought her into conflict with Taglietti, as she tried to ensure the building met the needs of users.

A survey of St Kilda's user population was initiated, and Horn began acquiring a collection that would cater to the community's diverse needs. Taglietti's inviting design for the library was accepted by Council, but it was decided to split construction into two stages – the second of which was never constructed. Taglietti also specified furniture for the library. The library was constructed by M. Notkin Construction and completed in late 1972, with Horn keeping a watching brief on the building program. The building was formally opened by the Governor of Victoria, Sir Rohan Delacombe, in May 1973.

Upon completion, the design of the St Kilda Public Library was praised. In a feature on the newly completed

building, the Constructional Review observed that:

'Internally it possesses an atmosphere that is at once restful and yet sufficiently animated to appeal to children ... Planning of services, materials and building was related at all stages to the community needs of St Kilda's [municipal] population of over 60,000. Stage I emphasises the library as a source of recreational reading at all levels and provides lounge areas for members wishing to relax in comfortable and pleasant surroundings.'

Architect magazine held some reservations about the exterior of the building but observed that 'once inside, all is lightness and warmth'. It celebrated the main reading room where 'space unfolds before us as we enter...[with] variety, interest and delight. There are no formal spatial divisions.' In a subsequent issue it was observed that the St Kilda Public Library was a 'sprawling, idiosyncratic building, the form of which emerged from the interplay of a lively architectural imagination and functional problem.'

When interviewed about the design of the library in 1981, Vida Horn reflected that she had written the brief for the Taglietti in terms of the functions required of the library and 'had left him to decide on aesthetic features'. It was designed to 'warm, welcoming and informal' and to provide a comfortable public space for the many St Kilda residents who lived in small flats or rented rooms. After several years of use she was pleased to have a building which had 'proved flexible in use and was low-maintenance'.

Subsequent development

The St Kilda Public Library has been a busy and well-subscribed service since this building was completed. High community use necessitated changes to the building from the 1980s onwards. A large painted mural by Mirka Mora called *Mirka's Children*, which was created in 1980, was subsequently installed in the Library. In 1987, staff workroom areas were modified. In the early 1990s, Ashton Raggatt McDougall (ARM) was commissioned to design an extension to the Library. In this period, ARM was 'one of Melbourne's most individual and celebrated architectural practices' and was engaged in designing arguably its most iconic work – RMIT's Storey Hall annex. ARM's design for St Kilda Public Library essentially filled the courtyard of the Library that fronted Carlisle Street, but left the original building largely intact, internalising what were external walls. The construction of a large concrete 'book' feature facing Carlisle Street was the most distinctive element of the ARM design.

Enrico Taglietti

Dr Enrico Taglietti (1926–2019) was born in Milan, Italy, where he began his studies in architecture in 1948. During his training he was influenced by Bauhaus approaches, the engineering of Pier Luigi Nervi and the design principles of Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. In 1955, the Italian ambassador to Australia commissioned Taglietti to select a site for the Italian embassy in Canberra. From this point, Taglietti was enmeshed with the development of Canberra, which he adopted as his home. He designed a series of key civic and commercial buildings in the city, as well as private residences. His designs for residences typically drew 'upon his experience with Italian free form construction...he experimented with sculptural form, volumes, voids and framing views of the Australian bush'. Taglietti is closely identified with his creative use of concrete as a material, where 'stepped and curved forms' are not driven by 'structural determinants' but from abstract patterning to 'create interest through striking visual and spatial effects'. Well-known public buildings in Canberra designed by Taglietti include the Cinema Centre (1965), the Italian Embassy (1967), the Dickson Library (1968), the Giralang Primary School (1974) and the Australian War Memorial Repository in Mitchell (1978-79). A 2018 symposium organised in acknowledgement of his work noted that 'Enrico Taglietti's contribution to Australian architecture is difficult to overstate. His thoughtful detailing, aesthetics and sense of place have helped to shape Australia's national capital'.

The Dickson Library, which the St Kilda Public Library closely resembles, is one of the most celebrated of his designs and is notable for its layered horizontal forms, expressive use of concrete and extensive cantilevers. The Dickson Library was awarded the RIAA ACT Chapter Twenty-Five Year Award for a public building in 1995. The Cinema Centre, Giralang Primary School and the Dickson Library are included in the ACT Heritage Register.

Taglietti's work is somewhat unusual in Australia and his personal style is highly identifiable. Architectural historian Jennifer Taylor has written of Taglietti that his:

'... architecture has no parallel in the country. It strangely combines the gaiety of much Italian, free-form

construction with the sobriety of the heavy forms of Japan's post-war architects. It is an architecture fashioned for mood and visual delight.'

In 2007, Taglietti received the RAI Gold Medal from the National Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects. The St Kilda Public Library is one of the few examples of his work outside of Canberra and New South Wales.

Selected bibliography

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Lovell Chen, St Kilda Public Library Conservation Management Plan, 2019.

Taglietti, Enrico., Enrico Taglietti: Architect in Australia, Milan, Italy: Lodigraf, 1979.

Taylor, Jennifer., Australian Architecture since 1960, Sydney: Law Book Company, 1986.

Consultation and interviews

Thank you to Sera-Jane Peters, Heritage Advisor at the City of Port Phillip, and Katherine Foster, Team Leader Library Branch, for their assistance in the preparation of this recommendation.

Extent of Registration

Heritage Act 2017

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 a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2456

Category: Registered Place, Registered Objects Integral to a Registered Place

Place: St Kilda Public Library

Location: 150 Carlisle Street, St Kilda

Municipality: City of Port Phillip

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2456 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Plan of Subdivision 334783 and all of Lot 1 on Plan of Subdivision 45670 and all of the objects integral to the place listed in the inventory held by the Executive Director.

17 April 2025
STEVEN AVERY
Executive Director
[Government Gazette G 16 17 April 2025]

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/>