

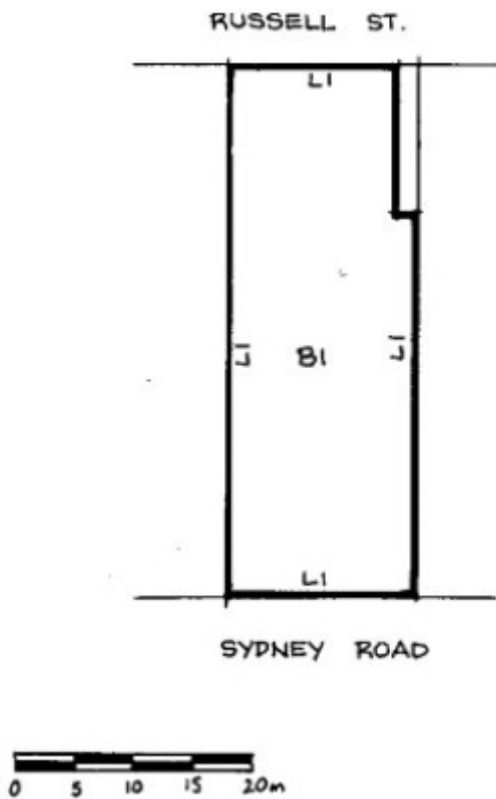
## FORMER BATES BUILDING



FORMER BATES BUILDING  
SOHE 2008



1 former bates building  
sydney road coburg front-  
view apr1996



former bates building plan

### Location

400-404 SYDNEY ROAD COBURG, MORELAND CITY

### Municipality

MERRI-BEK CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1290

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO159

## VHR Registration

January 9, 1997

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 12, 1999

In 1887-88 Henry Bates, a furniture remover and general carrier, erected a two-storey brick building containing two shops, a livery stable and a roller skating rink. It was designed by Sydney H Wilson, architect, and built by T R Spargo of North Melbourne. The two shops flanked a central carriageway, which provided access to the stables behind. The upper level, constructed as one large open space spanned with delicate metal portal frames, and a timber board mansard ceiling, was used as the skating rink. After leasing out the skating rink for about two years Bates used this space to store furniture, and in the 1920s it became a billiard saloon, then a physical culture school. During the First World War Bates leased the stabling to carrier, Mayne Nickless, and in 1932 the ground floor was converted into a large variety store (No.21) for GJ Coles & Company, and an adjoining small shop. At the same time the upper level became the short-lived Taj Mahal dance hall, and murals depicting exotic Indian scenes were painted on the walls and proscenium. This was the second decorative scheme to cover the walls of the hall, the first being for the roller-skating rink which is still discernible under the present painted surface. Coles' remained in the building until 1954.

The building is of historic, aesthetic, social and architectural importance to the State of Victoria.

The Bates Building is of architectural importance as a most unusual combination of purpose-built roller-skating rink, shops and livery stables. The upper floor skating-hall remains exceptional as a large space spanned by arched metal portal frames supporting the main roof. This form of framing is rare. The cement modelled horse heads features on the front facade and the decorative wheel motifs below the first floor windows, are pertinent references to the building's original use as livery stables previously located on the ground floor.

The Bates Building hall is historically and socially important as a rare example of a nineteenth-century roller-skating rink, a type of recreational facility once phenomenally popular in Melbourne and its metropolis. The former roller-skating hall is significant for its association with a phase in Melbourne's nineteenth-century popular culture when skating for both men and women, both young and old, rivalled cricket and football as a leisure activity

The Bates Building hall interior is aesthetically significant for its ability to demonstrate a sequence in popular recreational trends associated with the worldwide craze for roller-skating in the 1880s, and jazz culture between the wars. The Middle Eastern-inspired murals painted in a free-form vernacular style reflect the mood of popular

dance culture of the inter-war period and its fascination with exotica. The more formal decorative scheme associated with the hall's use as a skating rink, which can still be discerned through parts of the present scheme, is important for its potential to yield information on nineteenth-century interior design and popular taste.

## 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:

#### EXEMPTIONS FROM PERMITS:

##### INTERIOR DECORATIVE SCHEMES

Interior painting to walls and ceilings in all areas except the large open first floor area containing the wall murals, and its associated stage, provided the preparation work for painting does not remove evidence of the building's original paint or other decorative scheme.

Removal of existing carpets / flexible floor coverings eg vinyl.

Installation of carpets and flexible floor coverings.

Installation of curtain tracks, rods, blinds and other window dressings.

##### REFURBISHMENT OF TOILETS, KITCHENS

Refurbishment of toilet and kitchens including removal of existing sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, and wall and floor coverings, and installation of new fixtures, and wall and floor coverings.

Removal of existing kitchen benches and fixtures (stoves, dishwashers etc.) and floor coverings and installation of new kitchen benches and fixtures, including associated plumbing and wiring.

##### INSTALLATION OF HEATING SERVICES

Installation of hydronic, or concealed radiant (Ceiling Foil Radiant Heating or under carpet heating) type heating, provided that the installation does not

damage existing skirtings, architraves and the location of the heating unit (boiler etc) is concealed from view.

#### RE-WIRING

Re-wiring provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches, pull cords, or GPO's are retained in-situ.

Note : If wiring is original to the building, timber conduits should be left in situ rather than removed.

#### HANGING OF PAINTINGS, MIRRORS, AND OTHER WALL-MOUNTED ART WORK

Installation of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of paintings, mirrors, and other wall-mounted works of art.

#### INSTALLATION OF INSULATION

Installation of bulk insulation to the roof space.

#### INSTALLATION OF SMOKE DETECTORS

Installation of smoke detectors.

#### REMOVAL OF EXTRANEIOUS EXTERNAL ITEMS

Removal of air-conditioners / pipework / wiring / antennae / aerials / and making good.

#### INSTALLATION OF DAMP-PROOF COURSES

Installation of damp-proofing by either injection method, or "grouted pocket" method.

#### SIGNAGE

Existing signage may be altered/replaced provided that the new sign is no larger than the existing, is located in the same position and that no internally illuminated signage is used.

Construction dates	1887,
Architect/Designer	Wilson, Sydney H,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	ROLLER SKATING RINK, DANCE HALL, COLES, BILLIARD HALL,
Hermes Number	5055
Property Number	

---

## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

The Bates Building: Carriers' Office and Roller-skating Rink

Henry John Bates (1854-1924), was the son of London born shipwright and carpenter, Henry Weeks Bates. Henry senior , who emigrated to Australia in 1854 eventually found work as an overseer at Pentridge prison, and as a consequence the Bates family moved to Coburg, or Pentridge as it was then known.

Henry John Bates (Harry) initially began working as a furniture dealer, and then in 1874 as a carrier delivering parcels and removing furniture. At this stage the Bates family was living in a rented house on the west side of Sydney Road, and Harry conducted his business there until his father's death in 1877. The following year he bought land and built a timber house on the other side of Sydney Road, and in 1883, the same year as his marriage, he bought a large allotment on the north side of Page Street with a 96 feet frontage to Sydney Road.

During 1887 advertisements in The Reformer indicate that he was conducting his business from 14 Collins Street West, Melbourne. Two horse vans were also available for picnics.

Sometime in 1887 local contractors Messrs Spargo & Co. were commissioned to erect a two storey brick building on part of the Coburg land. Extending through to Russell Street, the structure was to have a 44 feet frontage to Sydney Road. Designed by architect, Sydney H. Wilson, this commercial building was to be a most unusual combination of purpose-built roller skating rink, shops and livery stables. On the ground floor flanking the main entrance were two small shops for lease. At the centre, below the arched verandah a van entrance gave easy access to the extensive stables at the rear. After the huge building had been erected according to Wilson's specifications, a large area of wall and roof was found to be too weak to resist wind pressure, which resulted in the front wall giving way. As a consequence much of the building had to be pulled down and re-erected. The building was finally completed in April 1888. On its parapet were displayed the words H. Bates General Carriers Established 1874. For the first two years James Smith and Michael Hassett conducted a blacksmithing business in part of this space, and Messrs Leonard & Co. leased the large roller-skating rink upstairs. Other two-storey shops in Sydney Road had residential rooms for shopkeepers on the upper floor but Bates' building was exceptional in making the whole of this large space a purpose-built roller-skating hall.

#### Roller-skating

Roller-skating was all the rage in the 1880s. It probably came via the United States after it was introduced by James L. Plimpton to New York in 1863. At first the fad was restricted to 'the educated and refined classes'. The dining hall and piazza of the plush Atlantic House at Newport was converted to a rink for twice weekly assemblies, and distinguished guests, including General Sherman watched 'tastefully dressed young men and girls, sailing, swimming, floating through the mazes of the march, as if impelled by magic power'. The skating epidemic quickly spread to all levels of society, and rinks were built in every town and immense ones established in the cities. In Chicago the Casino could accommodate 4000 persons, 3000 spectators and 1000 skaters. A band accompanied the crowd, and a lighting system shone down on the hard maple floor. The attraction was not just to circle the floor or race, but to tackle fancy skating manoeuvres. Professor A. E. Smith introduced the Richmond Roll, the Picket Fence, the Philadelphia Twist, and the Dude on Wheels. Skating was even more popular on the west coast. The Olympian Roller Skating Rink in San Francisco held races, roller-skating polo games, and parties, and advertised 5000 pairs of skates and 69,000 square feet of hard maple floor. Young and old skated, and for a short time no other popular recreation could match its universality.

#### Local Roller-skating

The first rink known to be operating in the metropolis was at J. E. Lowe's skating hall in Stephen Street, Melbourne. Architect, J. F. Matthews invited tenders for constructing a skylight and ventilation at the skating hall in 1874. Lowe's rink must have quickly grown in popularity for within a few months tenders were again called for reconstructing and enlarging the 'Rooms and Skating Rink'. It wasn't until the late 1880s however that the craze for roller-skating really set in. The December 1887 editorial of the Reformer observed that

A new recreation in the shape of rink skating has been established in the colony during the past year which bids fair to revolutionise our existing national games of cricket and football. It has risen into popular favour with unparalleled rapidity, and its votaries can advance arguments why such should be the case, which are really unanswerable.

More rinks followed. Architect, Lloyd Tayler designed a hall, rink, shops and offices for the Sale Public Hall Company in 1878; Thomas Crouch designed a rink in Canterbury Road, St Kilda in 1886; C. D. Figgis invited tenders for the erection of a large rink at Mentone in 1888; in the same year G. E. Crouch designed a rink in Kensington; and George McMullen called for tenders for the erection of a large rink at Prahran. Other rinks known to have been operating in the 1880s include; the Moonee Ponds Skating Rink, Puckle Street, the Brunswick Town Hall rink; the Exhibition rink in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy; the Preston rink in Plenty Road, South Preston; and the Queen City rink, Melbourne. Most were handsomely decorated and commodiously fitted out with cloak and retiring rooms, refreshment bars and lavatories, and Kauri pine became mandatory for the floor. Some were provided with a gallery for spectators, and most were equipped with a bandstand or stage for musical accompaniment which undoubtedly added to the charm of the new recreational activity and drowned the noise of the rollers. The Exhibition Rink accommodating 800 people, had a raised promenade around the edge of the floor and its bandstand was suspended from the roof. Champion fancy skaters featured as special attractions, and polo skating became popular for the more energetic fanatics. Suburban polo skating clubs played competition matches at various metropolitan rinks and formed the Victorian Rink Polo Association using rules based on the American game.

### The Coburg Skating Rink

The Coburg Skating Rink opened in the new Bates Building on a Wednesday night in April 1888. The local newspaper reported the Kauri pine floor 'to be a very good one' that 'greatly pleased those who went on it for the purpose of skating'. The music however was not so favourably praised. At about 12.00 midnight interval was announced and the crowd of 200 people sat down to supper. Toasts were made to the proprietor, Harry Bates; the lessees, Messrs Leonard & Co.; the contractors, Messrs Spargo & Co.; ladies, the press, and others present. Skates were removed afterwards and dancing ensued until 3.00am.

The Coburg Rink operated for about two years. After peaking in the late 1880s, roller-skating took a down hill turn in popularity over the next decade. Some rinks notably the South Yarra Rink and the Crystal Palace Rink in Bridge Road Richmond, did manage to stay open and survived into the twentieth century, but skating as a popular pastime had been generally superseded by other crazes, bicycling being a major rival. A hosiery factory leased the upper storey space of the Bates Building for the next three years, and later Bates used the hall as a storeroom for clients' furniture.

In 1914, after 44 years in business, Harry retired to a house at 93 Harding Street, Coburg (built 1907) and leased his Sydney Road residence and business. First to lease the Bates Building was Charles Mc Arthur, followed by Mayne Nickless who used the upper storey for storage purposes. Bates sold the building in 1920 to a Mrs Mary Mitchell, wife of Walter Mitchell, Coburg Town Clerk. Bates moved to Preston where he died four years later.

### Recreational Use of the Hall in the Twentieth Century

A variety of tenants followed, however only one of them, Leslie Rogers was a carrier. From 1921-1925 the upstairs hall was revived for entertainment use as a billiard saloon, and for some years later it became the Arthur D. Spencer Physical Culture School.

### The Taj Mahal Dance Club

The most flamboyant use of the hall was by the Taj Mahal Dance Club. The opening ceremony was performed by Walter Mitchell 'amidst a scene of oriental splendour' on Saturday 6 February 1932. A four piece orchestra led by dance hall manager Norm McWhinney provided music for the 400 dancers, while drummer, Tom Saunders entertained by singing Nola and novelty numbers such as I'm a Ding-Dong Daddy. The bandstand, simulating a sheik's tent, was located on a small stage with a painted replica of the Taj Mahal around it. Murals on the side walls depicted exotic Indian scenes of palms and domed buildings. Arches adorned the walls on either side in rose and black designs and 'oriental rugs and smoking stands beside large and rosy-hued armchairs' were supplied for the lounge area by the well-known Walkers Stores at 347-349 Sydney Road. The kauri dance floor gleamed and the whole created 'the impression of a sunken garden, from which stretched lovely gardens of palms and bright hued exotic flowers, glowing warmly under a canopy of blue starry sky'. Over the following weeks the club opened for old time dancing on Wednesday nights and modern dancing on Friday and Saturday nights. For a while it seems the one shilling admission was no deterrent in these depressed times for locals wanting to kick up their heels. By April however, advertisements for the dance hall ceased to appear in the Coburg Courier and it would seem that the club closed.

### Coles

Despite the hardship of the Depression that lingered through the 1930s, many Sydney Road shops became the focus for prosperity during this period. The Coburg Market was opened in August 1930 by the Bush family, makers and sellers of furniture, and it was immediately successful, offering some of the lowest-priced foodstuffs in the district. In April 1932 the whole Sydney Road strip was lit up to attract Friday night shoppers who could admire 'the well dressed windows' of local traders and note 'the prices under the soft penetrative light of the new lamps'. In the same month G. J. Coles opened their twenty-first variety store in the ground floor of the Bates Building. The large downstairs space was converted for the building's new commercial function by local builder, Robert Irvine. The walls separating the small shop on the north side of the stables were removed, while the other shop was reduced in width from seventeen to ten feet and extended towards Russell Street. A new floor and ceiling were installed and, at the front, plate glass windows and a cantilever veranda changed the appearance of the former carrier's shop and stables. At the much anticipated opening, management had to provide 'two uniformed and two plain-clothed policemen to regulate the traffic' and

only 100 customers were admitted at one time. The crowd outside had been considerably augmented before many minutes were past, and stretched across Sydney Road. When doors were re-opened to allow the entrance of another batch of customers, a sudden surge of the crowd got out of hand for a few minutes. The twelve foot square glass windows of the store were broken and four women and a child sustained cuts and abrasions.

A 4 ft, 6 in. counter across the end of the shop formed the garden section, and two tables and an apron stand in the centre were used for the drapery section. Other sections included haberdashery, books, confectionery. Extensions to the store were completed in August 1933, providing two entrances, and two island counters, one with an illuminated display cabinet. In 1954, after twenty eight years in the Bates Building, Coles moved to larger premises at 463 Sydney Road.

#### Other Occupants

Other tenants have included Robert Pierce, bootmaker 1902-1918, and Edments 1955-1967. The longest trader, Mella's Silk Store, has had two proprietors (the store is named after the wife of the first), and has occupied the small shop on the south side of the building for forty years since 1956 and is still trading.

Mary Mitchell retained title of the whole building for forty seven years, selling it for \$85,000 in 1967. It has changed hands three times since, the current owners being Monit Nominees Pty Ltd and Zacmore Pty Ltd., who paid \$440,000 for it in October 1980. The present tenant for larger shop and upstairs hall, The Two Dollar Shop, continue the bargain hunter's paradise tradition of Coles where nothing was over two shillings and sixpence. The upstairs hall is presently not used by the tenant.

#### Sydney Herbert Wilson - Architect for the Bates Building

Born Prahran 1860, Sydney Wilson was the son of architect Ralph Wilson (of the partnership Crouch and Wilson). He served articles with his father's firm for six and a half years, then worked with Wilson and Beswicke for four and a half years. In February 1887, the year he designed the Bates Building, he was elected associate of the RVIA and began his own practice at premises at 80 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. Wilson designed and supervised the erection of many large city warehouses, suburban residences and country mansions, among which included J. V. Smith's mansion, Bundoora Park (1889; H 1091), and the Malvern Town Hall (1885/86). The majority of his buildings were designed in the southern and eastern suburbs, among which were a sports pavilion and two-storey shops in Caulfield. He was elected fellow of the RVIA in 1903.

#### COMPARISON:

The building is essentially a typical Victorian commercial premises. Its significance derives from its unusual combination of original uses - shops, livery stable and roller skating rink, and also the wall murals associated with its later use as a dance hall. There are no other known buildings which had this combination uses, and no other known buildings which retain their 1930s dance-hall decorative schemes. It is the only example of a purpose-built rollers kating rink known to be surviving from the nineteenth century.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under Section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the Heritage Register Number 1290 in the category described as a Heritage Place:

Former Bates' Building, 400-404 Sydney Road, Coburg, Moreland City Council.

#### EXTENT:

1. To the extent of all of the building marked B1 on Diagram No. 607328, held by the Executive Director, Heritage Council.
2. To the extent of all the land marked L1 on Diagram No. 607328, held by the Executive Director, Heritage Council, being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 4342, Folio 868372.

Dated 19 December 1996

RAY TONKIN

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G1 9 January 1997 pp.50-51]

*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/>*