

SHIPPING CONTROL TOWER



2025 Shipping Control Tower
Photo - Development Victoria



2025 Shipping Control Tower
view from south Photo -
Development Victoria



2025 Shipping Control Tower
viewed from Victoria Dock -
Photo - Heritage Victoria



2025 Shipping Control Tower
Photo - Heritage Victoria



2025 Shipping Control Tower
base - Photo - Development
Victoria



2025 Shipping Control Tower
lift and stairs Photo -
Development Victoria



The Shipping Control Tower
in 2024 prior to repair works



1966 port hostesses in front
of newly opened Melbourne
Harbour Trust shipping
control tower National
Archives of Australia



The interior of the Shipping
Control Tower as featured in
the 1966 Harbour Trust
Annual Report



c1968-1978 control room of
Shipping Control Tower
National Archives of Australia

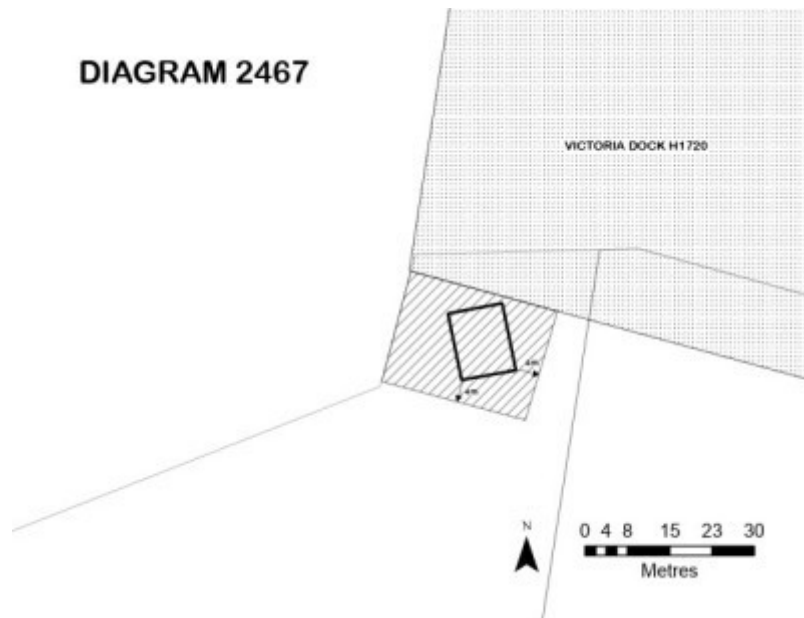


Diagram 2467

Location

NORTH WHARF ROAD DOCKLANDS, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2467

VHR Registration

October 16, 2025

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 16, 2025

The Shipping Control Tower is located in Narm, on Wurundjeri Country.

What is significant?

The Shipping Control Tower, located on the western extremity of the south arm of Victoria Dock, is a 40-metre-high reinforced concrete tower comprising two piers that support a two-level operations and amenities structure. Electronic and manual signalling equipment, as well as a crow's nest, are present on the roof. It was designed for the Melbourne Harbour Trust by architect C J Smith and it was constructed by W J Cody. The tower officially opened in April 1966 and provided a centre for managing ship arrivals and departures for the Port of Melbourne until its decommissioning in the 1990s.

How is it significant?

The Shipping Control Tower is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, 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 Shipping Control Tower is historically significant as the centre for control of shipping in and around the Port of Melbourne from the 1960s to the 1990s. From its strategic location, master mariners could maintain visual and electronic connection with ships entering and leaving the Port. The tower is symbolic of efforts to expand and modernise the Port in the middle decades of the twentieth century, and demonstrates the demands created by Victoria's busiest cargo docks. It is emblematic of the importance of maritime trade in driving Victoria's prosperity. The tower's relationship with Victoria Dock and the Yarra River speaks to the ongoing importance of these docks to shipping into the second half of the twentieth century. It is also significant for its role in providing shipping information to the general public in the latter decades of the twentieth century. The prominence and design of the tower enable its function and importance to be readily appreciated.

(Criterion A)

The Shipping Control Tower is significant as a notable example of a control tower in Victoria. Dating from a key period in the growth and modernisation of port facilities, it is a particularly historically relevant example. Its design, location and prominence enable the class and its function to be well understood. Its considered design represents the efforts of the Melbourne Harbour Trust to provide a modern facility to manage Victoria's busiest port.

(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:

Guidelines for specific permit exemptions

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the Act and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the Act specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
2. In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the Act, unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the Act, the Act will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.
5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.
6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor.
7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the Act must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.
8. All works should be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place or object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

General conditions for specific permit exemptions

1. All works or activities permitted under specific exemptions must be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents harm to the registered place or object. Harm includes moving, removing or damaging any part of the registered place or object that contributes to its cultural heritage significance.
2. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the registered place are revealed relating to its cultural heritage significance, including but not limited to historical archaeological remains, such as features, deposits or artefacts, then works must cease and Heritage Victoria notified as soon as possible.
3. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time, all works must cease and the Secretary (as defined in the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006) must be contacted immediately to ascertain requirements under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.
4. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any munitions or other potentially explosive artefacts are discovered, Victoria Police is to be immediately alerted and the site is to be immediately cleared of all personnel.
5. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any suspected human remains are found the works or activities must cease. The remains must be left in place and protected from harm or damage. Victoria Police and the State Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the remains are Aboriginal, the State Emergency Control Centre must be immediately notified on 1300 888 544, and, as required under s.17(3)(b) of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, all details about the location and nature of the human remains must be provided to the Aboriginal Heritage Council (as defined in the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006).

Exempt works and activities

Shipping Control Tower

1. Repairs, maintenance and replacement of glazing, window frames and doors, provided the appearance of the control tower is not permanently altered and the retention of early or original physical fabric is maximised.
2. Replacement of lift and mechanisms within existing lift shaft.

Security and safety

3. Installation of lighting, alarms, surveillance systems and other security devices required to secure the site and prevent unauthorised access.
4. Installation of fire detection and prevention systems.
5. Maintenance, repair, removal, and installation of security hoarding and fencing surrounding the base of the tower to secure the site and prevent unauthorised access, provided it is no more than four metres high.

Area surrounding the Shipping Control Tower

6. All sub-surface works, provided that the surface treatment is reinstated on the completion of works.
7. All ground-level works and activities (including hard and soft landscaping, and construction of roadways/laneways and the like) provided they do not:

- involve the construction of new buildings
- introduce new features greater than two metres above ground level
- cause harm to the physical fabric of the Shipping Control Tower (for example, by introducing poor drainage).

8. Maintenance, repair and removal of light poles.
9. Maintenance, repair, removal and installation of signage (not including interpretive and advertising signage) provided it is not attached to the Shipping Control Tower. The installation of any temporary or permanent interpretive and advertising signage, including electronic signage, will require separate approval under Part 5 of the Heritage Act 2017.
10. All works to wharves, including removal, remediation and replacement.

Other buildings and structures

11. Demolition and removal of buildings and structures other than the Shipping Control Tower within the extent of registration.

Events and activation activities

12. Art installations and activation activities, provided they:

- are temporary (in place for no more than three months annually)
- do not alter the physical fabric of the Shipping Control Tower.

Theme

3. Connecting Victorians by transport and communications

Construction dates	1963,
Architect/Designer	C J Smith,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	VICTORIA DOCK CONTROL TOWER,
Hermes Number	5319
Property Number	

History

Port of Melbourne

Soon after Melbourne's establishment, wharfs and associated infrastructure developed on the lower reaches of the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers, as well as at locations such as Williamstown and Port Melbourne. The narrowness and shallowness of the Yarra River, as well as the rocky reef ('the Falls') at Queen Street, limited its usefulness for larger ships which had to anchor in Hobsons Bay and then shift goods by lighters up to city wharves. The goldrush of the 1850s initiated a demand for increased wharf facilities for Melbourne, as well as connections to early rail infrastructure. In 1877, the Melbourne Harbour Trust was formed to coordinate the development of Melbourne's ports, and commissioned Sir John Coode to provide a plan for improving shipping access for Melbourne. The Yarra Falls were removed in 1883 and Coode's Canal was opened in 1887. Such works, which generally required substantial environmental disruption, allowed for larger vessels to berth closer to the centre of Melbourne, and connect to rail infrastructure.

Victoria Dock

Coode had also proposed that land close to the growing railyards be excavated to provide a new, purpose-built dock facility, an idea that the Harbour Trust adopted. Melbourne Harbour Trust engineer Joseph Brady adapted Coode's proposal for a purpose-built dock close to the centre of Melbourne. Construction of the West Melbourne Dock (later known as Victoria Dock – VHR H1720) was underway by 1889 and the dock was opened in 1892. On completion, it was reported to be one of the largest single docks in the world, enabling large ships and extensive cargoes to be managed on the edge of the city, and it 'effectively turned Melbourne into a significant port.' Victoria Dock was the Port of Melbourne's key dock facility well into the 1960s, when methods of shipping began to change and new dock facilities were established further west.

Expansion of the port

Following World War II, plans for expansion of the Port of Melbourne's facilities got underway with the need to plan for 'more ships, more cargo, more often'. By the early 1950s, exports via the Port of Melbourne reached an all-time high and continued mechanisation of wharves shortened turnaround times. By 1957, a vessel berthed or departed the Port of Melbourne roughly every 80 minutes. 1960 marked the 'beginning of a new era for the Port' under the leadership of V.G. Swanson who is credited with bringing containerisation to Melbourne. Melbourne was the first Australian port to accommodate container ships 'which would change cargo shipping as greatly as the change from sail to steam one hundred years before.' In this era, new wharves were established in several locations, including Appleton Dock (completed 1956), Webb Dock (1959) and Swanson Dock (1969), which was built specifically as a container terminal.

Shipping Control Tower

A timber octagonal watch tower had been located in a similar position to the current tower since 1934. By the early 1960s, with the growth in the number of vessels and their increasing size, there was a recognition that a new control centre was required to enable safer and more efficient shipping through the Port of Melbourne. In 1962, a joint conference was held between Trust officers, shipowners and others to discuss the establishment of a central control station for the port. It was agreed that an observation tower would be constructed and staffed by five control officers at all times to coordinate movements of shipping in the port, including towage pilots and emergency services.

The tower was designed by architect C J Smith and tenders for the tower were announced in 1963. It was constructed by W J Cody for \$174,548 and officially opened in April 1966. It comprised two levels – services and amenities were located on the lower level and enabled the tower to be staffed 24-hours a day, reflecting the operating hours of the docks. The operations room occupied the upper level and featured radar equipment and radio facilities (now removed) as well as angled glazing to minimise glare. The Shipping Control Tower was a sophisticated facility that used state-of-the-art electronic communication and tracking technology to control shipping traffic rather than traditional visual signalling alone (flags, semaphores and lights). It enabled control of shipping through major Port of Melbourne facilities and provided passenger and cargo shipping information. As described in the 1966 Annual Report for the Port of Melbourne:

“The Centre regulates all shipping movements and co-ordinates the various ancillary services associated with the arrival and departure of ships such as health, customs, pilots, tugs, berthing parties, line boats, etc. Operating from a central point in the port with visual and radar observation over the whole port area, the control officers have been able to considerably streamline the organisations associated with the arrival and departure of ships...”

By the 1990s, shipping volumes had further increased and shifted toward standardised freight containerisation and bulk handling. Melbourne's freight operations shifted further west to facilities dedicated to the container operations which required a large amount of open land to store containers, rather than cargo sheds. The opening of the Bolte Bridge in 1999 closed Victoria Dock to ships. The 1966 Shipping Control Tower was replaced by a new control tower further west on the Yarra River in 2000.

Selected bibliography

Primary sources

Port of Melbourne Annual Reports

Reports of the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners

Online resources

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Trace, K., 'Port of Melbourne', Encyclopedia of Melbourne, www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01162b.htm.

Reports, papers and articles

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Ruhan, O., Port of Melbourne, 1835-1976, Stanmore, Cassell Australia, 1976.

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: H2467

Category: Registered Place

Place: Shipping Control Tower

Location: North Wharf Road, Docklands

Municipality: Melbourne City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2467 encompassing part of Crown Allotment 24 Section 1B Parish of Doutta Galla. The extent of registration abuts the Victoria Dock registration (VHR H1720) to the north, extends 4m from the widest part of the tower to the east and to the south, and to the land parcel boundary to the west.

16 October 2025

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

[General Gazette G42 16 October 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/>