
Wilson Hall & Fincham Organ - University of Melbourne

Location

156-292 Grattan Street,, PARKVILLE VIC 3010 - Property No B6478

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

State

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1012

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 4, 2005

Wilson Hall. Designed in 1953 by architects Bates Smart and McCutcheon, Wilson Hall was completed in 1956 to replace the much revered Gothic Revival hall of the same name which was designed in 1879 by Reed and Barnes and gutted by fire in 1952. Wilson Hall is of architectural and historic significance at a state level as being the first major institutional building of note in Victoria after 1945 to combine a high level of craft, detail, and introduced artwork with the strict visual tenets of the International Style in an attempt to find a monumental expression for the post-war public building. Wilson Hall characterised the nationwide debate in the late 1950s over the International Style and whether the deliberate inclusion of ornament and artwork in such a design was justified. As a consequence, prominent Australian architect and critic Robin Boyd ambivalently and simultaneously dubbed Wilson Hall as "the crowning jewel of Australian Featurism" and "a record of the highest level of Australian public taste in the mid-nineteen-fifties, and the highest levels to which Featurism and sensitive creative ornamentation can aspire".

With its vast sunlit interior volume, Wilson Hall signalled the success of post-war International Modernism in Victoria and was a revelation in new public building design for the post-war decade. Built on the same site as the former Wilson Hall, the new hall was designed and has continued to fulfill the same central ceremonial role as its predecessor as well as provide a venue for concerts, addresses and examination. In terms of the development of the University of Melbourne, Wilson Hall is significant as being the first in a series of demonstrably progressive architectural designs that transformed the character of the campus in the 1950s. With the Beaurepaire Centre,

the Baillieu Library, and the Russell Grimwade School of Biochemistry, Wilson Hall forms part of a significant post-war group of campus buildings. Significantly, at a national level, Wilson Hall was also the first in a series of prestige post-war buildings that were to grace the country's university campuses in the 1950s.

Significant components of the building design include: its bold geometric form, a simple rectangular box with an east wall almost entirely of Bulgarian heat absorbing glass and the controversial additions and layering, both inside and out, of lavish materials, sculptural reliefs and timber veneers. These include the mural on the wall above the dias, a combination of painting and sculpture designed by Douglas Annand and executed by Tom Bass and Alan Ingham called "A Search for Truth" depicting a human figure freeing himself from chaos, war and disorder, and reaching upward through a bank of cloud towards a sun-like symbol of the ultimate good; four stone sculptures mounted externally on the west wall by Tom Bass: the textured brickwork of the south wall which incorporates stone rosettes from the old hall; the copper clad pod on the south wall containing the organ; the curving foyer ceiling of spaced wooden battens: the etched and stained glass mural by Douglas Annand in the foyer; the globular feature light pendants in the main hall; the Swedish birch panelling of the ceiling and west wall; the ceremonial chairs and lectern designed by Grant Featherstone; and the black Italian marble on the freestanding columns inside the giant glass wall with their copper speaker bases: as well as a substantial bronze relief by Tom Bass which is externally mounted on the north wall above the main entry and depicts "The Trial of Socrates". The north terrace paved with grey concrete slabs with a pattern of brick panels, the cream brick retaining walls and associated stairs (all part of the original design) are included.

Wilson Hall Classified: 20/10/1993

Organ Statement of Significance : A four-manual organ of 74 speaking stops rebuilt and installed in 1956 by George Fincham & Sons, incorporating the pipework and slider windchests from an organ built in 1890 by Fincham & Hobday for the Australian Church, Flinders Street, Melbourne. The present instrument contains the largest extant corpus of pipework of 19th century Australian manufacture, close to 50 ranks, from the largest church organ in 19th century Australasia. The pipework is of interest for its two five-rank Mixtures (the only such Fincham stops to survive), unique in Fincham's work. The asymmetrical facade of the organ was designed to complement the architecture of the hall, and dates from 1956, as do the action, wind system, layout and console, which are excluded.

Organ Classified: 16/02/1994

Hermes Number 65782

Property Number

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/>