

# FORMER MAIL EXCHANGE



FORMER MAIL EXCHANGE  
SOHE 2008



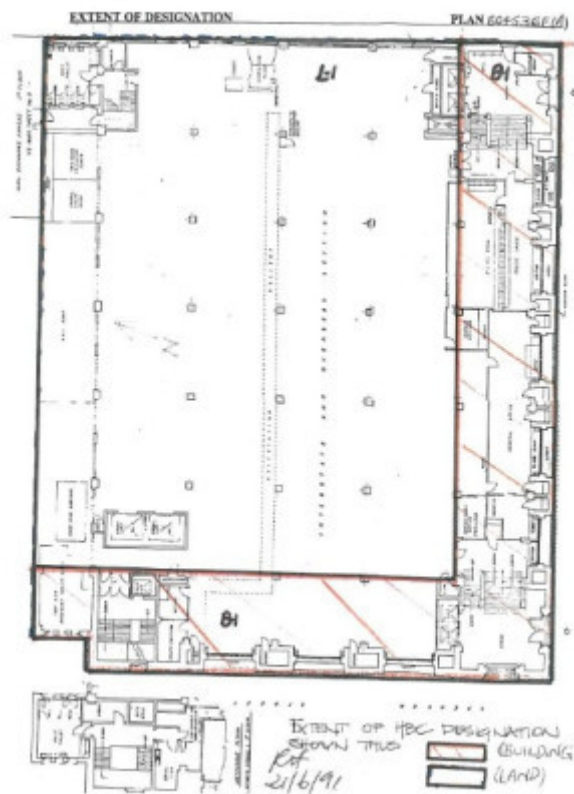
1 former mail exchange  
bourke street melbourne side  
corner elevation jun1997



former mail exchange bourke  
street melbourne side view  
jan1978



former mail exchange bourke  
street melbourne rear view



H0881 H0881 plan

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## Location

672-696 BOURKE STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0881

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO554

## VHR Registration

September 25, 1991

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - December 15, 1999

### What is significant?

The Former Mail Exchange, completed in 1917, was designed by Commonwealth Home Affairs architect John Smith Murdoch. The seven storey, steel-framed building was constructed in a beaux-arts classical style, with a red brick facade featuring rustication at the corners and a trabeated facade at first to third floor levels. The dominant feature of the facade is the paired giant order fluted columns, with ionic capitals, rising through three storeys. Bronzed steel framed windows fill the bays between the columns, contrasting with the mass and solidity of the masonry. Windows in each corner also rise three storeys from small balconettes with a simple bronzed steel balustrade. An under-road tunnel connects the sub-basement to Platform 2 at Spencer Street Station and was used for the conveyance of mail to trains.

### How is it significant?

The Former Mail Exchange is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

### Why is it significant?

The Former Mail Exchange is of architectural significance as a major example of the early work of the Commonwealth Department of Works and its first chief architect, J.S. Murdoch. The building is a distinguished example of beaux-arts classical design, and its Greek flavour was ten years ahead of Melbourne's mainstream Modern Greek revival. The beaux-arts style was not common in Australia, tending to be used for large and important buildings. It was the sense of monumentality that it imparted that Murdoch considered appropriate for Commonwealth buildings. Classicism became the style of choice for Commonwealth buildings during Murdoch's time. Its dignified conservatism was thought appropriate for major public buildings, and is particularly evident in

the public buildings of Canberra, such as the Old Parliament House (1927), also designed by Murdoch. Murdoch was a major figure in the development of Canberra, being a judge of the competition to design the city and responsible for many of the capital's buildings himself. He was also responsible for a number of other significant public buildings throughout Australia.

The Former Mail Exchange is of historical significance as an important reminder of the development of the Australian mail service in the early decades of the 20th century. The building was erected to ease congestion and provide better conditions than those prevailing at the Melbourne GPO. Its direct tunnel link to Spencer Street Station, modern and well-designed internal spaces and system of chutes to transport mail around the building demonstrated a concerted effort to modernise the mail system in the early years of the new Commonwealth. This modernity was reflected in the materials of the building, the steel framed windows being an early example of the use of such technology. The proximity of the building to Spencer Street Station reflects the important connections between the railways and the postal service in the development of postal communications throughout the State.

## 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](#).

Construction dates	1913,
Architect/Designer	Murdoch, John Smith,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	709
Property Number	

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## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

The site upon which the former Mail Exchange is located was variously used as a boarding house and as a timber yard until construction of the new Mail Exchange.

The source of the following material is the Register of the National Estate.

This building was erected to ease the lack of space and facilities at the Melbourne General Post Office (GPO) after some private premises in various parts of the city had previously been leased. Before the construction of the Melbourne Mail Exchange the Melbourne Telegraph Office operated from an inadequate galvanised iron structure built as temporary accommodation but which had continued to function for over eight years. Similarly the GPO failed to satisfy the needs and demands of the public. The GPO was dirty, dusty and in a general state of disrepair. It was unable to cope with the crowds who came to collect parcels when the English mail arrived. According to the original plan the Melbourne General Office was intended to be used on the same principle as a huge banking chamber, customers transacting their business inside, but circumstances prevented the idea from being carried into effect. The Argus reported that the scenes of chaos and confusion were indescribable. Persistent complaints from the public and the press regarding the overcrowding and poor facilities appear to have been influential in the erection of the new building. Plans for the new building appear to have been announced in 1911. All of the sorting of mail was eventually to be done at the new building and the bags were to be despatched by means of chutes directly to the train on the other side of the road. The basement was equipped as a baggage cartway and a motor garage and there were tunnels below Spencer Street as a means of communication between the stores and the railway station. One feature of the new structure was the relative absence of woodwork and of inflammable materials. This was carried out on the advice of the Chief Officer of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Mr Harry B Lee. The building provided a total of about 51,648 square feet, exclusive of the flat roof, which was fitted up as luncheon and recreation rooms for employees.

Associated People:

## **Extent of Registration**

### **AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

Historic Building No. 881.

Former Mail Exchange Building, 670-696 Bourke Street, corner of Spencer Street, City of Melbourne.

To the extent of :

1. The facades on the former Mail Exchange Buildings, Bourke Street and Spencer Street elevations, and the building behind those facades to a depth of 9.5 metres for the full height of the buildings, being part of the building marked B-1 on Plan No. 604536F(A), endorsed by the Chairperson, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council; and
2. The land marked L-1 on Plan No. 604536F(A), being part of the land described in Register Book Certificate of Title Volume 9209 Folio 999.

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G37 25 September 1991 p.2676]

*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/>*