

# OLD MELBOURNE GAOL



OLD MELBOURNE GAOL  
SOHE 2008



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1 old melbourne gaol russell  
street melbourne front view  
jan1979



Old Melbourne Gaol



Old Melbourne Gaol



Old\_Melbourne\_Gaol\_aerial\_1!



OLD MELBOURNE GAOL  
Nov 2016



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## Location

377 RUSSELL STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## **Municipality**

MELBOURNE CITY

## **Level of significance**

Registered

## **Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H1553

## **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO789

## **VHR Registration**

August 20, 1982

## **Amendment to Registration**

May 23, 1998

## **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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## **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on - August 17, 1999

### **What is Significant?**

The Old Melbourne Gaol was erected in stages between 1851 and 1864 by the Public Works Department of the Colony of Victoria, the design is attributed to Henry Ginn, Chief Architect of the Department. The oldest remaining section is the Second Cell Block (1851-1853) which serves as a museum and consists of a long block with three tiers of cells terminating in the central hall (1860), the site of the scaffold. The chapel, entrance block and the remaining walls date from the early 1860s. The Gaol Chapel is attributed to H.A. Williams, who worked for the Public Works Department. The north facade and bellcote of the chapel, which exhibit more Italian origins, are attributed to John James Clark or Gustav Joachimi, both Public Works Department architects. All of the buildings are constructed in bluestone. As the oldest surviving penal establishment, it was the site where one of the most notable criminals, Ned Kelly was imprisoned, executed and buried, amongst many other criminals. The complex ceased to be used as a gaol in 1923 and a number of buildings were subsequently demolished to accommodate the City Watch House, Police Garage, Emily McPherson College and various buildings for RMIT.

The cellblock is well preserved and it gives an understanding of the conditions endured by prisoners. The Chapel and entrance buildings are well maintained and these are the focus of this complex of buildings. They have been altered internally, although most of the work is reversible.

### **How is it Significant?**

The Old Melbourne Gaol, the Chapel and the entrance buildings and courtyard are of cultural, aesthetic, architectural, scientific and historic significance to the State of Victoria. The site of the original gaol complex is of archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

## Why is it Significant?

The remaining Second Cell Block, Chapel, Entrance buildings and courtyard of the Old Melbourne Gaol are culturally significant to Victoria as remaining evidence of one of the early gaols and the oldest surviving penal establishment in the state. The Second Cell Block is aesthetically and architecturally significant as a representation of prison architecture in Victoria during the massive building campaign of the 1850s and 1860s when eight other gaols were built. All remaining buildings are significant as examples of early Public Works designed buildings. The Second Cell Block is scientifically significant as an illustration of the Pentonville type gaol based on the universal specifications of the British prison engineer Joshua Jebb. The complex of buildings is historically significant for its role as Melbourne's oldest surviving gaol and as the Remand, Trials, Debtors and Females prison for the metropolitan area for much of its functioning life. The site of the whole extent of the original complex is archaeologically significant in so far as it contains remnants of the original gaol structures and the site of the original burials of prisoners hanged at the gaol, including Ned Kelly.

[Online Data Upgrade Project 2001]

## 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:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to

seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Construction dates            1853,  
Heritage Act Categories    Registered place,  
Hermes Number                796  
Property Number

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## History

### History of Place:

The first gaols in Victoria were primitive lock-ups. In 1838 a building of two rooms was rented from John Batman and converted for use as cells. The continued lack of space meant that retired ships were pressed into service as hulks. A new temporary brick gaol, designed by Clerk of Works James Rattenbury, was constructed in Collins Street West on the government reserve in 1839-40. It consisted of two cells with subsequent additions. This too proved inadequate and in March 1841 tenders were called for a proposed new permanent Gaol. The original cell block, built of sandstone, was begun that year but was not officially opened until 1845. The architect is not known but works were supervised by Rattenbury. The contractor Patrick Main was paid 21,028 pounds. The cell block housed those guilty of lesser crimes because there was no Supreme Court in Melbourne until separation and serious offenders were sent to Sydney for trial. The second wing, built parallel to the first one, was begun in 1851 in response to severe overcrowding following the first gold rush in 1851. It was finished in 1853 and is now the sole surviving cell block. Between 1856 and 1860 a further 44,000 pounds was spent on other additions, including the central hall, a third cell block to the west (demolished), the main entrance to Franklin Street with iron gates, and a 6.5 metre high wall encircling the whole block of Russell Street, Latrobe Street, Bowen Street and Franklin Street (partly demolished). In 1859 gaolers quarters were erected on Swanston Street by P Cunningham for 8,500 pounds (demolished). In 1860 contractor C J Lynn was paid more than 30,000 pounds for further work including the chapel block. In 1864 O'Grady and Co. were paid 999 pounds for a new Gaol hospital. (demolished)

Despite the massive building program the gaol was soon deemed unsuitable for its central location amidst an expanding city, and in 1870 the Royal Commission into Prisons in Victoria recommended its closure. However the gaol survived intact until 1908 when the first cell block was demolished to make way for the City Watch House lock-up. In 1924 approval was given for the erection of a College of Domestic Economy on the site of the remand yard. In 1929 much of the Gaol was demolished to make way for extensions to the Working Men's College. Demolished parts included the western (female) cell block, hospital and parts of the walls. The remaining cell block was used by the police as storage until 1973. The National Trust became custodians of the site and it became a museum of penal history.

Associated People: Ned Kelly

Mick Jagger

## Extent of Registration

Amendment of Register of Government Buildings

Melbourne City

Russell Street, City.

(ii) Old Melbourne Gaol (Cell Block)

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G39 12 October 1988 p3091]

Transferred to the Victorian Heritage Register 23 May 1998 (2 years after the proclamation of the Heritage Act 1995 pursuant to the transitional provisions of the Act)

*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/>*