

---

## CITY BATHS



CITY BATHS SOHE 2008



1 city baths swanston street melbourne front corner elevation



city baths swanston street melbourne front stairs



city baths swanston street melbourne close up she project 2004



city baths swanston street melbourne entrance she project 2004

---

### Location

420-438 SWANSTON STREET AND 39-41 VICTORIA STREET AND 2-6 FRANKLIN STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

### Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0466

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO493

## VHR Registration

March 26, 1980

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 30, 2008

#### What is significant?

The City Baths were built by Swanson Brothers builders in 1903-4 to competition winning designs by the architect J. J. Clark and his son, E. J. Clark. Constructed on an unusual triangular site, the building provided the city with segregated bathing facilities for men and women.

Municipal baths were a common and necessary feature of daily life in early Melbourne when many houses had little provision for private bathing facilities. The present site was reserved for public baths in 1850 and a structure for bathing purposes was opened in 1860. The current building was completed in 1904 with two large swimming baths and associated changing facilities, as well as slipper baths, spray baths, Jewish Mikva baths and Turkish Baths. The symmetrical front facade clearly indicates the division of men's and women's facilities on either side of the entry bay.

The City Baths were very popular throughout the early twentieth century, however by the 1940s the facility had fallen into disrepair. Degradation continued after the Olympic Games in 1956 as the construction of suburban pools reduced patronage at the City Baths. Despite attempts to close and demolish the building in the 1970s, the City Baths were retained and underwent restoration and alteration work from 1981-83, including the addition of spas, saunas, squash courts and a gymnasium.

Edwardian Baroque in style, the City Baths building is distinctive in its use of red brick and contrasting cement render mouldings. The two storey central entrance bay incorporates arched openings emphasised by banded voussoirs, a broken pedimented entry and cupola-roofed belvederes. Flanking single storey wings also incorporate cupolas at the corner bays.

The front entrance stairs and fence were reconstructed in the 1981-83 works. Of similar configuration, the original stairs did not contain an entrance at street level. A fence of masonry and ironwork has replaced the original masonry fence along Swanston Street.

#### How is it significant?

The City Baths, Melbourne are of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

#### Why is it significant?

The City Baths, Melbourne are of architectural significance as one of the most distinctive Edwardian Baroque buildings in Melbourne and as an important work of the noted Victorian architect, J. J. Clark. Working for the Public Works Department, Clark was a prolific designer of nineteenth century public buildings, and was responsible for such important buildings as the Treasury (1858, VHR H1526) and the Royal Mint (1869-72, VHR H0770).

The City Baths, Melbourne are of historical significance as a reminder of the important role played by bathing establishments in the early twentieth century. They are also illustrative of the patterns of social organisation in the early twentieth century, with the segregation of males and females still evident in the entry signage.

[Online Data Upgrade Project 2008]

## 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            1903,

Architect/Designer            Clarke, John James & EJ,

Heritage Act Categories Registered place,

Hermes Number 811

Property Number

---

## History

The City Baths were built by Swanson Brothers builders in 1903-4 to competition winning designs by the architect J. J. Clark and his son, E. J. Clark. Constructed on an unusual triangular site, the building provided the city with segregated bathing facilities for men and women.

Municipal baths were a common and necessary feature of daily life in early Melbourne when many houses had little provision for private bathing facilities. The present site was reserved for public baths in 1850 and a structure for bathing purposes was opened in 1860. The current building was completed in 1904 with two large swimming baths and associated changing facilities, as well as slipper baths, spray baths, Jewish Mikva baths and Turkish Baths. The symmetrical front facade clearly indicates the division of men's and women's facilities on either side of the entry bay.

The City Baths were very popular throughout the early twentieth century, however by the 1940s the facility had fallen into disrepair. Degradation continued after the Olympic Games in 1956 as the construction of suburban pools reduced patronage at the City Baths. Despite attempts to close and demolish the building in the 1970s, the City Baths were retained and underwent restoration and alteration work from 1981-83, including the addition of spas, saunas, squash courts and a gymnasium.

### **The draft statement of significance and the above history were produced as part of an Online Data Upgrade Project 2008. Sources were as follows:**

Argroup Pty Ltd Architects. *Melbourne City Council City Baths Restoration and Development*. Melbourne 1979 [Outline History with no footnotes or bibliography]

H. Chapman and J. Stillman. *Melbourne Then and Now*. Melbourne 2005

J. Bailey. 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed: Melbourne City Baths' *Victorian Historical Journal*. Vol 63, 2 & 3, October 1992

G. A. T. Middleton. *Modern Buildings, their Planning, Construction and Equipment*. London 1906

Contextual History:History of Place:

The first public baths opened in Melbourne in 1844, located on the Yarra opposite the Customs House. They didn't last long, however, with a new structure being opened on the site of the present baths in 1858. The current building was completed in 1904 at a cost of 18,000 pounds.

The original configuration of the baths, now altered, included two separate pools, one for men and one for women, with changing cubicles around the edge of each, as well as womens slipper baths, spray baths, Jewish Mikva baths and Turkish baths as well as rooms for swimming clubs.

A steam heating system was used to heat the pools.

## Plaque Citation

This grand Edwardian Baroque building, designed by architect J. J. Clark, was built in 1903-4. It provided a variety of baths and segregated amenities for Melburnians, many of whom had limited bathing facilities at home.

## Extent of Registration

Historic Building No. 466 - City Baths, Swanston Street, Melbourne (excluding the residence at the rear). [Victoria Government Gazette No. 22 - 26 March 1980 p.932]

---

*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/>*