

City of Melbourne Amendment C258

Statement of Heritage Evidence and Report to Planning Panel

Festival Hall, 300 Dudley Street, West Melbourne

Prepared for Best Hooper Lawyers on behalf of
Stadiums Pty Ltd

July 2018

Prepared by

LOVELL CHEN



Prepared for

Stadiums Pty Ltd

Statement of Qualifications and Experience, and Declaration

Authorship

This statement has been prepared by Mr Peter Haynes Lovell, Director of Lovell Chen Pty Ltd, Architects and Heritage Consultants, Level 5, 176 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne, assisted by Ms Libby Blamey, Senior Associate and Ms Michelle Bashta, Research Assistant. The views expressed in the statement are those of Mr Peter Lovell.

Qualifications and Experience

I have a Bachelor of Building degree from Melbourne University and have been director of the above practice, which I established with Richard Allom in 1981. Over the past 32 years I have worked in the field of building conservation and have been involved in, and responsible for, a wide range of conservation related projects. These projects include the preparation of conservation/heritage studies for the Borough of Queenscliffe, the former City of South Melbourne, the former City of Fitzroy and the former City of Port Melbourne. In addition, I have acted as heritage advisor to the Borough of Queenscliffe and the former City of South Melbourne. In the area of conservation management planning I have been responsible for the preparation of a wide range of conservation analyses and plans including those for the Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building, the State Library and Museum, the Supreme Court of Victoria, Werribee Park, the Regent Theatre, the Bendigo Post Office, Flinders Street Station, the Old Melbourne Observatory and the Mt Buffalo Chalet. I have been responsible for the preparation of strategic planning reports for Government House, Canberra, the Melbourne Town Hall and the Supreme Court of Victoria.

In the area of building conservation works I have been involved in and directly responsible for the investigation, design and documentation of a wide range of projects including the ANZ Gothic Bank at 380 Collins Street, the Collingwood, Melbourne and Fitzroy Town Halls, the Athenaeum and Regent Theatres, Parliament House, Melbourne, Government Houses in Canberra and Perth, and the Supreme Court of Victoria Court of Appeal.

I am a member of long standing of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), and the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. I am also an honorary fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

Over the past twenty years I have appeared frequently before the former Historic Buildings Council, now the Victorian Heritage Council, and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in relation to matters relating to conservation, adaptation and redevelopment of historic places.

Expertise

I have expertise in the study of heritage and heritage management. This expertise is primarily derived from my experience in researching and assessing heritage places for the application of heritage controls at both a local and state level, in the formulation and review of guidelines for the implementation of such controls, in the application of heritage controls to projects undertaken by Lovell Chen and other architects and in the testing of those controls by way of Victorian Heritage Council and Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal review.

Instructions

My instructions comprised a verbal request from Mr Chris Wren on behalf of Stadiums Pty Ltd to review Amendment 258, as impacting on the subject site and to provide advice and an expert report with regard to the recommendations contained in the Amendment.

Declaration

In preparing this report I declare that I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Panel.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Lovell', is positioned above the name. The signature is stylized with a large initial 'P' and a long horizontal stroke.

Peter Lovell

1.0 Introduction

This statement of evidence has been prepared on behalf of Stadiums Pty Ltd, owners of the property at 300 Dudley Street, West Melbourne, known as Festival Hall. The statement relates to the proposal to include Festival Hall in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (HO) of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as part of Amendment C258. The amendment also proposes to introduce a new incorporated document to the Schedule to Clause 81.01 – the *West Melbourne Heritage Review Statements of Significance*. The *West Melbourne Heritage Review* (Butler, 2015) is proposed to be included at Clause 22.05 as a reference document.

A statement of significance for Festival Hall is included in the proposed incorporated document and this is the subject of this evidence. It is noted that the inclusion of Festival Hall in the Schedule to the HO is not opposed, rather this evidence addresses the form and content of the statement of significance.



Figure 1 April 2018 aerial photograph of the subject site, indicated by red line
Source: Nearmap

1.1 Background

Festival Hall, also referred to as the former West Melbourne Stadium, was identified in the *West Melbourne Heritage Review* prepared by Graeme Butler in 2015. Interim heritage controls were applied to a number of places identified in the *West Melbourne Heritage Review*, including Festival Hall, as part of Amendment C273 in May 2017. These interim controls were set to expire on 1 March 2018. The interim controls were extended an additional 12 months by amendment C321. The interim controls now expire on 1 March 2019.

In 2016 Lovell Chen was engaged by Stadiums Pty Ltd to provide advice regarding the potential heritage significance of Festival Hall. This advice included a detailed history and description, which in part, is reproduced below. The report concluded that Festival Hall was of local significance and of potential state significance.

Subsequent to the application of the interim heritage overlay Festival Hall was nominated to the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR), as a place of potential state significance. On 10 May 2018 the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria recommended to the Heritage Council of Victoria that Festival Hall

be included as a Registered Place in the VHR under the *Heritage Act 2017*.¹ It is noted that although the state significance of Festival Hall is not contested a Heritage Council hearing has been requested by Stadiums Pty Ltd for the purpose of refining the statement of significance, the extent of registration and the permit policy/exemptions.

2.0 Heritage controls and assessments

2.1 Melbourne Planning Scheme

Festival Hall is individually identified as HO1183 in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme (Figure 2). This is an interim control which is due to expire on 1 March 2019. The HO is proposed to be made permanent as part of Amendment C258.



Figure 2 Detail of the HO map with the extent of HO1183 which
Source: Melbourne Planning Scheme

2.2 Heritage assessments

2.2.1 *Survey of Post-War Built Heritage in Victoria, 2008*

Festival Hall was identified in the *Survey of Post-War Built Heritage in Victoria* (Heritage Alliance 2008). This study identified Festival Hall as being of historical significance for its association with the Olympic Games and as Melbourne's 'premier live performance venue in the heyday of popular music.'²

2.2.2 *West Melbourne Heritage Review*

The *West Melbourne Heritage Review* (Butler, 2015) identified Festival Hall as being 'significant historically and socially to West Melbourne, Victoria and the City of Melbourne.' The citation is set out

¹ Heritage Victoria, *Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Division 3 of the Heritage Act 2017: Festival Hall*, 10 May 2018, p. 1.

² Heritage Alliance, *Survey of Post-War Built Heritage in Victoria, 2008*, p. 77.

as a statement of significance in a 'what', 'how', 'why' format, with the historical and descriptive information in the 'what' section. The study proposes a C grading for the place.³

The history gives information on the hall's rebuilding in the 1950s, the Wren family connection, performances and sporting (wrestling/boxing) events. The surveyed places information in Appendix 2 of the study, which is separate to the citation, includes a comprehensive list of 'music singers/bands' that have performed at the venue.

2.2.3 *Heritage Victoria assessment*

Heritage Victoria has also undertaken an assessment of the significance of Festival Hall and the Executive Director's recommendation concludes that Festival Hall is of historical (Criterion A) and social (Criterion G) significance to the State of Victoria.⁴ The recommended extent of registration is:

The extent of registration of Festival Hall in the Victorian Heritage Register affects the whole place shown on Diagram 2386 including the land and all of the building (including the exteriors and interiors).

3.0 **History and description**

3.1 **History**

3.1.1 *West Melbourne Stadium*

The first West Melbourne Stadium on the site was originally known as Baker's Stadium, established by the Sydney-based sports manager Reginald 'Snowy' Baker in 1913. Baker, who had played rugby, rowed and boxed at elite levels, became involved with sporting and theatrical entrepreneur H D McIntosh's Stadiums, as a referee, purchasing the Rushcutters Bay Stadium in 1912.⁵ In 1913, Baker opened the new boxing stadium 'among a respectable array of timber stores, iron-yards and non-descript warehouses' and was to 'put new life into a part of the city which has been forgotten by the world for the last thirty or forty years'.⁶ By October 1913, the new building was nearing completion, and was described by the *Age* newspaper:

The building is oblong in shape, its dimensions being 165 feet x 300 feet, and seating accommodation is provided for 12,000 people. The outer walls are of brick, within which, on the four sides, are tiers of seats sloping down to the area, and so arranged that an unobstructed view of the ring is obtained from any part ... The entire building will, when finally completed, be covered by a louvered roof, which will afford excellent ventilation ... Everything is being carried out on the same complete lines that has made the Sydney stadium so popular.⁷

3 'West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall', Graeme Butler & Associates, *West Melbourne Heritage Review*, 2015, Appendix 2, pp 351-354 and Appendix 3, pp. 1422-1424.

4 Heritage Victoria, 'Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Division 3 of the Heritage Act 2017 – Festival Hall', 10 May 2018.

5 Chris Cunneen, 'McIntosh, Hugh Donald (1876–1942)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcintosh-hugh-donald-7373/text12811>, published first in hardcopy 1986, and W. F. Mandle, 'Baker, Reginald Leslie (Snowy) (1884–1953)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/baker-reginald-leslie-snowy-5106/text8531>, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 6 June 2016

6 *Table Talk*, 28 August 1913, p. 5.

7 *Age*, 27 October 1913, p. 14.

The construction of the building, which took six weeks, was delayed by the need to deal with the unstable ground, and the walls were ultimately constructed on 12 foot concrete rafts.⁸ The stadium was opened at a boxing match between Hughie Mehegan and Matt Wells, in front of a crowd of 10,000 people.⁹

In May 1914, Stadiums Ltd was formed to take over control of boxing in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. John Wren held the position of chairman of directors, with Baker as managing director, although the directors noted that he was 'really the father of the company.'¹⁰ Long-term Wren associate, Richard Lean, was the company's manager. The company had a 'near monopoly' of boxing on the east coast, dictating terms to its boxers including discouraging them from fighting overseas.¹¹ Boxers who challenged these terms were 'locked-out' of matches, until they relented.¹²

John Wren was born in Collingwood in 1871, and rose to prominence, and wealth, with the establishment of his betting totalizator in Johnston Street in the 1890s.¹³ Wren was generous to the local needy, but the inability of authorities to move against his 'tote' infuriated many outside the community. After the passing of the Lotteries, Gaming and Betting Act in 1906, which effectively closed the tote, Wren concentrated on other businesses including the Richmond and Ascot racecourse, and boxing promotion. He also established horse-racing and media interests in Queensland in this period. He is known to have had political influence at local, State and union levels, although as biographer James Griffin notes, 'the extent of his political manipulations is impossible to gauge.'¹⁴ Writing four years after Wren's death in 1953, the *Argus* newspaper reminisced about the boxing matches of the 1920s under Wren's helm:

Ruling as unchallenged boxing dictator, John Wren in the 1920s, presided over what might be called the second golden age of the fight game in this country. [The boxers] made Stadium nights historic. They drew crowds that spilt grumbling overflows into Dudley Street.¹⁵

By September 1914, the West Melbourne Stadium was closed for major roofing works, with the installation of the louvered roof (Figure 3). These works also included the construction of new dressing rooms under the 'south gallery' and alterations to the entrances and seating arrangements. The stadium was reopened in early 1915, and by this time was under the control of Stadiums Ltd.¹⁶

8 *Leader*, 1 November 1913, p. 26

9 *Examiner*, 4 November 1913, p. 2.

10 *Warwick Examine and Times*, 2 May 1914, p. 4.

11 James Griffin, 'Wren, John (1871–1953)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wren-john-9198/text16247>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 6 June 2016.

12 'Boxing', e-Melbourne, Encyclopedia of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00224b.htm>, 6 June 2016.

13 James Griffin, 'Wren, John (1871–1953)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wren-john-9198/text16247>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 12 July 2016.

14 James Griffin, 'Wren, John (1871–1953)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wren-john-9198/text16247>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 15 July 2016.

15 *Argus*, 16 January 1957, p. 6.

16 *Referee*, 16 September 1914, p. 9, *Bendigo Independent*, 22 February 1915, p. 3, *Sporting Judge*, 20 February 1915, p. 3, *Winner*, 10 February 1915, p. 5.

Between 1917 and 1921, the stadium remained unused for boxing, and was used for the storage of wool.¹⁷ Aside from boxing matches, wrestling was a regular component of the stadium's sporting programme.¹⁸ Occasional fundraising theatrical performances were also held at the stadium as part of the venue's entertainment offering.¹⁹ The Stadium was the site of many famous boxing matches, as well as memorable concerts and events. Famous fighters included Frank Flannery, and noted performers included Johnny Ray, Gracie Fields, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Ella Fitzgerald. The Stadium was also used for political meetings, and in 1934 was the venue where Egon Kisch (1885-1948), the Czech journalist and anti-war activist, addressed his Melbourne followers.²⁰ Mary Wren, peace activist and daughter of John Wren, secured the use of the Stadium from her father.²¹ Other large political meetings held at the venue include stop work meeting of engineers (1940), building workers (1941), waterside workers (1949), the Tramways Union (1950) and an address by the New South Wales premier to a capacity crowd to explain 'his policy on Australia's financial problem.'²²

Professional boxing continued throughout World War One, although many amateur sporting groups curtailed their activities, and some regarded professional sporting activities as 'unpatriotic and disloyal'.²³ The *War Precautions Act 1917*, limited the number of boxing promotions and made promoters share their facilities with vaudeville acts, to provide lighter entertainment during the conflict. Numbers attending boxing bouts declined and by 1918 the Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne stadiums had closed temporarily.²⁴ At this time, Wren had the building reclassified as a warehouse because it was not then being used for boxing.²⁵ However, it appears that the stadium re-opened in 1921, after the seating was replaced. Balconies and lavatories were installed in 1927, and further alterations took place in 1947. Wren's company became known as Stadiums Pty Ltd in 1937. Professional boxing suffered during the depression of the 1930s, and bouts were held less regularly than in the previous decades. In World War Two, the boxing stadiums again remained open, although they were also used as recruiting centres, with boxers often wearing service uniforms to promote enlistment.²⁶ After the war, Stadiums Pty Ltd continued to operate its three stadiums, primarily as boxing venues, but also for concerts and other events.

In addition to hosting boxing matches, West Melbourne Stadium was a venue for wrestling matches in Melbourne. Although often taking second billing to boxing, the wrestling events at the stadium attracted large audiences and by the mid-1920s a strong community in Melbourne was drawing world renowned wrestlers to the stadium.²⁷ In 1926, Stadiums Pty Ltd hosted an Australian tour of the World

17 *Argus*, 16 January 1957, p. 6.

18 *Argus*, 18 January 1957, p. 6.

19 *Argus*, 1 November 1923, p. 12.

20 Stuart Macintyre 'Egon Kisch (1885-1948)' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, p. 369.

21 Stuart Macintyre 'Egon Kisch (1885-1948)' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, p. 369.

22 *Argus*, 11 November 1941, p. 4, 17 April 1950, *Weekly Times*, 2 March 1949, p. 4, p. 5, *Age*, 15 April 1931, p. 10.

23 Wray Vamplew & Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 42.

24 Wray Vamplew & Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 42.

25 Index Card for Building Applications, 300 Dudley Street, West Melbourne, City of Melbourne.

26 *Festival Hall: An Appraisal of Cultural Significance for Stadiums Pty Limited*, Allom Lovell Architects Brisbane, 2001, p. 8.

27 *The Argus*, January 18 1957, p.6.

Light Heavyweight champion, Ted Thye, including a noted bout at West Melbourne Stadium against the British Champion Sam Clapham.²⁸ Wrestling remained a popular sport into the 1950s. The sport's base was considered to be in Melbourne, and results of matches at the West Melbourne Stadium were reported nationally including in the *Mercury* (Hobart), the *Canberra Times* and the *Brisbane Telegraph*.²⁹

In the early 1940s, internal works were undertaken to the stadium. A plan produced at the time of these works shows the internal layout of the stadium, with the boxing ring centrally located, and tiers of seating surrounding it. Exits were located on all sides, with the main entrance from Dudley Street (Figure 4). Part of the Dudley Street elevation, with the main entrance, can be seen in an undated (c. 1940s-1950s) photograph at Figure 5. The general form of the building can be seen in a c. 1939 oblique aerial at Figure 6.

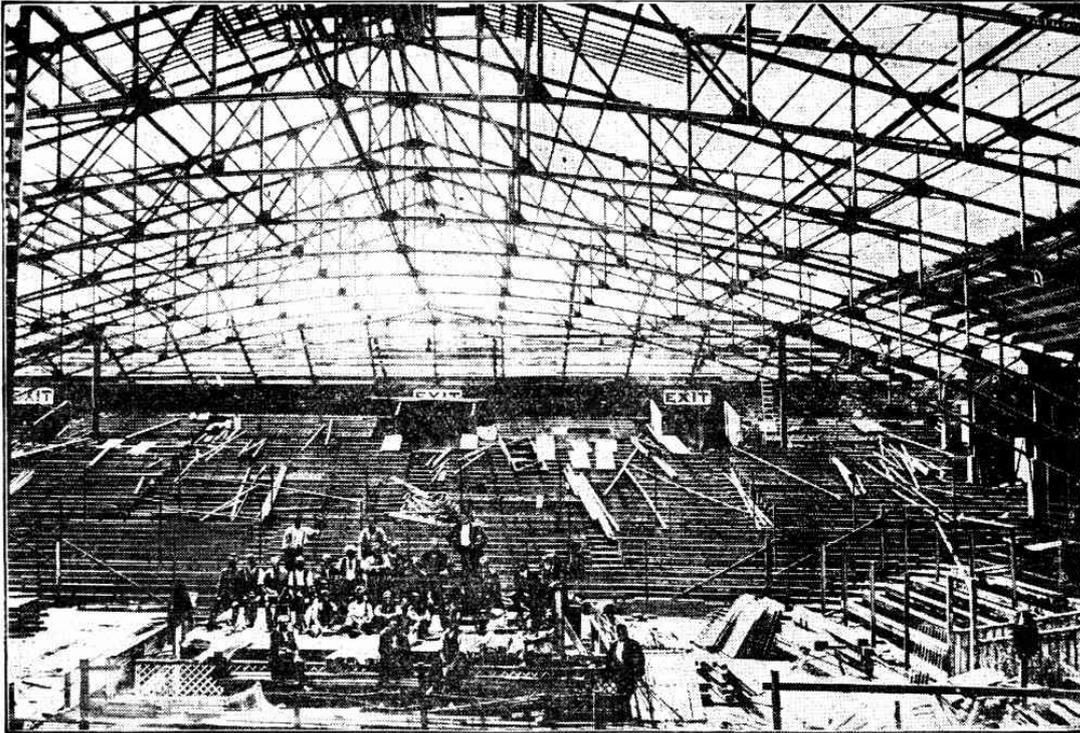


Figure 3 West Melbourne Stadium during works, 1915
Source: *Winner*, 3 February 1915, p. 5

28 *The Sporting Globe*, 4 August 1926, p.7.

29 'Wrestling', Encyclopedia of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01644b.htm>, accessed 30 July 2018, *Mercury*, 31 August 1953, p. 13; *The Canberra Times*, 12 July 1953, p. 4; *Brisbane Telegraph*, 17 April 1950, p.31.

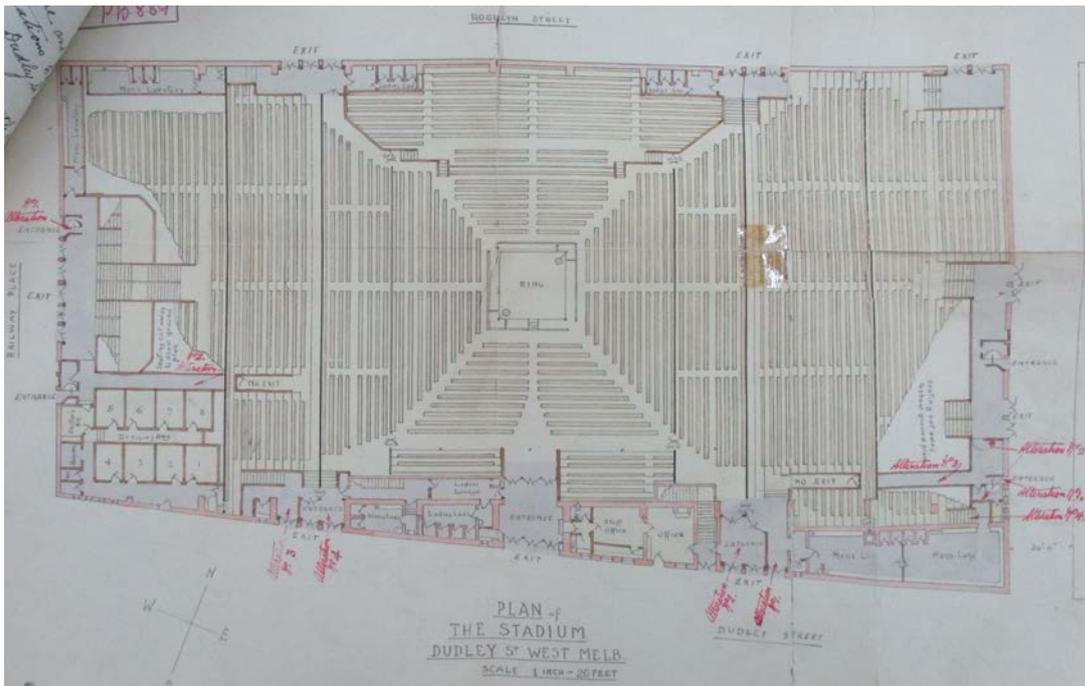


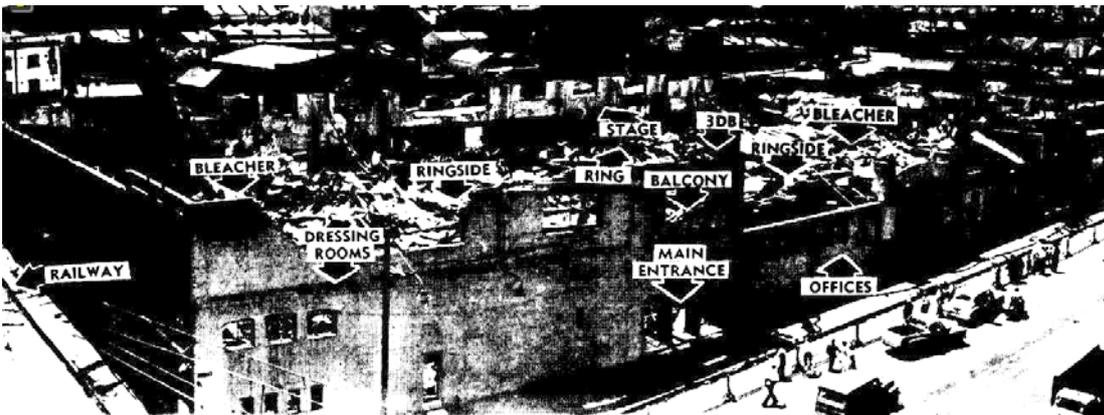
Figure 4 Plan of layout of 1910s West Melbourne Stadium, 1942
 Source: Public Buildings File, PB 889, VPRS 7882/P1/179, Public Record Office Victoria



Figure 5 View west down Dudley Street, with 1913 stadium at right
 Source: Public Transport Collection, VPRS 12800/P3, ADV/1453, Public Record Office Victoria



Figure 6 Oblique aerial view, c. 1939, with 1913 West Melbourne Stadium circled
 Source: original source unknown, accessed via Walking Melbourne,
<http://www.walkingmelbourne.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=7240>, 6 June 2016



All that is left of West Melbourne Stadium after the big fire are these broken walls cupping piles of debris.

Figure 7 Photograph in the *Argus* newspaper showing extent of damage to West Melbourne Stadium, 1955
 Source: *Argus*, 25 January 1955, p. 7

Fire

In January 1955, a huge fire broke out in the stadium. The *Argus* reported that the stadium was ‘burned to the ground ... in one of Melbourne’s biggest fires in recent years’, with some of the building’s brick walls caving in, and a new revolving stage, which had been installed for a Frank Sinatra show, rendered a ‘twisted wreck.’³⁰ The extent of damage to the building can be seen in a newspaper photograph (Figure 7), with the roof collapsed, and upper walls and interior sustaining significant damage.

³⁰ *Argus*, 24 January 1955, p. 5.

3.1.2 New stadium

The day after the fire, Richard (Dick) Lean, manager of Stadiums Ltd announced that the company would construct a replacement stadium in time for the 1956 Olympic Games, which would accommodate sports other than boxing.³¹ Although the company proposed finding a new site closer to the city, the replacement building was constructed on the site of the 1913 stadium. Approval for the building was granted in May 1955 and by August, foundations had been laid for the new building.³² In May 1955, it was reported that part of the walls of the earlier stadium were to be retained, but it is unclear to what extent this occurred.³³

The new stadium was designed by architects Cowper, Murphy & Associates (Figure 8, Figure 9). The firm was known for the design of theatres and hotels across Melbourne, with the former including the Palace (Hawthorn, 1916); Garrick (South Melbourne, 1932); Waverley (East Malvern, 1936); Sun (Yarraville, 1938); Dendy (Brighton, 1940), and the Time (Balwyn, 1941).³⁴ During the 1950s, Cowper, Murphy & Associates designed a number of halls (Koroit, Sunshine), theatres (St Martins, South Yarra), the Pharmaceutical College in Parkville, and office buildings in the city.³⁵ The firm was established by Christopher A Cowper in 1912. Cowper had been articled to E McIvor in 1884 at the age of sixteen. He began his own practice in 1892 but changed profession during the late 1890s when he was employed as manager of the American insurance giant, Equitable Life Assurance. This was short-lived; by 1906 he was again practising as an architect and represented the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects at the International Congress in London. In 1912, Cowper began to branch out into commercial architecture. He was soon joined by Reg Appleyard, a draftsman, and Gordon Murphy, chief designer, although it was not until 1921 that Appleyard and Murphy's contribution was reflected in the company name, Chris A Cowper, Murphy & Appleyard. Though the partnership dissolved in 1940, Cowper reserved the right to use the name Cowper, Murphy & Appleyard. Cowper died in 1954 and Murphy died in 1966.³⁶

The 'air-conditioned [and] sound proof' building was completed by October 1956, in time for the Olympic Games as promised.³⁷ Both the broadly trapezoidal footprint and internal layout of the building, with tiered seating surrounding the central boxing ring, were along the lines of the earlier building, as was the location and footprint of the stage on the north side of the building. The plain and utilitarian design of the building may have been influenced by the short construction period, as the building was completed approximately 20 months after the fire. The main entrance remained on Dudley Street, with a cantilevered awning, and 'STADIUM' lettering above (Figure 10). At its opening, 'thousands of eager fight fans stormed the new West Melbourne Stadium ... but many of them did not get in', with 8,000 patrons inside for the boxing bout between George Barnes and Italian champion Bruno Visintin.³⁸

Wrestling was also intended to continue at the rebuilt stadium with news reports referencing this sport alongside boxing as a drawcard of the new stadium's programme. Other uses for the building were

31 *Argus*, 25 January 1955, p. 7

32 *Argus*, 20 August 1955, p. 34.

33 *Argus*, 17 May 1955, as referenced in Graeme Butler & Associates, *West Melbourne Heritage Review*, 2015, p. 355.

34 Allom Lovell & Associates, *Former Waverley Theatre*, January 2000, p.11.

35 *Argus* 15 February 1955, p. 19, 7 May 1955, p. 21; *Sunshine Advocate*, 6 February 1953, p. 3; *Age*, 3 December 1954, p. 3, 20 February 1954, p. 39.

36 Allom Lovell & Associates, 'Festival Hall, Heritage Appraisal', 2002, p. 3.

37 *Argus*, 25 January 1955, p. 7.

38 *Argus*, 6 October 1955, p. 20 and 13 October 1956, p. 1.

proposed to include 'tennis, gymnastics, basketball, stage shows and vaudeville'.³⁹ Although the new stadium was opened with boxing, wrestling resumed at the stadium the following week with matches between Chief Big Heart, Dr Jerry Grahame, Danny O'Shane (Ireland), Luck Simonovitch and the Great Zorro.⁴⁰ The West Melbourne Stadium was a venue for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, with boxing and gymnastics events held there during November and December (Figure 12). Although wrestling had long been held at this site and formed part of the billing for the new stadium, Olympic wrestling events were held at the Royal Exhibition Building, not the West Melbourne Stadium.⁴¹

The journal *Building* described the new stadium:

Melbourne's new Stadium embodies all the very latest in its design. Reconstructed in cream and red bricks, the building is so constructed as to be entirely clear of supporting pillars, so that the view from every part of the hall is entirely free of obstruction.⁴²

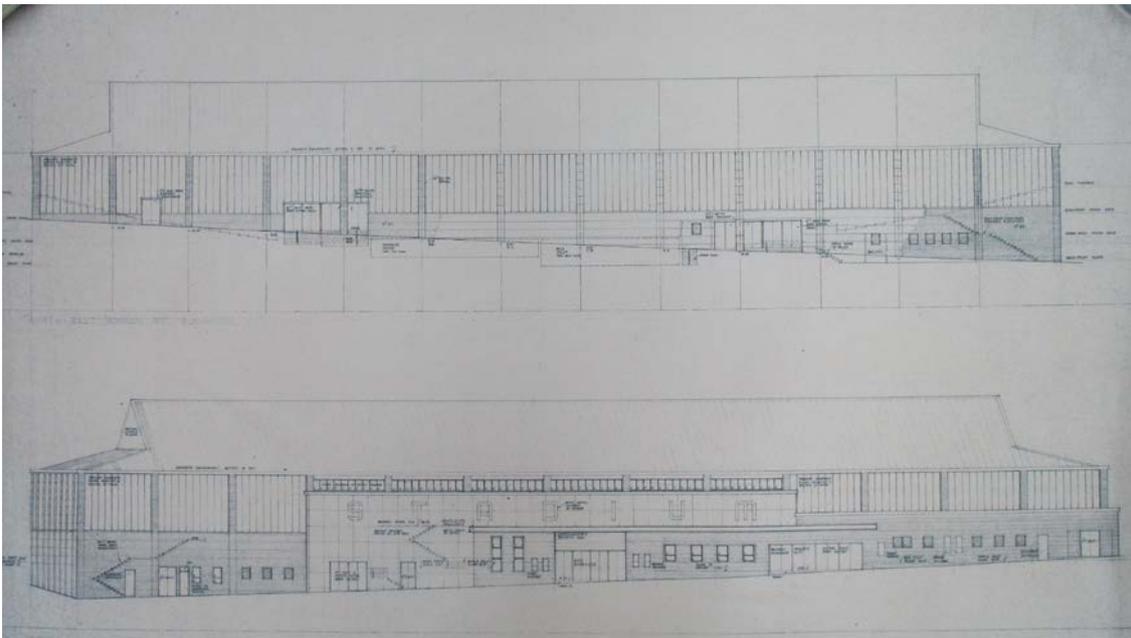


Figure 8 Elevations of new West Melbourne Stadium, 1955, by Cowper, Murphy & Associates
Source: VPRS 16284, Public Record Office Victoria

39 *Western Herald*, 19 October 1956, p.8.

40 *Argus*, 6 October 1956, p. 20.

41 *Argus*, 16 November 1956, p.26.

42 *Building*, 24 December 1956, p. 41.

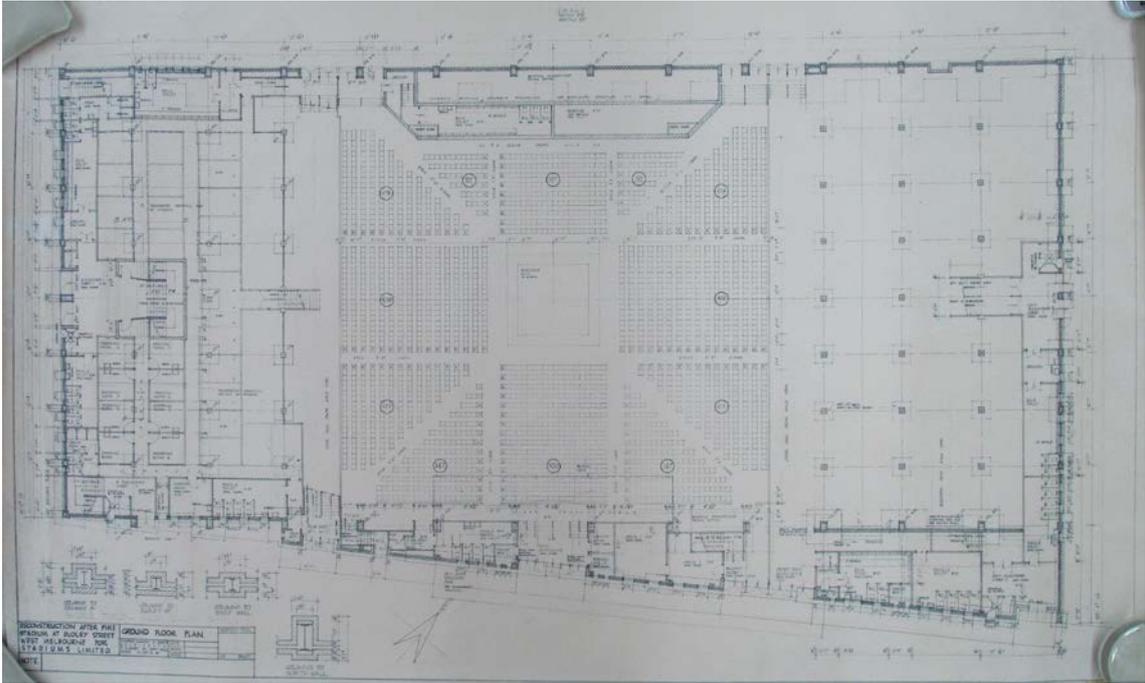


Figure 9 Ground floor plan, c. 1955
Source: VPRS 16284, Public Record Office Victoria



Figure 10 Dudley Street elevation of the rebuilt West Melbourne Stadium, 1957
Source: Lyle Fowler collection, State Library of Victoria



Figure 11 View of interior, 1957
Source: Lyle Fowler, State Library of Victoria



Figure 12 Hungarian gymnasts competing during the Olympic Games, 1956
Source: National Library of Australia

3.1.3 Festival Hall

The West Melbourne Stadium hosted musical and theatrical performances as well as sporting events from soon after its opening. Such events included the Record Star Parade tour (Figure 13), American comedian Mickey Katz and the Australian Ballroom Championships, along with tennis matches and speaking tour performances of touring American evangelical preachers.⁴³ From as early as October 1959, the West Melbourne Stadium had become known as Festival Hall, a reflection of the growing diversity of events held at the venue since its rebuilding.⁴⁴ Through the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the proportion of sporting, political and music events at the hall varied.

With the popularity of boxing declining through the second half of the twentieth century, live music began to be the more dominant form of entertainment at the stadium. Wrestling matches were also televised from the venue in the 1960s and 1970s by commercial networks.⁴⁵ Festival Hall was one of a small number of venues which could accommodate larger local and international tours, with the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and Dallas Brooks Hall also hosting live music acts. The stage originally comprised a structure with an awning (Figure 15), however, this was removed in 1979 as part of works which also replaced the corrugated iron roof with acoustic tiles.⁴⁶ The hall arrangement allowed for the removal of the central boxing ring and rows of seating on the floor in front of the stage (Figure 14). Although boxing events had declined, the association with the sport endured: the funeral for the former world boxing champion, Lionel Rose, was held at Festival Hall in 2011.⁴⁷ Up until the time the Melbourne Concert Hall was opened in November 1982, Festival Hall (with a capacity for approximately 6,000 patrons) was the only indoor venue in Melbourne which was able to accommodate large audiences.⁴⁸

A number of concerts by international acts became infamous, most notably the three days' series of concerts by the Beatles in 1964 and Frank Sinatra's 1974 Australian tour.⁴⁹ Performances at the venue covered a range of popular music styles, from pop performers (Olivia Newton-John, Justin Timberlake), singer-songwriters (Elton John, Jerry Lee Lewis, Lily Allen), early rock 'n' roll (Buddy Holly), heavy metal (Metallica, Megadeath), and indie-alternative groups (MGMT, The Strokes, Pulp), hip hop (A Tribe Called Quest) and Australian performers (The Seekers, Living End, AC/DC).⁵⁰

The building continued to be used for political meetings into the 1980s. Such meetings include strikes of General Holden employees (Figure 16) and a rally as part of Gough Whitlam's campaign of 1975 (Figure 17). It is noted that Wren Lane was named in c. 2014 as part of an interpretation scheme relating to Festival Hall.

43 *Argus*, 24 October 1956, p. 25, 12 November 1956, p. 12, and 5 January 1957, p. 12, *Australian Women's Weekly*, 11 February 1959, p. 7.

44 Correspondence dated 27 October 1959, Public Buildings File, PB 889, VPRS 7882/P1/179, Public Record Office Victoria.

45 GTV-9 (now Nine Network) presented World Championship Wrestling from 1964 to 1978, 'Wrestling', e-Melbourne, Encyclopedia of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01644b.htm>, 30 July 2018.

46 *Sun*, 31 August 1979, p. 19, in Public Buildings File, PB 889, VPRS 7882/P1/179, Public Record Office Victoria.

47 *Age*, 16 May 2011, p. 6.

48 Allom Lovell & Associates, 'Festival Hall, Heritage Appraisal', 2002, p. 4.

49 *Age*, 19 May 2002, p. 6 and 1 March 2014, p. 36.

50 'West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall', Graeme Butler & Associates, *West Melbourne Heritage Review*, 2015, Appendix 2, pp. 353-354.



Figure 13 Newspaper advertisement for 'Record Star Parade' shows at the West Melbourne Stadium
Source: *Argus*, 12 October 1956, p. 17



Figure 14 Seating layout for Festival Hall for staged productions, 1978
Source: PB 889, Public Buildings Plans, VPRS 8044



Figure 15 Undated photograph of audience and performers at concert, Festival Hall
Source: Stadiums Pty Ltd Collection, 1984.0094.0006, accessed via <https://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/archives/boxing-ballroom-dancing-and-the-bishop-of-coventry-festival-hall-and-stadiums-pty-ltd/>, 13 July 2016



Figure 16 Meeting of General Holden employees during strike, 1964
Source: State Library of Victoria



Figure 17 Whitlam giving speech at Festival Hall during campaign, 1975
Source: National Archives of Australia

The building acquired a number of nicknames including ‘the old sardine can’, ‘Festering’ or ‘Festy’ Hall and ‘House of Stoush’ by punters and performers, due to its relatively unprepossessing exterior and unglamorous interior. Despite the utilitarian space, some entertainers, such as repeat performer at Festival Hall, Liberace, transformed the stage into more luxurious sets:

What Liberace did for Festival Hall last night – with pink gauze and artificial star dust – Henry Mancini and Johnny Cash could never have achieved. The orchestral pit was enclosed in a balcony of white filigree woodwork, with palms in marble pots. There were the usual chandeliers and candelabras plus a new (he likes to have one in every show) white mink piano stool cover. ⁵¹

Some newspaper reports have compared it unfavourably to newer or updated venues in the city or Docklands – ‘the hall does not have spanking new walkways ... that old place has always been a bit of a barn’ – yet also acknowledged the relative intimacy of performances compared to other large venues. As noted in the *Age* in 1997:

As an entertainment venue, Festival Hall is not enticing when you compare it with the casino glowing and belching on the riverbank or modern Melbourne Park. Dallas Brooks Hall sits on an elm-lined boulevard, but Festival Hall is dark and squat and filled with old-time boxers' sweat ... it's hard to believe, walking past Festival Hall through the syrupy truck-fume air, that it was once Melbourne's

51 *Age*, 30 March 1973, p. 2.

entertainment epicentre. Every performing megastar played here: Bill Haley, the Beatles, Conway Twitty, Billy Joel, Sherbet, Dave Brubeck, Frank Sinatra, Bay City Rollers, Santana, Little Feat and Nana Mouskouri - they all belted tunes out across the wooden floor and plastic seats.⁵²

The then manager of Festival Hall, Bernie Meredith, noted that despite the changes, Festival Hall had made a niche for itself as 'a mid-size venue for meetings, conferences and particularly for young, alternative music acts':

We're catering for the next generation of megastars ... for the apprentices who are learning to play to bigger audiences,' he says. 'The Presidents of the United States of America played two concerts here and they're more comfortable in these size venues. They got a thrill playing here, on the same stage as the Beatles played.'⁵³

A sense of affection for the venue was apparent from as early as the 1990s, with newspaper reports in the 1990s-2010s reflecting on its 'enduring' role in popular culture, particularly in live music.⁵⁴ For example, in 2000, *Age* reporter Alan Attwood noted 'there is barely an adult in Melbourne without memories of a Festival Hall show'.⁵⁵ The *Sunday Age* commented that although the venue's 'glory days are long gone', it was 'a jack-of-all-trades'. As the sign which then adorned the venue proclaimed, it was 'Melbourne's original rock 'n' roll venue'.⁵⁶ Festival Hall continues to host live music performances, despite competition from other theatres and sporting arenas.

3.2 Description

Festival Hall occupies the block bound by Dudley Street to the south, Rosslyn Street to the north, Wren Lane (formerly Railway Place) to the west and an unnamed private lane to the east. The building is a large, single-storey overpainted brick and concrete building with a Dutch gable hipped roof. While the main hall is rectangular in shape, a stepped skillion-roofed structure to the south elevation gives the building its generally trapezoidal footprint. The building comprises brick base with concrete wall panels, with evenly spaced brick buttresses or pilasters, which are more expressed at the south-west of the building to Dudley Street. Due to the slope of Dudley Street to the west, the building is taller at the west than at the east. The main entrance to the building is from the south (Figure 18, Figure 19), with a cantilevered awning, adorned with exposed light bulbs, over two sets of wide doors. There are a number of groups of small windows, formerly for ticket sales but now closed or painted over, along this elevation. Former ticket windows are also located on the other elevations, along with doors of varying widths for entrance to the main hall (Figure 19-Figure 21).

Internally the building presents as an open, unadorned space, with tiered seating to the east, west and south, a central open timber-floored area and the stage at the west of the building (Figure 23-Figure 27). There are bars located around the venue, including at the foyer (Figure 28), balcony and the east and west tiered seating sections. Backstage areas are located around the main hall, including under the tiered seating stands at the west ends of the building (Figure 29). Some early timber bench or leather fold-down seating remains but has been replaced in most areas. The original timber stage remains, although has been extended.

52 *Age*, 22 May 1997, p. 4.

53 *Age*, 22 May 1997, p. 4.

54 *Age*, 8 October 2012, p. 13.

55 *Age*, 19 February 2000, *Saturday Extra*, p. 2.

56 *Sunday Age*, 16 January 1994, p. 7.



Figure 18 View of south elevation of Festival Hall from Dudley Street, with main entrance visible



Figure 19 West elevation of Festival Hall, with view of Wren Lane and railway bridge



Figure 20 North elevation, from Rosslyn Street



Figure 21 East elevation and private lane



Figure 22 Recent Festival Hall signage above main entry from Dudley Street

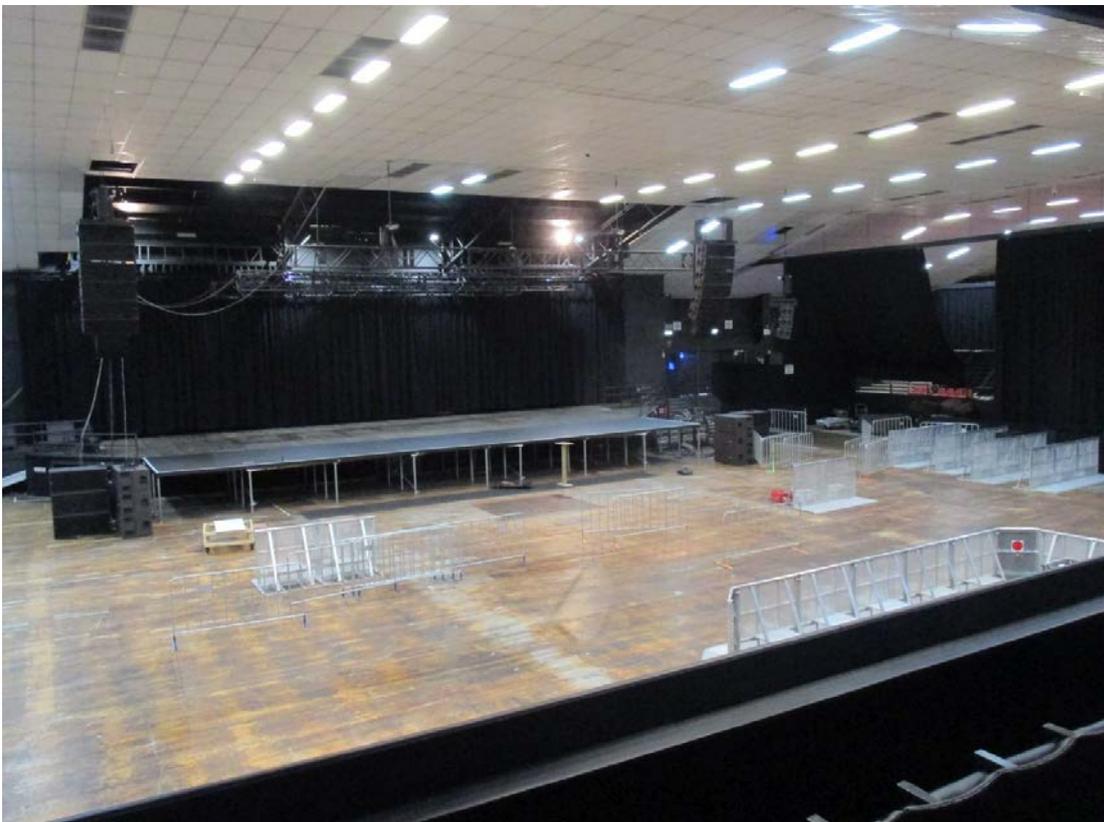


Figure 23 View of main hall and stage, from balcony

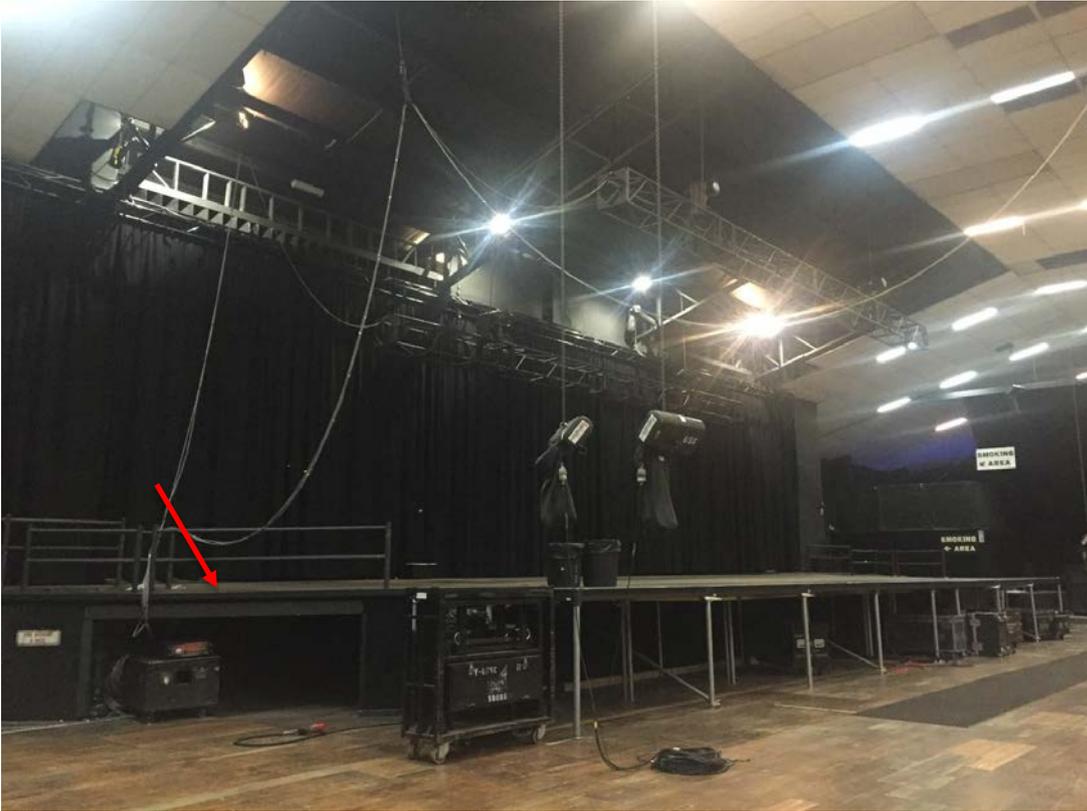


Figure 24 Stage, with original timber stage at left (indicated) and extension at right

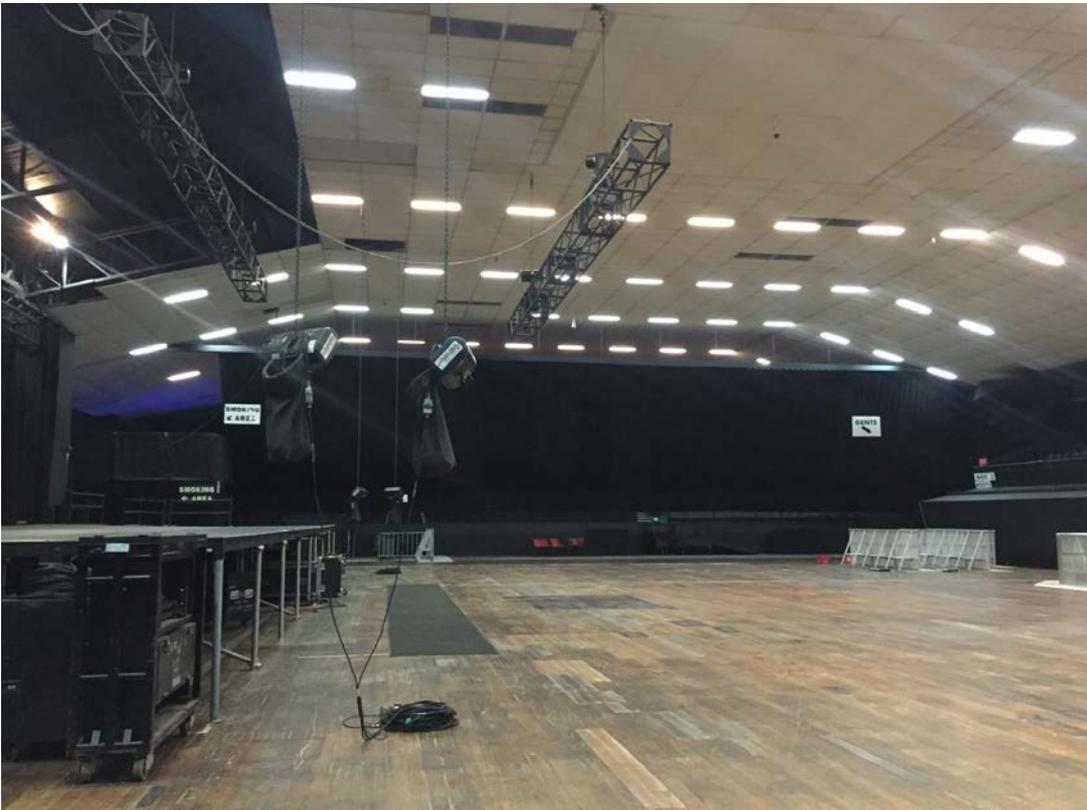


Figure 25 Main hall with curtained off seating at end, and stage at left



Figure 26 Tiered bench seating in stands

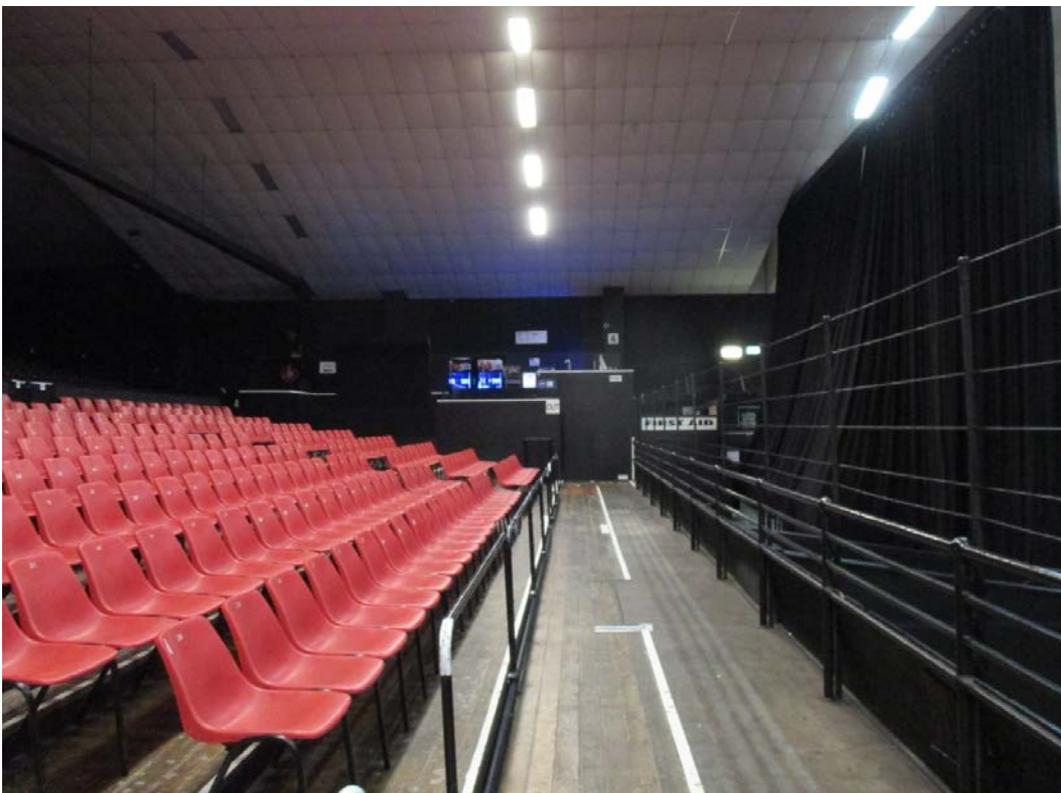


Figure 27 Tiered seating at west end of hall with bar at far end and balustrading at right



Figure 28 Foyer and main entry from Dudley Street



Figure 29 Backstage area under tiered seating at west end of hall

4.0 Contextual assessment

As discerned from an examination of the history and construction of the place there are a number of attributes which to a greater or lesser degree contribute to the cultural significance of Festival Hall. Some of these are identified in the two citations which have been prepared in support of local and/or state listing. They include:

- Festival Hall as a boxing venue
- Festival Hall as an entertainment venue
- Festival Hall as associated with the Olympic Games
- Festival Hall as associated with John Wren and the Wren family
- Festival Hall as an early example of the use of prestressed concrete panels

The following section provides a brief response to these attributes by way of comparison to related places.

4.1 Boxing and sporting venues

Festival Hall has a long association with boxing, a sport which flourished through the twentieth century and was dominated by John Wren's Stadiums Ltd. Boxing grew in popularity in Victoria from the 1880s, after the introduction of rules and the use of gloves and reached a peak in the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁷ The sport was seen as egalitarian, one which could 'elevate the ordinary working-class man to hero status.'⁵⁸ An article in the *Age* noted that it was:

Embraced by members of the marginalised migrant and indigenous communities, it gave Melbourne's original battlers a chance to stamp their mark on the city.⁵⁹

Early fights were held in the Victoria and Apollo halls in the city, and in suburban venues, with a large, temporary venue constructed in South Melbourne in 1908 for the Bill Lang and Tommy Burns bout.⁶⁰ As noted in the history, Wren's Stadiums Ltd dominated the industry following its formation in 1914 and the first West Melbourne Stadium hosted regular, and well-attended, matches. A court decision following a campaign by Labor politician W P Barry regarding public entry to matches ended commercial boxing matches at the Royal Exhibition Building, benefitting Stadiums Ltd.⁶¹ The scale and form of the 1956 West Melbourne stadium anticipated the continuing popularity of the sport beyond the 1950s and 1960s. However, by the 1970s matches were held much less regularly, partially due to changes in legislation and community demographics such as decreasing migration and improving standard of living.⁶² Although the sport declined in the second half of the twentieth century, the scale of Festival Hall in part evidences the popularity of boxing in Melbourne and, at the time of its construction, the expectation that boxing would continue as a major offer at the venue.

57 'Boxing', eMelbourne, Encyclopedia of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, accessed via <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00224b.htm>, 22 July 2016.

58 *Age*, 29 September 2009, accessed via <http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts/boxing-history-hits-the-canvas/2005/09/28/1127804534288.html>, 22 July 2016.

59 *Age*, 29 September 2009, accessed via <http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts/boxing-history-hits-the-canvas/2005/09/28/1127804534288.html>, 22 July 2016.

60 'Boxing', eMelbourne, Encyclopedia of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, accessed via <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00224b.htm>, 22 July 2016.

61 'Boxing', eMelbourne, Encyclopedia of Melbourne, University of Melbourne, accessed via <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00224b.htm>, 22 July 2016.

62 *Age*, 29 September 2009, accessed via <http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts/boxing-history-hits-the-canvas/2005/09/28/1127804534288.html>, 22 July 2016.

In addition to being Victoria's premier boxing venue, Festival Hall hosted wrestling matches on a large scale, including televised programs between 1964 and 1978. The wrestling use of Festival Hall does not appear to have been as prominent as the boxing events, but it was a consistent feature of the stadium's attractions, contributing to its reputation as a sporting venue.

By way of comparison there are few if any comparable boxing venues of this size and age. As such, along with other specialist sporting facilities Festival Hall is of an elevated level of historical interest. As reflected in the physical form however, the fabric which supported boxing events was in essence not unlike a stage set and accordingly the venue does not evidence boxing as an activity ahead of the multiplicity of other events that have taken place in the space.

In the context of the range of purpose built sporting facilities across Melbourne and beyond, Festival Hall is of a lower order of interest physically, recognising that it does not exhibit the purpose-built elements in design which are associated with places such as the former Olympic Pool or the more recent arenas and stadium constructed for tennis and soccer. While of a different scale to Festival Hall, these venues respond more strongly in their physical form to the particular sport with which they are associated. Festival Hall sits within this broader context of sporting venues which have been constructed throughout the City of Melbourne but not one of which is elevated as a consequence of its sports related design and form.

4.2 Entertainment venues

As a capital city Melbourne is the home of diverse places of entertainment, both historic and recent. These range across single use buildings, such as the theatres, to multipurpose venues such as the Arts Centre. They also include specialist venues, such as those for live (contemporary) music, clubs and dance spaces. While many have long histories, others are of more recent origins and on occasions transient, the activity existing for short periods of time and then relocating.

Many of these places are recognised for heritage reasons at a state and or local level, to some degree reflecting their typically unique form and architecture. They include many of the state's most prominent theatres (the Princess Theatre (VHR H0093), the Athenaeum Theatre (VHR H00501), and the Arts Centre (VHR H1500), historic cinemas, mostly no longer operating as such, (the former Capitol Theatre (VHR H0471), the former Hoyts Cinema Centre (VHR H2335) and the Regent Theatre (VHR H0690)), and smaller live music and performance venues, often in repurposed heritage buildings (the former cinema space in the basement of the Century Building (VHR H2250), now the Max Watts nightclub, and the Toff in Town at Curtin House (included in HO507, Little Bourke Street Precinct)). While not strictly comparable to Festival Hall they provide an indication of the entertainment culture which exists across the City.

The closest live music venue comparison to Festival Hall in terms of construction date is the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (SMMB), constructed in 1958 as a public sound shell. Established by the Sidney Myer Charitable Trust, it was built to a design by Yuncken Freeman Architects and Griffiths and Simpson. The provision of a public sound shell had been proposed as early as the 1940s. It was opened in 1959 to an audience of 30,000. Its events have been more performance based, including popular and classical music concerts and festivals.

The SMMB is listed at a national, state and local level for heritage reasons. The Victorian Heritage Register listing (H1772) notes that it is of significance for its 'historic, cultural, aesthetic (architectural) and technical importance to Victoria'. The VHR statement of significance notes that it is of 'cultural', likely meaning historical and social, significance as a 'as a major and long serving location for a wide range of open air cultural events and performances and is a well-known venue through-out Australia'.⁶³ The SMMB is included in the heritage overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme in the South Yarra

⁶³ 'Sidney Myer Music Bowl', accessed via Victorian Heritage Database, <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/1067>, 13 July 2016

Precinct. The datasheet notes that the ‘remarkably large structure ingeniously blending in with the landscape is significant architecturally and also socially significant for its association with the long lived Melbourne tradition of outdoor performances and concerts.’⁶⁴

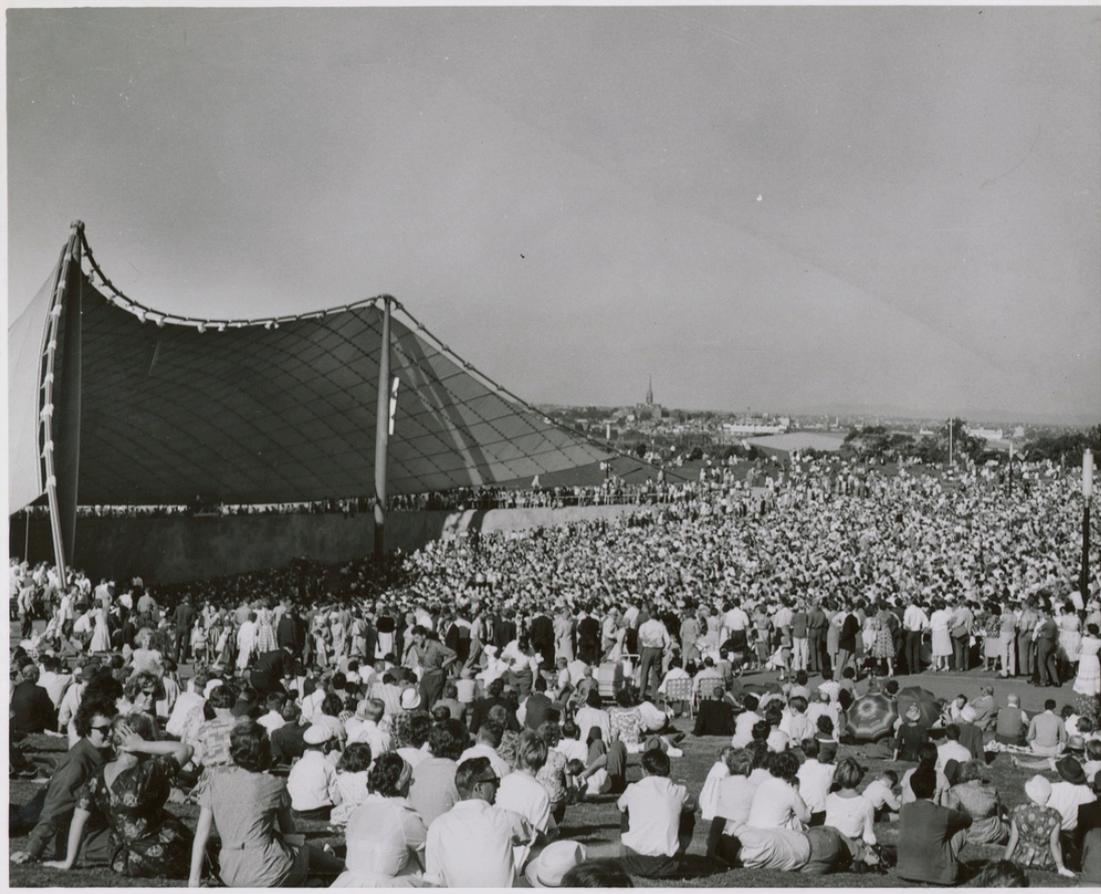


Figure 30 Sidney Myer Music Bowl during a performance
Source: Cliff Bottomley, State Library of Victoria

A related, but later venue was Dallas Brooks Hall constructed in 1969 and recently demolished to make way for redevelopment. Dallas Brooks Hall hosted political and television events as well as music performances including Skyhooks and Kylie Minogue, Diana Ross and Billy Joel. However, from the late twentieth century the live performance use was increasingly replaced with conventions, union and protest meetings and social events.⁶⁵

Additionally, there are a number of venues in Melbourne which are predominantly used for live music performances, which are located within buildings of heritage significance. The Forum Theatre, formerly the State Theatre, was originally constructed as a cinema. The building was designed by American cinema architect John Ebersohn, with the Melbourne architects Bohringer, Taylor and Johnson in 1928, at the height of the boom in cinema construction.⁶⁶ It was converted to a live music and entertainment

64 'Domain Park #14', Meredith Gould, *South Yarra Conservation Study*, 1985, Building Identification Form

65 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 April 2015, accessed via <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/dallas-brooks-hall-destined-for-demolition-but-full-of-memories-20150331-1mchhi.html>, 19 July 2016.

66 Heritage Victoria, 'H0653 Forum and Rapallo Cinemas', Victorian Heritage Register citation, http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/#detail_places;753, accessed 14 June 2013.

venue in 1996, after its purchase by theatre operator David Marriner.⁶⁷ Since then, it has hosted tours by more popular or established local acts, and international artists, and has also been used as a venue for arts and film festivals. The building is included in the VHR for its historic and architectural significance (H0438).

Like the Forum, the Palais Theatre, while outside the City of Melbourne, has in more recent decades offered a wide range of live music events typically involving older bands and popular groups. While capacity wise smaller than Festival Hall it often competes for the same acts.

More recent venues of a smaller scale include 'Max Watts' (Century Building) and '170 Russell' (Total House) both basement level venues incorporated into multi-storey buildings. Both venues are known for hosting smaller local and international tours and are not on the same scale as Festival Hall. Both buildings are included in VHR for architectural and historical significance as important commercial buildings.

A number of more recently constructed sporting venues are also used for live music performances. These include Rod Laver Arena (1985-88), Hisense Arena (2000) and Margaret Court Arena (2014) at Melbourne Park, and Etihad Stadium (2000) at Docklands. These venues generally host large international tours and can hold larger audiences than Festival Hall. However, their primary purpose is sporting, including tennis, cycling and netball (Melbourne Park stadiums) and various codes of football (Etihad).

Within this context of broadly related places Festival Hall, like others is unique in its physical form but more common in its function. There is no direct physical comparison to Festival Hall but numerous comparisons to like venues which can accommodate a range of events. All also have a degree of community connectedness and recognition varying from the general, as in the case of the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, to the specific, as in the case of venues with a live music following.

It is also evident that few if any can be linked to a specific geographical community, as in people who live in Melbourne, or in the case of Festival Hall residents of West Melbourne. These are places which draw on the population at large and in a local context are more likely to be places of frustration arising from noise, traffic, parking and patron attitude issues rather than appreciation. As such Festival Hall presents as a venue of significance as related to its history, but less so as related to its physical form.

4.3 Melbourne Olympic Games (1956)

Festival Hall is also associated with the Melbourne Olympic Games. Although not constructed specifically for the Olympics, it was completed in time to be used as a venue for some events, including gymnastics. By way of comparison a number of venues and buildings remain around the inner suburbs of Melbourne which are recognised as being significant for their association with the Olympic Games. Such venues include the Olympic Swimming Stadium (VHR H1977), the Melbourne Cricket Ground (VHR H1928), the Royal Exhibition Buildings (VHR H1501), and the Beaurepaire Centre (training swimming pool, VHR H1045). The former Olympic Village, Heidelberg West, constructed to accommodate athletes during the games, also retains some elements, such as the village green, dating from this period. Festival Hall, although not a purpose-built venue for the Olympic Games, is one of a group of places in Melbourne which has associations with this important event. That association is however, not as strong as the association which arises from purpose built facilities. It is an association of interest in the history of the place but not one which had any impact on the physical form of the place.

4.4 The Wren family

Festival Hall also has a strong association with John Wren, as do other sites and places in Melbourne. Although Wren had died in 1953, prior to the rebuilding of the West Melbourne Stadium after the fire, it was his boxing interests which were the main reason for the construction of the original stadium and

⁶⁷ 'Forum Melbourne – History', <http://www.forummelbourne.com.au/history.php>, accessed 14 June 2013.

which were still an important factor in the rebuilding of the stadium in 1955-56. In this regard Wren was and to some degree remains a well-known name associated the place and more generally with boxing and horse racing. He was also a popular subject for media reports, both during his lifetime and after his death.

Beyond Festival Hall other sites associated with Wren include his tote in Johnston Street, Collingwood (demolished), the site of which is behind a pair of interwar shops, and the Richmond racecourse which was subdivided for housing in the 1930s. The place with the closest association with Wren is his residence Studley House, Kew, included in the VHR as place no. H0789.

As relevant to the significance of Festival Hall, albeit that the ownership of Festival Hall remains in the Wren family, subsequent generations have not sustained the prominence of the place name association and the association with John Wren. The Wren association presents as a point of interest, as informing the history of the place, rather than one of importance. As time passes the John Wren connection will become increasingly remote and it is unlikely that even now the name resonates for patrons or users of the place.

4.5 Prestressed concrete

Although in use in Europe since the early twentieth century, and particularly used in the immediate pre and post war years, architectural historian Miles Lewis notes prestressing of concrete was first discussed in Australia in a report of 1949, with the 1953 St Lucia building at Queensland University the first documented application.⁶⁸ In the same year the Brunswick Road bridge over the Moonee Ponds Creek was reportedly the 'first prestressed concrete road bridge' in the Melbourne metropolitan area.⁶⁹

Continuing the story of its early application a 1954 article in the *Herald* noted that prestressed concrete was not banned but 'merely discouraged' in Melbourne despite examples of its successful use; the article also notes that prestressed concrete would soon be used in a private house in Camberwell and references EPM Concrete as a manufacturer of the product.⁷⁰

Other early uses in Melbourne included at a private house in North Balwyn and a building at the William Angliss & Co factory in Footscray. Prestressed concrete was also used in the flooring of the building at 231 Bourke Street in 1957, and appears to have been used in an earlier three-storey building in 1954, and for works along Heidelberg Road in 1956. It was used in the construction of the Melbourne Tullamarine Airport in the 1960s.⁷¹ As a new building technique in the 1950s the use of prestressed concrete was often referenced in both general news and more specific architectural coverage of new buildings and structures, including notable international examples.⁷²

Documents in the Public Records Office indicate that 2' and 1/2" precast prestressed concrete wall panels were utilised in the construction of the Festival Hall manufactured by EPM, though the exact extent of the wall panels is unclear.⁷³ Although this was an early use of prestressed concrete in

68 'Cement and concrete', Miles Lewis, Australian Building database, accessed via <http://www.mileslewis.net/australian-building/pdf/07-cement-concrete/7.08%20forms%20+%20systems.pdf>, 22 July 2016.

69 *Age*, 11 September 1953, p. 3.

70 *The Herald*, 6 July 1954, p. 13.

71 'Cement and concrete', Miles Lewis, Australian Building database, accessed via <http://www.mileslewis.net/australian-building/pdf/07-cement-concrete/7.08%20forms%20+%20systems.pdf>, 22 July 2016, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 July 1954, p. 9, *Argus*, 22 February 1956, p. 25.

72 For example see: *Cross Section*, August 1956; *Construction*, 4 March 1953, p.1; *Construction*, July 1953, p. 4; *Northern Star*, December 1954, p. 3, *Advocate [Burnie, Tas]*, July 1953, p. 2, *Western Mail*, 20 December 1956, p. 49.

73 West Melbourne Stadium Computations prepared by EPM Concrete, Public Records of Australia, VPRS/P0001 Unit 179, Public Buildings File 889.

Melbourne, particularly as precast wall panels, the use of prestressed concrete in the construction does not seem to have been noted in contemporary reporting on the building or later histories of concrete use in Australia.⁷⁴ EPM advertised their services in pre cast and prestressed concrete in relevant publications and no example of the use of Festival Hall has been uncovered (Figure 31 and Figure 32). This is in contrast with other manufacturers who did use Festival Hall as an example of the use of their products (Figure 33).

Although the use of prestressed concrete at Festival Hall is early in the history of the application of such materials in construction it does not present as innovative or as an exemplar and presents as a point of technical interest rather than significance.

⁷⁴ Refer: *Cross Section*, November 1955; *Building*, 24 December 1956, p. 41; 'Cement and concrete', Miles Lewis, Australian Building database, accessed via <http://www.mileslewis.net/australian-building/pdf/07-cement-concrete/7.08%20forms%20+%20systems.pdf>, 13 July 2018; Miles Lewis (ed.), *200 Years of Concrete in Australia*, Concrete Institute of Australia: Sydney, 1988.

E.P.M. CONCRETE PTY. LTD.

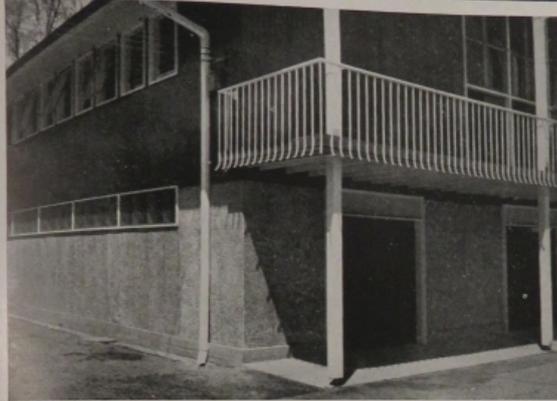
258 NORTH ROAD, EAST OAKLEIGH

Telephone: UM 4311

6

5

Precast Concrete Wall Panels



IN PLAIN OR EXPOSED AGGREGATE FINISHES

Precast concrete wall panels provide the answer to the problem of cladding framed structures for office buildings, hospitals and other buildings where an attractive durable material is required.

View of the new Melbourne Grammar School Boatshed, showing exposed aggregate finish panels, used in the construction of the ground floor walls. The inner surface of the panels is smooth finished, and is left as interior wall surface.

FINISHING

E.P.M. precast wall panels are available in a wide variety of attractive finishes from plain trowelled or textured concrete to exposed marble or granite crushings.

SIZES

Usually 2 in. thick in panels up to 10 ft. x 2 ft. E.P.M. wall panels are reinforced for handling stressed as well as normal working load conditions.

MANUFACTURE

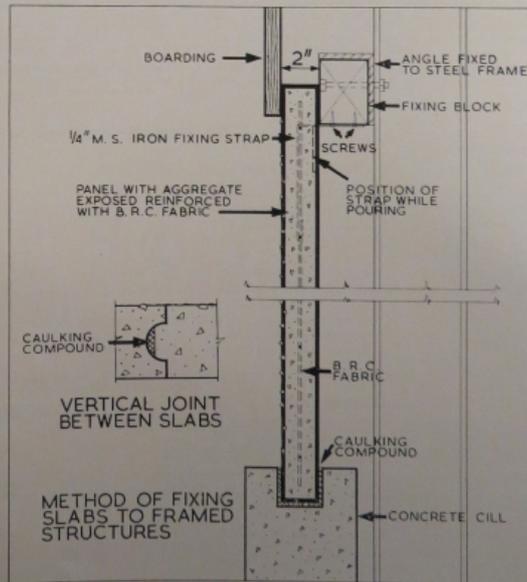
E.P.M. wall panels are manufactured under scientifically controlled conditions and with concrete having a minimum compressive strength of 5,000 lb./sq. in. at 28 days.

FIXINGS

Suitable fixings are provided for attachment to steel, aluminium, timber or concrete framework. One method is shown in the sketch at right.

ERECTION

Simple and speedy erection with dry joints or with mastic compounds eliminate much of the expensive site work associated with conventional walling materials.



Sole Agents: **JOHN BING & CO. PTY. LTD. 9 LITTLE LEICARDT STREET, MELBOURNE**
TELEPHONES: FB 2091 FB 2927

RAMSAYS CATALOGUE

Figure 31 EPM Concrete advertisement showing the use of precast concrete wall panels at the Melbourne Grammar Boatshed
Source: Ramsay's Architectural and Engineering Catalogue, 1954, section 6/5

E.P.M. CONCRETE PTY. LTD.

258 NORTH ROAD, EAST OAKLEIGH

Telephone: UM 4311

Manufacturers of

'STRESSCON'

Prestressed Concrete Structural Units

Prestressed concrete is a modern development of reinforced concrete in which the tensile stresses which occur under normal working loads are counterbalanced by compressive stresses set up initially in the concrete. This is achieved in various ways usually depending on whether the work is precast or cast in situ. In precast work the

method known as pretensioning is normally applied and in this the concrete is cast around stretched high tensile steel wires. When the concrete has hardened sufficiently the wires are released and the stress transferred to the concrete thus putting the casting into compression.

ADVANTAGES:

GREATER STRENGTH

In a prestressed concrete structural member, before tensile stresses can occur the compressive stresses initially induced in the concrete have first to be overcome. This means that the member will carry a greater live load and is more elastic in its behaviour than is the case with an ordinary reinforced concrete unit of similar size. Cracking of the concrete can be entirely eliminated for ordinary working load conditions, and where cracks do occur under overload conditions, these disappear when the overload is removed. The ability of prestressed concrete to completely recover after considerable overload is one of its most important characteristics.

REDUCED DEAD WEIGHT

As the whole of the concrete section, in a prestressed member, is made to do useful work, the dead weight of the member itself is considerably reduced, a factor which influences the economy of the entire structure in which prestressed units are used, right down to the foundations.

LARGER SPANS

Because of lower dead weight and the considerable reduction in the quantity of steel required, greater openings may be spanned with shallower members of prestressed design. With ordinary reinforced concrete, very long spans for heavy loadings become impracticable because the large amount of reinforcing steel which would be required could not be accommodated in the cross section of concrete available.

SAVING IN MATERIALS

Up to 30% saving in concrete and 50% saving in steel may be effected by the use of prestressed concrete,

compared with ordinary reinforced concrete construction.

SPEEDY ERECTION

The use of precast pretensioned structural members eliminates the costly and time-absorbing work of erecting and removing shuttering, which is necessary for the placing of in-situ concrete. Because site labour is reduced to a minimum, erection times can be cut by as much as 70% when compared with conventional methods.

MANUFACTURE AND CURING

E.P.M. "STRESSCON" products are manufactured under conditions of scientific control and strict technical supervision. All units are steam cured thus ensuring uniformity and dependability. All E.P.M. structural products have a minimum compressive strength of 5,000 lbs./sq. in. at the equivalent of 28 days normal curing.

ECONOMY

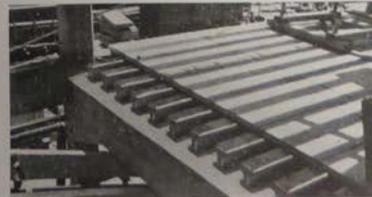
The above-mentioned advantages all add up to greatly reduced building costs.

DESIGN SERVICES

On the opposite page, some technical details of typical "Stresscon" units are given. The Company is equipped to produce a wide range of prestressed structural units to meet special requirements. On the staff are qualified engineers with wide, practical experience in prestressed concrete work, and they are pleased to discuss all technical aspects of the design of building structures, and assist at arriving at the most economical method of construction.



General view of new building erected for William Angliss and Co. (Aust.) Pty. Ltd. at Footscray, Victoria. Precast concrete structural members are clearly shown.



A closer view of the same building. Note the "Stresscon" beams in position, together with the 4' x 2' x 2" reinforced floor slabs.

[See following page for details
RAMSAY'S CATALOGUE

Figure 32 EPM Concrete Advertisement for pre-stressed concrete
Source: Ramsay's Architectural and Engineering Catalogue, 1954, section 6/5



Figure 33 Advertisement of 'Stramit' in the construction of the West Melbourne Stadium (Festival hall)

Source: *Architecture and Arts*, March 1957 via State Library of Victoria

5.0 Assessment

The following assessment of significance has been undertaken against the criteria as listed in the Planning Practice Note No. 1 (PPN01). This has been informed by the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria's Recommendation in addition to the research undertaken in the preparation of the 2016 appraisal and in the preparation of this statement.

5.1 Criterion A

5.1.1 Local level

Criterion A: *Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).*

Festival Hall is of historical significance as a long-running entertainment venue which has hosted sporting, music and political events since its construction in 1956. The first stadium on the site was constructed in 1913 and was acquired by Stadiums Ltd in 1915. Stadiums Ltd was established by well-known entrepreneur and sporting promoter John Wren and created a monopoly within the boxing industry. The stadium was rebuilt in 1956 following a fire, and completed in time for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, during which it hosted boxing and gymnastics events. Boxing was hugely popular in the early-mid twentieth century, particularly with working class communities, where it was seen as an egalitarian sport and drew large crowds. As the popularity of boxing declined, however, live music performances were more regularly held, and some of popular and alternative music's biggest names

have played the venue over the past 50 years. Such performances include hugely popular concerts by world famous groups and individuals such as the Beatles and Frank Sinatra, along with many other international and local acts.

In contrast with other related venues in Melbourne, Festival Hall is, however, unusual in accommodating sporting and music events from its earliest days. In doing so it is the substantial number and variety of performances, and the longevity of the use which is of particular note. This has in turn attracted a wide audience which extends well beyond the municipal catchment. In this regard Festival Hall is of historical significance as a destination venue within the City of Melbourne which has catered for the changing recreational and entertainment desires of the wider Melbourne and Victorian public.

Accordingly, Festival Hall satisfies this criterion at a local level as a popular, long-running and large multi-purpose entertainment venue in the municipality.

5.1.2 State level

The Executive Director's recommendation provides an assessment of the state level significance of Festival Hall as it relates to criterion A and finds that it is of significance as the "only purpose-built boxing and wrestling venue in Victoria to physically demonstrate the long-term history of these sports in the State" and as a large scale live music venue that played a principal role in the social evolution of Victorian society.⁷⁵

It is agreed that Festival Hall meets this criterion at a state level.

5.2 Criterion B

5.2.1 Local level

Criterion B: *Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).*

In the context of the boxing industry, Festival Hall is unusual as a large, purpose-built boxing arena, for showpiece bouts, as opposed to the smaller suburban halls which were often used for lesser matches. Its survival, and its multiple uses are of interest. Its form and scale, which replicated the earlier stadium, are indicative that the popularity of the sport was expected to continue into the second half of the twentieth century. Purpose-built boxing venues are rare, however large scale entertainment and sporting venues are not. Many other entertainment venues are located in the City of Melbourne including historic theatres, such as the Regent (H0690) and the Princess (H0093), places which host live music, such as the Forum (former State Theatre, H0438) and the SMMB (H1772), and cinemas such as the former Hoyts Cinema Complex (H2335) and the Capitol Theatre (part of Capitol House, H0471, now an auditorium). As for sporting venues the City of Melbourne is home to multiple historic and current sporting venues such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground (H1928), the former Olympic Swimming Pool (H1977), Rod Laver Arena and Etihad Stadium. Although Festival Hall is a rare example of a boxing venue it is not a rare example of an entertainment or sporting venue and Festival Hall is not considered to satisfy this criterion at a local level.

5.2.2 State level

Heritage Victoria does not consider that this criterion is likely to be met at a state level. This is agreed.

⁷⁵ Heritage Victoria, Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Division 3 of the Heritage Act 2017: Festival Hall, 10 May 2018, p. 8.

5.3 Criterion C

Criterion C: *Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).*

This criterion is not considered to be applicable at either a local or State level.

5.4 Criterion D

5.4.1 Local level

Criterion D: *Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).*

Festival Hall demonstrates many of the key characteristics of a live music/entertainment venue including stage, raked seating and backstage area. However, it is the utilitarian design of the building and its egalitarian spaces which reflect the audience for which it was designed. Boxing was generally seen as a sport which was popular with working class communities and was a cheap form of entertainment. In this way, it is similar to venues such as early cinemas, and the St Moritz skating rink in St Kilda, which also provided inexpensive and accessible forms of entertainment. Such venues were typically large, open halls, with flat floors, which enabled a flexible use of space. With its simple and unpretentious form, and lack of ornamentation, Festival Hall is typical of venues designed to provide low-cost, popular entertainment.

Festival Hall is considered to satisfy this criterion at a local level as exhibiting the principal characteristics of a place for low-cost, popular entertainment, rather than as an entertainment venue more generally. Based on comparative assessment, there are few large venues in the City of Melbourne which demonstrate the popularity of boxing and, to a lesser extent, other forms of popular entertainment, which catered predominantly to Melbourne's working class communities.

5.4.2 State level

The Executive Director's Recommendation notes that Festival Hall is not a *notable* example of a live music/entertainment or sporting venue (as is required by the state level significance test), particularly in comparison with other similar places on the VHR.

It is agreed that Festival Hall does not satisfy this criterion at a State level.

5.5 Criterion E

Criterion E: *Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).*

The design of Festival Hall by theatre architects Cowper, Murphy & Associates was for a simple, unadorned building, which generally repeated the plan layout of the earlier West Melbourne Stadium. Although it responded to a particular need – for a large, open hall with flexible seating arrangements – the design of the building is not considered to be of significance, especially as compared with other buildings of the period including Olympic Games venues and the Sidney Myer Music Bowl. Likewise, it is not considered to be a significant example of the work of architects Cowper, Murphy & Associates.

Festival Hall is not considered to satisfy this criterion at either a local or State level.

5.6 Criterion F

5.6.1 Local level

Criterion F: *Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).*

Festival Hall sits within an early group of buildings in Melbourne which utilised prestressed concrete in the 1950s, although the extent to which this material was used in the construction of the building has not been established and the use of such material was not noted in contemporary sources nor does it appear to have been an influential use of a new and innovative building technique in Australia. It is not

considered that the use of prestressed concrete at Festival Hall evidences a technical achievement of significance and as such it is an aspect of the building that is of historical interest rather than being of a level to meet criterion F at a local level.

5.6.2 State level

It is agreed that Festival Hall does not satisfy this criterion at a State level.

5.7 Criteria G

5.7.1 Local level

Criterion G: *Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons (social significance).*

It is considered likely that Festival Hall has a level of social significance for sections of the broader Melbourne and Victorian community, particularly live music attendees of the past 50 years, as a long running entertainment venue. Many international and local music performances have been held at the venue in this period, which were often attended by large crowds, and such performances continue to be held there. Media articles of the past 16 years have identified the ‘enduring’ role the venue holds in the live music industry of Melbourne. For example, in 2000, *Age* reporter Alan Attwood noted ‘there is barely an adult in Melbourne without memories of a Festival Hall show’, and despite nicknames including ‘house of stoush’ and ‘festering hall’, there is a sense of affection for the building.⁷⁶ Furthermore, given the number of high profile or popular performers that have given concerts at Festival Hall, it is likely many people would have affection for the place due to ‘fond’ memories of attending such concerts.

It is considered that the social significance of Festival Hall is related to the wider Victorian community rather than having any particular association with either the West Melbourne or City of Melbourne populations. People from across metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria have attended events at the venue and these associations extend well beyond the local municipality. There is no evidence that there is a particularly special association between the City of Melbourne community that differs from the association with the larger live music attending population of Victorian. The same holds for the association with Victoria’s boxing community. Accordingly, Festival Hall is not considered to meet criterion G at a local level.

5.7.2 State level

The Executive Director’s recommendation notes that criterion G is likely to be satisfied at a state level for its association with the Victorian live-music community, in particular for the length and strength of the association. It also notes that Festival Hall is of social significance as Victoria’s principal boxing venue with an ongoing connection with this community.

It is agreed that Festival Hall meets this criterion at a state level as associated with the live music community, but not for reasons of the association with Victoria’s boxing community.

5.8 Criterion H

Criterion H: *Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).*

As noted, John Wren had died in 1953, prior to the rebuilding of the West Melbourne Stadium after the fire, and he had no role in the reconstruction of the stadium. Although it was his boxing interests which were the main reason for the construction of the new stadium, and were the main drawcard of the earlier stadium, the re-built Festival Hall quickly became a noted live music venue and moved beyond Wren’s original vision for the West Melbourne Stadium as originally constructed in 1913.

⁷⁶ *Age*, 19 February 2000, Saturday Extra, p. 2.

Wren was a well-known figure in the Melbourne popular sporting industry, from his Johnston Street tote, and horse-racing and boxing interests and he is acknowledged as a prominent figure in Victoria's history, although he had no particular association with the City of Melbourne beyond owning and operating the West Melbourne Stadium. Notably Wren had strong associations with the City of Collingwood and this association is acknowledged in the statement of significance for Victoria Park (H0075).

Festival Hall has remained in under Stadiums Ltd ownership, the company established by Wren, however other members of the Wren family are not considered to have been influential figures in the course of Victoria's or the City of Melbourne's history.

The association with Wren is of interest rather than importance and informs an understanding of the place. The association is not at the level which would satisfy the application of criterion H and it is considered that Festival Hall does not satisfy this criterion at either a State or local level.

Conclusion

In summary Festival Hall is considered to meet the following criteria at a state and/or local level:

- Criterion A (historical) - state and local
- Criterion D (representativeness) – local
- Criterion G (social)– state

6.0 Proposed citation

The citation (statement of significance) for Festival Hall proposed under Amendment C258 includes content and an assessment which differs from that contained in the Heritage Victoria statement. This in part reflects the fact that the intent of the statements differs – state v local – and also that the assessors hold different views. Further to this, the above assessment draws conclusions which also differ from both proposed statutory statements.

In the absence of any guidance on how state and local statements should or might relate one to the other, the opportunity exists to develop a single statement which considers both state and local values in the one document. Alternatively, the practice of maintaining two statements could be continued.

The preparation of a single statement of significance for VHR/locally listed places has occurred in some more recent studies. In the *City North Heritage Review Statements of Significance* (revised June 2015) the statement for the Carlton Tram Substation (HO1135) refers to the VHR statement (H2325)⁷⁷ and the proposed (refer amendment C305) *Southbank Statements of Significance* documents reproduce the VHR statement for the Robur Teahouse (VHR H0526 and HO765).⁷⁸

Recognising that the proposed Heritage Victoria statement is also the subject of an appeal and may vary in content as a consequence of that appeal the proposed approach to Festival Hall is that two statements be maintained, but ideally with an alignment of content.

Format

Addressing the statement proposed under the amendment the guiding document in formulating the statement is Planning Practice Note No. 1 *Applying the Heritage Overlay* (January 2018). As addressing the writing of statements of significance the note states as follows:

Writing statements of significance

⁷⁷ City of Melbourne Incorporated Document, *City North Heritage Review Statements of Significance 2013 (revised June 2015)*, p.36.

⁷⁸ City of Melbourne Incorporated Document (proposed C305), *Southbank Statements of Significance October 2017*, pp.44-45.

For every heritage place (that is, a precinct or individual place) a statement of significance should be prepared using the three-part format of 'What is significant?'; 'How is it significant?' and 'Why is it significant?'.

What is significant? – This section should be brief, usually no more than one paragraph or a series of dot points. There should be no doubt about the elements of the place that are under discussion. The paragraph should identify features or elements that are significant about the place, for example, house, outbuildings, garden, plantings, ruins, archaeological sites, interiors as a guide to future decision makers. Mention could also be made of elements that are not significant.

How is it significant? – A sentence should be included to the effect that the place is important because of its historical significance, its rarity, its research potential, its representativeness, its aesthetic significance, its technical significance and/or its associative significance. These descriptors are shown in brackets at the end of the heritage criteria listed above. The sentence should indicate the threshold for which the place is considered important.

Why is it significant? – This should elaborate on the criteria that makes the place significant.

A separate point or paragraph should be used for each criterion satisfied. The relevant criterion should be inserted in brackets after each point or paragraph. Each point or paragraph may include the threshold for which the place is considered important.

The approach adopted by Heritage Victoria in more recent statements adopts a similar structure, but includes a 'Background' note which describes the place and provides a precis of its history.

6.1 The exhibited citation

The following citation was exhibited as part of the *West Melbourne Heritage Review Statements of Significance* document proposed to be included as an incorporated document to the Melbourne Panning Scheme as part of Amendment C258:

What is significant?

Reconstruction of the West Melbourne Stadium, Dudley Street, West Melbourne was undertaken from 1955 for Stadiums Ltd (Richard Lean, general manager) to the designs of Cowper Murphy and Associates Architects who had also helped reinstate the burnt Regent Theatre, Collins Street, in the mid 1940s. The estimated cost for the West Melbourne Stadium was £150,000. C S Steele, was the consulting engineer for the steel-framed auditorium, with Vickers Ruwolt, of Richmond, as the steel fabricators and contractors. The former Edwardian-era West Melbourne stadium on the site, built at a cost of £30,000, had burnt down in January 1955 just before four concert performances by Frank Sinatra. Sinatra said he would sing '...even if meant he had to sing in the streets'.

The stadium's destruction left little time for a luxurious new venue. The notorious John Wren had developed boxing stadiums in Brisbane, Rushcutters Bay (15000 capacity, demolished 1973) and Melbourne and even in 1980s, John Wren II was chairman of Stadiums Pty. Ltd. Melbourne. Chris Wren was there in the 2000s. Part of the old brick walls were retained, and the design of the new stadium was said to be will be similar to the old one but extended to take in the lane that ran between Dudley and Rosslyn Streets at the eastern end. This allowed seating to be increased from 9,000 to 10,000 with vastly improved seating arrangements that included a ringside area of 5,000 on tubular steel chairs. There were to be more up-to-date

dressing room and public convenience accommodation and the new stadium was air-conditioned and sound-proofed.

Early images show the Dudley Street elevation with brick piers, brick base, rendered parapeted façade, rectilinear canopy (now rounded), window strips and slots and super-size well-spaced 3D letters spelling out 'STADIUM' on the facade upper level.

The completed stadium was used for the Olympic games (gymnastics and wrestling), sports events (indoor tennis, boxing) and as part of the 'Friendly Games' culture program the sequinned USA singer Frankie Laine sang Ghost Riders in the Sky there during the Games.

For a long time, the stadium was Melbourne's only large indoors live performance venue for popular music performances. Apart from the wrestling program which had proved to be not as popular as the old West Melbourne Stadium days, Stadiums Pty. Ltd. announced revival of vaudeville and variety acts as had been done at the old stadium 20 years ago. The Australian Ballroom Championships were held there in 1957 and 1958 as the West Melbourne stadium, the 'largest dance floor in Australia'. The USA star Winny Atwell and a cast of many, Star Night, appeared there in 1958, with locals that included Graham Kennedy, Panda, Bill McCormack, Happy Hammond, Rodriguez, Tune Twisters, Aborigines Girls Choir, Joff Ellen and Russell Stubbings.

In 1959 a free Festival Hall concert featured Bertha Jorgensen and the Victorian Symphony Orchestra on a Sunday afternoon with music by Goldmark, Grandado, Rossini, Wagner etc. This was the emergence of music at the hall. Its name Festival Hall was used from the late 1950s, echoing the London Royal Festival Hall.

Dick Lean Jnr, (son of the original General Manager, Dick Lean) joined Stadiums in 1960 and set about successful promotion of major music acts of all genres from both the U.K. and U.S.A, increasing the use of the venue significantly. U.S.A. Jazz giant Ella Fitzgerald appeared there with Mel Torme and the Lou Levy Quintet in 1960, applauded by local critics.

The Scottish White Heather Group performed there in 1962 to an audience of 3500 bringing music of all kinds from the old country for local Scots fans. Lonnie Donegan and Billy Baxter came to the hall direct from London in 1960. In 1963 Lean Jnr. announced more variety acts with sport events, including wood chopping, every Saturday night in addition to the boxing every Friday night. Boxing included amateurs, allowing training and trailing for the coming Tokyo Olympics. The first variety acts included singers and German jugglers. The Starlift show was there in 1964, Peter and Gordon, The Searchers, Dinah Lee, Del Shannon among others, under the auspices of radio 3DB's Barry Ferber.

In 1969 women wrestlers were the prime attraction accompanied by a large police attendance, including the vice squad reporting back to Arthur Rylah on the propriety of the performance. Seven thousand attended, about half being women.

Melbourne City Council planned a carpark near the hall in 1962, bounded by Dudley, Rosslyn and Addison Streets and then used as a rubbish site. FJ Marland would lease it for five years.

The stadium accommodated around 2,600 standing and 5,445 for concerts, far outnumbering any existing theatre venue. The hall was the only option for large budget performers that required the numbers for profit, although a basic interior with poor acoustics, the rise of electric amplification for performances allowed it to

prosper. The Sydney equivalent for large- scale live performances was Randwick Racecourse. A mass meeting of General Motors- Holden employees was held at Festival Hall during a strike in 1964, as another use for a large venue such as this.

Most of the world's popular music figures performed here with early highlights including Lee Gordon's 'Big Shows', the 1964 Beatles concert and Judy Garland's ill-fated appearance, even Liberace's glittering shows in the 1970s. His pink gauze and artificial star dust transformed the stark interior with the orchestra pit enclosed in white filigree joinery with palms in flower pots, candelabras and chandeliers. The U.K. soul singer Joe Cocker performed there in 1972 eventually being arrested after the show for offensive behaviour among other things.

The hall was in an uproar in 1975 when the Bay City Rollers were pursued by girlish fans here and at the Southern Cross Hotel. The innovatory rock figure Frank Zappa and his Mothers of Invention played there for frenzied 2.5 hours in 1976 with Zappa pronouncing Festival Hall 'as not the best venue for a concert... "This is a Miserable Place to go to a concert ", he added. The powerhouse performance of the Tina Turner Revue appeared there in 1977, coinciding with the Australian Dance Theatre and Jesus Christ Superstar (1976) performances at the Palace Theatre, now operating in Bourke Street. Meanwhile boxing and wrestling was still the staple diet at the 'House of Stoush'. International tennis was played there in 1981 with John Newcombe, Tony Roche, Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall playing exhibition matches on courts set up in the stadium.

Stadiums Ltd. was established in 1899 by John Wren and Dick Lean and registered in 1914. It specialized in promoting boxing and wrestling events, building venues in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.

Contributory elements include:

- large Dutch-hipped roof steel-framed stadium in a simple Modernistic style;
- exposed open-web gabled steel roof trusses;
- external parapeted brick and rendered walls, with piers and face brick base;
- 16' x 2 'x 2.5" thick waterproof prestressed concrete wall panels with tongued and grooved edges on brick base;
- cemented Dudley Street façade with stepped parapet;
- metal sheet clad rounded cantilever canopy;
- window groups in strips and slots; and
- location on the appropriately named Wren Lane.

Openings have been altered; bricks painted over; services added, building name removed; new steel deck roof cladding added; and an unrelated paint scheme applied externally.

The interior has not been inspected recently but past attendance at Festival Hall has revealed a basic utilitarian interior which is not significant in its own right but contributory to the historical expression of the events that have occurred there.

How is it significant?

West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall is significant historically and socially to West Melbourne, Victoria and the City of Melbourne.

Why is it significant?

West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall is significant.

- Historically, and socially as a major event, sport and music venue in Victoria since its erection in 1955-6, and its use for the 1956 Olympics. Over the years the venue has seen many international and Australian performing artists and sportspersons, with the large numbers it accommodated creating many associations for many people from these events;
- The site and the stadium also have long associations with the notorious John Wren (former stadium), John Wren II and Chris Wren (existing stadium). The hall is a rare surviving part of his once vast sporting and betting empire, many key parts of which, such as the Richmond race course, have gone and the interstate stadiums demolished. More than any other Melbourne indoor entertainment venue, the hall had a special affinity to the working classes that worked and lived in the West Melbourne area from its inception; and
- The walls were an early use of prestressed concrete panels in Melbourne.

6.2 Proposed Heritage Victoria citation

The following proposed statement of significance is included in the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria recommendation for inclusion of the place in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Background

What is at the place?

Festival Hall is a large, unadorned, rectangular indoor sporting and entertainment stadium in West Melbourne. The building is constructed of a steel frame infilled with brick and precast concrete panels. Internally, the stadium comprises a central timber floor with a simple stage to the north, tiers of seating to the west and east, and a balcony to the south.

What is the history of the place?

Festival Hall, also known as West Melbourne Stadium, was constructed in 1955, replacing the 1913 West Melbourne Stadium. Festival Hall and its predecessor were the principal boxing and wrestling venues in Victoria from 1913 until at least the late 1970s. Festival Hall was a principal live music venue in Victoria from the late 1950s until the 1980s and hosted some of the most important national and international musicians of that era.

Statement of Cultural heritage Significance

What is significant?

Festival Hall at 272-306 Dudley Street, West Melbourne, including the external form and fabric and the following internal features:

- The volume of the internal space
- The central timber floor
- The tiered seating to the west and east, including the early rows of steel-framed timber bleachers to the east and west and rows of theatre-like balcony seating to the south
- The location of the northern stage

- The balcony to the south
- Highly intact original amenity areas.

How is it significant?

Festival Hall is of historical and social 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 G

Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

Why is it significant?

Festival Hall is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

Festival Hall is historically significant as Victoria’s principal purpose-built boxing and wrestling venue. Since the late nineteenth century, boxing has been a highly popular spectator sport in Australia attracting crowds in the thousands with many more watching televised matches since the 1960s. Festival Hall – and the 1913 West Melbourne Stadium that it replaced – was the home of Victorian boxing throughout much of the twentieth century, earning it the name “The House of Stoush”. Festival Hall hosted the boxing and gymnastics for the 1956 Olympic Games and was the venue for bouts of key national and international athletes including Lionel Rose, Johnny Famechon, Anthony Mundine, Lester Ellis and Barry Michaels. Festival Hall was the venue for the televised ‘TV Ringside’ (1966-75) and ‘World Championship Wrestling’ (1964-78) and hosted Lionel Rose’s State Funeral in 2011. Festival Hall remains as the only purpose-built boxing and wrestling venue in Victoria. [Criterion A]

Festival Hall is historically significant as one of Victoria’s primary live music venues since its opening in 1955 and as the principal venue in Victoria for large-scale live music performances from the late 1950s until the 1980s. Festival Hall played a key role in the social evolution of Victorian society in the post-war period by exposing thousands of patrons to the “new wave” of big production live music. Festival Hall hosted some of the biggest national and international acts of the day including the Beatles, Buddy Holly, Neil Young, The Kinks and Frank Sinatra. [Criterion A]

Festival Hall is socially significant for its association with the live music industry in Victoria. The association between Festival Hall and the Victorian live music community is particularly strong due to the length of the association and the close relationship between the place, the live music community and the establishment and growth of the live music industry in the State. [Criterion G]

Festival Hall is socially significant for its association with the boxing and wrestling community in Victoria. As the site of Victoria’s principal boxing and wrestling venue since 1913, the association between Festival Hall and the boxing and wrestling communities in Victoria is particularly strong. While the use of the place for boxing and wrestling has declined since the late 1970s, it remains affectionately known as “The House of Stoush” and continues to be used by the wrestling community for events. The association between the place and the boxing community has more

recently been celebrated with Festival Hall being the venue for champion boxer Lionel Rose's State Funeral (in 2011). [Criterion G]⁷⁹

6.3 Comment

The proposed City of Melbourne and Heritage Victoria citations for Festival Hall diverge with regard to content but arrive at similar conclusions regarding the relevant criteria. Additionally, the local statement contains extensive descriptive content which moves away from the guidance provided in the Practice Note. In the proposed revised statement below this descriptive content has been removed and would be proposed to be included as background content to be retained in the West Melbourne Heritage Review, which is to be included as a reference document to Clause 22.05.

6.4 Proposed statement of significance

Having regard to the above comments the following statement is proposed to be included in the incorporated document under Amendment C258. This, in part, utilises content from the draft Heritage Victoria statement [proposed changes indicated in red]:

What is significant?

~~Reconstruction of the West Melbourne Stadium, Dudley Street, West Melbourne was undertaken from 1955 for Stadiums Ltd (Richard Lean, general manager) to the designs of Cowper Murphy and Associates Architects who had also helped reinstate the burnt Regent Theatre, Collins Street, in the mid 1940s. The estimated cost for the West Melbourne Stadium was £150,000. C S Steele, was the consulting engineer for the steel framed auditorium, with Vickers Ruwolt, of Richmond, as the steel fabricators and contractors. The former Edwardian era West Melbourne stadium on the site, built at a cost of £30,000, had burnt down in January 1955 just before four concert performances by Frank Sinatra. Sinatra said he would sing '...even if meant he had to sing in the streets'.~~

~~The stadium's destruction left little time for a luxurious new venue. The notorious John Wren had developed boxing stadiums in Brisbane, Rushcutters Bay (15000 capacity, demolished 1973) and Melbourne and even in 1980s, John Wren II was chairman of Stadiums Pty. Ltd. Melbourne. Chris Wren was there in the 2000s. Part of the old brick walls were retained, and the design of the new stadium was said to be will be similar to the old one but extended to take in the lane that ran between Dudley and Rosslyn Streets at the eastern end. This allowed seating to be increased from 9,000 to 10,000 with vastly improved seating arrangements that included a ringside area of 5,000 on tubular steel chairs. There were to be more up to date dressing room and public convenience accommodation and the new stadium was air-conditioned and sound-proofed.~~

~~Early images show the Dudley Street elevation with brick piers, brick base, rendered parapeted façade, rectilinear canopy (now rounded), window strips and slots and super size well spaced 3D letters spelling out 'STADIUM' on the facade upper level.~~

~~The completed stadium was used for the Olympic games (gymnastics and wrestling), sports events (indoor tennis, boxing) and as part of the 'Friendly Games' culture program the sequinned USA singer Frankie Laine sang Ghost Riders in the Sky there during the Games.~~

79 Heritage Victoria, Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Division 3 of the Heritage Act 2017: Festival Hall, 10 May 2018, pp. 5-6

For a long time, the stadium was Melbourne's only large indoors live performance venue for popular music performances. Apart from the wrestling program which had proved to be not as popular as the old West Melbourne Stadium days, Stadiums Pty. Ltd. announced revival of vaudeville and variety acts as had been done at the old stadium 20 years ago. The Australian Ballroom Championships were held there in 1957 and 1958 as the West Melbourne stadium, the 'largest dance floor in Australia'. The USA star Winny Atwell and a cast of many, Star Night, appeared there in 1958, with locals that included Graham Kennedy, Panda, Bill McCormack, Happy Hammond, Rodriguez, Tune Twisters, Aborigines Girls Choir, Joff Ellen and Russell Stubbings.

In 1959 a free Festival Hall concert featured Bertha Jorgensen and the Victorian Symphony Orchestra on a Sunday afternoon with music by Goldmark, Grandado, Rossini, Wagner etc. This was the emergence of music at the hall. Its name Festival Hall was used from the late 1950s, echoing the London Royal Festival Hall.

Dick Lean Jnr, (son of the original General Manager, Dick Lean) joined Stadiums in 1960 and set about successful promotion of major music acts of all genres from both the U.K. and U.S.A, increasing the use of the venue significantly. U.S.A. Jazz giant Ella Fitzgerald appeared there with Mel Torme and the Lou Levy Quintet in 1960, applauded by local critics.

The Scottish White Heather Group performed there in 1962 to an audience of 3500 bringing music of all kinds from the old country for local Scots fans. Lonnie Donegan and Billy Baxter came to the hall direct from London in 1960. In 1963 Lean Jnr. announced more variety acts with sport events, including wood chopping, every Saturday night in addition to the boxing every Friday night. Boxing included amateurs, allowing training and trailing for the coming Tokyo Olympics. The first variety acts included singers and German jugglers. The Starlift show was there in 1964, Peter and Gordon, The Searchers, Dinah Lee, Del Shannon among others, under the auspices of radio 3DB's Barry Ferber.

In 1969 women wrestlers were the prime attraction accompanied by a large police attendance, including the vice squad reporting back to Arthur Rylah on the proprietary of the performance. Seven thousand attended, about half being women.

Melbourne City Council planned a carpark near the hall in 1962, bounded by Dudley, Rosslyn and Addison Streets and then used as a rubbish site. FJ Marland would lease it for five years.

The stadium accommodated around 2,600 standing and 5,445 for concerts, far outnumbering any existing theatre venue. The hall was the only option for large budget performers that required the numbers for profit, although a basic interior with poor acoustics, the rise of electric amplification for performances allowed it to prosper. The Sydney equivalent for large scale live performances was Randwick Racecourse. A mass meeting of General Motors Holden employees was held at Festival Hall during a strike in 1964, as another use for a large venue such as this.

Most of the world's popular music figures performed here with early highlights including Lee Gordon's 'Big Shows', the 1964 Beatles concert and Judy Garland's ill-fated appearance, even Liberace's glittering shows in the 1970s. His pink gauze and artificial star dust transformed the stark interior with the orchestra pit enclosed in white filigree joinery with palms in flower pots, candelabras and chandeliers. The U.K. soul singer Joe Cocker performed there in 1972 eventually being arrested after the show for offensive behaviour among other things.

The hall was in an uproar in 1975 when the Bay City Rollers were pursued by girlish fans here and at the Southern Cross Hotel. The innovatory rock figure Frank Zappa and his Mothers of Invention played there for frenzied 2.5 hours in 1976 with Zappa pronouncing Festival Hall 'as not the best venue for a concert... "This is a Miserable Place to go to a concert"', he added. The powerhouse performance of the Tina Turner Revue appeared there in 1977, coinciding with the Australian Dance Theatre and Jesus Christ Superstar (1976) performances at the Palace Theatre, now operating in Bourke Street. Meanwhile boxing and wrestling was still the staple diet at the 'House of Stoush'. International tennis was played there in 1981 with John Newcombe, Tony Roche, Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall playing exhibition matches on courts set up in the stadium.

Stadiums Ltd. was established in 1899 by John Wren and Dick Lean and registered in 1914. It specialized in promoting boxing and wrestling events, building venues in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.

Festival Hall at 272-306 Dudley Street, West Melbourne, including the external form and fabric.

Contributory elements include:

- large Dutch-hipped roof steel-framed stadium in a simple Modernistic style;
- ~~exposed open web gabled steel roof trusses;~~
- external parapeted brick and rendered walls, with piers and face brick base;
- 16' x 2' x 2.5" thick waterproof prestressed concrete wall panels with tongued and grooved edges on brick base;
- cemented Dudley Street façade with stepped parapet;
- metal sheet clad rounded cantilever canopy;
- window groups in strips and slots; and
- ~~location on the appropriately named Wren Lane.~~

~~Openings have been altered; bricks painted over; services added, building name removed; new steel deck roof cladding added; and an unrelated paint scheme applied externally.~~

~~The interior has not been inspected recently but past attendance at Festival Hall has revealed a basic utilitarian interior which is not significant in its own right but contributory to the historical expression of the events that have occurred there.~~

How is it significant?

~~West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall is significant historically and socially to West Melbourne, Victoria and the~~ **as representative of a class of buildings (popular entertainment venue) to the City of Melbourne.**

Why is it significant?

~~West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall is significant.~~

- ~~Historically, and socially as a major event, sport and music venue in Victoria since its erection in 1955-6, and its use for the 1956 Olympics. Over the years the venue has seen many international and Australian performing artists and sportspeople, with the large numbers it~~

accommodated creating many associations for many people from these events;

- ~~The site and the stadium also have long associations with the notorious John Wren (former stadium), John Wren II and Chris Wren (existing stadium). The hall is a rare surviving part of his once vast sporting and betting empire, many key parts of which, such as the Richmond race course, have gone and the interstate stadiums demolished. More than any other Melbourne indoor entertainment venue, the hall had a special affinity to the working classes that worked and lived in the West Melbourne area from its inception; and~~
- ~~The walls were an early use of prestressed concrete panels in Melbourne.~~
- West Melbourne Stadium, later Festival Hall is significant at a local level for the following reasons:
- Festival Hall is historically significant, at a local (and state) level, as Victoria's principal purpose-built boxing ~~and wrestling~~ venue. Since the late nineteenth century, boxing has been a highly popular spectator sport in Australia attracting crowds in the thousands with many more watching televised matches since the 1960s. Festival Hall – and the 1913 West Melbourne Stadium that it replaced – was the home of Victorian boxing throughout much of the twentieth century, earning it the name “The House of Stoush”. Festival Hall hosted the boxing and gymnastics for the 1956 Olympic Games and was the venue for bouts of key national and international athletes including Lionel Rose, Johnny Famechon, Anthony Mundine, Lester Ellis and Barry Michaels. Festival Hall was the venue for the televised ‘TV Ringside’ (1966-75) and ‘World Championship Wrestling’ (1964-78) and hosted Lionel Rose’s State Funeral in 2011. Festival Hall remains as the only purpose-built boxing ~~and wrestling~~ venue in Victoria. [Criterion A]
- Festival Hall is historically significant, at a local (and state) level, as one of Victoria’s primary live music venues since its opening in 1955 and as the principal venue in Victoria for large-scale live music performances from the late 1950s until the 1980s. Festival Hall played a key role in the social evolution of Victorian society in the post-war period by exposing thousands of patrons to the “new wave” of big production live music. Festival Hall hosted some of the biggest national and international acts of the day including the Beatles, Buddy Holly, Neil Young, The Kinks and Frank Sinatra. [Criterion A]
- Festival Hall is of significance at a local level as a representative example of a low-cost popular entertainment venue. The design of Festival Hall employs many of the features common to this type of venue including stage, raked seating and backstage area however in a utilitarian and relatively simple manner. Festival Hall is an example of a large venue in the City of Melbourne which demonstrates the popularity of live sporting and musical entertainment. [Criterion D]

7.0 Conclusion

It is agreed that Festival Hall is of state and local significance and warrants inclusion in both the VHR and the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay. As noted, it is also considered that it would be desirable that there is alignment in the assessments and citations. The above modified statement seeks to achieve such an alignment albeit ahead of the finalisation of a statement to be agreed for state listing. In

arriving at this modified statement it is also concluded that while Festival Hall is of state significance of reasons of social value, this does not necessarily flow through to the local level. This reflects the fact that the community which values Festival Hall is not one defined by the municipal area.