



Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens

VICTORIA

Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building is one of a group of grand monuments and buildings born from the world exhibition movement of the 1800s, which includes the Eiffel Tower and London's Crystal Palace.

The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens were designed and built to host an international exhibition in 1880. In the decades before this event, Victoria had been experiencing a period of marked economic growth resulting from the discovery of vast goldfields in the colony. Wealth from this booming economy was being directed to grand and symbolic projects intended to reflect the status and position of Victoria, and the Australian colonies, on the world stage. Hosting the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition was an expression of this.

In Australia, as in other countries, the international exhibitions were always matters of pride and an important mechanism for introducing the world to the wealth, capacity and culture of the city and country. Exhibitions were particularly important to countries trying to establish a global profile, to open the door to trade and closer international relations with others, and were often a symbol of the host's aspirations for nationhood.

Most exhibitions had a 'Palace of Industry' or 'Great Hall'. The Exhibition Building, as we now know it, was the Great Hall for the 1880 and 1888 international exhibitions.

The design of the Great Hall included many features reminiscent of churches and basilicas at the time, such as naves, aisles, a dome and a cruciform floor plan. It was, in effect, designed to be a 'temple' to industry.

The Carlton Gardens were designed as a 'pleasure garden' setting for the building, and also to reflect the scientific interest in gardens at the time.

Three decades later, when soon-to-be Prime Minister Edmund Barton expressed a desire to have as many Australians as possible attend the opening of Australia's first Federal Parliament, he turned to the nation's largest and arguably grandest building—the Royal Exhibition Building.

On 9 May 1901 more than 12 000 people listened to speeches, sang a hymn and the national anthem and watched as politicians were sworn in and a new nation was born.



It would be another four months before the national flag was flown at the Exhibition Building on 3 September 1901, following a national flag designing competition, which attracted more than 32 000 entries.

The Royal Exhibition Building has had a varied role in the life of the nation, from housing war memorabilia for the Australian War Memorial, to becoming a migrant reception centre and even a venue for weightlifting and basketball during the Melbourne Olympic Games. In between these diverse uses, exhibitions continued to be held in the Royal Exhibition Building and are still held today.

National Heritage List: 20 July 2004

World Heritage List: 2004



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