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composed by working party of:

**Australia**

1 Identity of  
building/group

**Melbourne Olympic Swimming Pool**



**New Olympic Swimming Pool**

State Library of Victoria, Multimedia Catalogue Library Record number: 753967



The Olympic Pool

1956 Book (copy in the State Library of Victoria, Multimedia Catalogue)

1.1	current name of building	Olympic Swimming Stadium (former)
1.2	variant or former name	Melbourne Olympic Swimming Pool
1.3	number & name of street	Swan Street and Batman Avenue, Flinders Park
1.4	town	Melbourne
1.5	province	NSW
1.6	zip code	
1.7	country	Australia
1.8	national grid reference	
1.9	classification/typology	Sports stadia
1.10	protection status & date	Register of the National Estate Victorian Heritage Register
<b>2</b>	<b>History of building</b>	
2.1	original brief/purpose	Olympic Swimming Pool
2.2	dates: commission/completion	Built for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games Competition held 1952 Built 1954-1956
2.3	architectural designers	Kevin Borland, Peter McIntyre, John & Phyllis Murphy
2.4	others associated with building	Bill Irwin (engineer)
2.5	significant alterations with dates	Alterations in 1962 by Borland Brown 1980s, infilling of the end walls. 2002 Restoration of the original appearance proposed (in consultation with Peter McIntyre).
	current use	Pool and entertainment complex
	current condition	unknown
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Description</b>	
3.1	general description	The Australian Register of the National Estate notes that:  <i>The East Melbourne Olympic Swimming Pool was designed by Kevin Borland, Peter McIntyre and John and Phyllis Murphy in the early 1950s. This collaborative effort won an international competition in 1952 to provide stadia for the 1956 Olympic Games. The designers and engineer, Bill Irwin, created a unique engineering structure using a pre-tensioned steel frame. (AHC)</i>
3.2	construction	<i>The roof truss form, with glazing below, dominates the principal elevation and gives the structure its architecturally distinctive shape. The stadium is based on two angled concrete seating ramp facing each other and</i>

connected by roof trusses. The ramp/roof intersection is held down by light vertical metal rods which finish at the top of light concrete pylons, capped by shaped metal edging. The north and south walls, running between the ramps, were all glass, emphasising the V-shape of the basic structure. Concrete access stairs descend beneath the angled seating ramps. Alterations in the 1980s were basically unsympathetic but do not greatly detract or disguise the visual impact or characteristic shape of the structure. The structure was only made possible through the use of the most up to date materials and technological engineering of the time and epitomises the developments of Post-War architecture where modern technology and an emphasis on the absolute efficiency of materials were used to create transparent, glass clad, buildings built on a light framework. (AHC)

*"The structure was only made possible through the most up to date buildings materials and engineering technology of the time. Fourteen trusses, each 240 feet long, were made from high tensile tube at Tubewright's Fisherman's Bend works. They were broken into three sections for delivery to the site."* (Heritage Victoria Media Release 25 Feb 2002)

3.3 context

The complex was originally to be constructed in the South Yarra parklands. Public outcry resulted in the current site on the corner of Swan and Batman Streets being chosen.

## 4 Evaluation

4.1

technical

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The former Melbourne Olympic Pool is significant for its innovative use of truss roofing, swimming pools in Australia generally being open air. Competition venues are roofed to allow competition in all weathers, and to protect the spectators.

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The holding of the 1956 Olympic Games in Australia in 1956 allowed local athletes to compete, without making the lengthy journey to the northern hemisphere, a journey that interrupted training schedules.

4.2 social

Swimming is one of few sports in Australia where both the women's and the men's competition are closely followed. Following the competitions the pool was opened to the public for recreational use as well as competitions.

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The Melbourne Olympic Pool is a significant modern building, one that contributes to Robin Boyd's thesis that, in the 1950s, Melbourne was the '*cradle of Modernity*'. (Goad: 1999: p. 165) The modern facilities constructed for the 1956 Olympics including the stadium at the MCG and the International Airport indicated widespread acceptance of the use of modern architecture for Olympic Games venues.

*The structure is predominantly associated with the 1956 Olympic Games and can be considered to have social and historical value as a reminder of the games and a time when world attention was focused on Melbourne.*  
(AHC)

4.3 cultural & aesthetic

*The Melbourne Olympic Swimming Pool, built in 1952, is significant as one of the earliest examples of Structuralist architecture in Australia. The design follows the Structuralist principles of transparent, often glass clad, buildings with exposed metallic structural skeletons. The structure, with its distinctive V-shaped elevation, was only made possible through the use of modern materials and engineering techniques, principally the pre-tensioned steel frame. The design won an international competition in 1952 to provide stadia for the 1956 Olympic Games and was acclaimed at the time as a brilliant and original design which would set an example for the rest of the world to emulate.* (AHC)

4.4 Historical

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Australia achieved great success in swimming in the Los Angeles games in 1932. This resulted in a series of Olympic Pools being constructed, including 4 in Sydney. During the 1950s and 1960s Australia continued to produce Olympic swimming champions. Australian champion Dawn Fraser won a gold medal for her 100m swim, breaking the world record.

4.5 general assessment

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The design contrasts with the 1930s Olympic pools such as the four in Sydney, which are based on the layout of a roman baths. This pool, in contrast contains a far larger seating capacity and used current architectural motifs and building technologies rather than details drawn from a historical source. The use of large span trusses was usually reserved for train sheds and exhibition halls. The buildings constructed in Melbourne for the 1956 Olympic Games were probably the largest group of sporting buildings constructed in Australia, although this has since been eclipsed by the Sydney Olympic Games complex at Homebush, built for the 2000 Olympic Games.

## 5 Documentation

- 5.1 principal references Goad, Philip, *Melbourne Architecture*, Watermark Press, Sydney, 1999  
Australian Heritage Commission, Register of the National Estate
- 5.2 visual material attached
- 5.3 rapporteur/date Noni Boyd July 2003