

Architecture of the Supreme Court of Victoria





Supreme Court of Victoria

The Supreme Court is the highest court in Victoria. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1852 just a few months after the Colony of Victoria was proclaimed. It comprises the Trial Division and Court of Appeal.

The Trial Division of the Supreme Court hears serious criminal charges, such as murder and treason, and large civil disputes.

The Court of Appeal is the appellate division of the Supreme Court. It hears appeals from criminal and civil cases originally heard in the Trial Division of the Supreme Court, the County Court, and Victorian tribunals.

210 William Street

The Supreme Court has occupied its current home at 210 William Street since 1884. The heritage-listed building is a fine example of the classical Renaissance Revival style on a grand and imposing scale, and is significant as the largest single-design network of court buildings in Australia.

The design of the building had controversial origins. The winner of the competition held to determine its design, A.L. Smith, was revealed to have a close professional relationship with one of its assessors, A.E. Johnson. Smith's design, on review by the Inspector General of Public Works, was nonetheless upheld to be the best of the entries on purely architectural grounds, and formed the basis of the existing building.

Constructed of brick on Malmsbury bluestone footings and faced with Tasmanian freestone, the exterior of the building features an elaborate double arcade of Ionic and Composite columns along William Street.

Above the William Street entrance to the court is seated the bronze figure of Justice, about twice life size. It is an unusual representation of Justice as the figure is not blindfolded and the scales of justice are not held aloft, but rest on her knee.

The whole complex including the Supreme Court Library is on the Victorian Heritage Register. This recognises the buildings are of special cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria and are legally protected to help ensure they survive for future generations.



Banco Court – Court 1

The Banco Court serves as the ceremonial court of the Supreme Court building. Recently restored, the elaborately moulded plaster of its ceiling and upper walls, and the marvellously fitted joinery, create an atmosphere appropriate to the solemnity and importance of the events which occur within its walls.



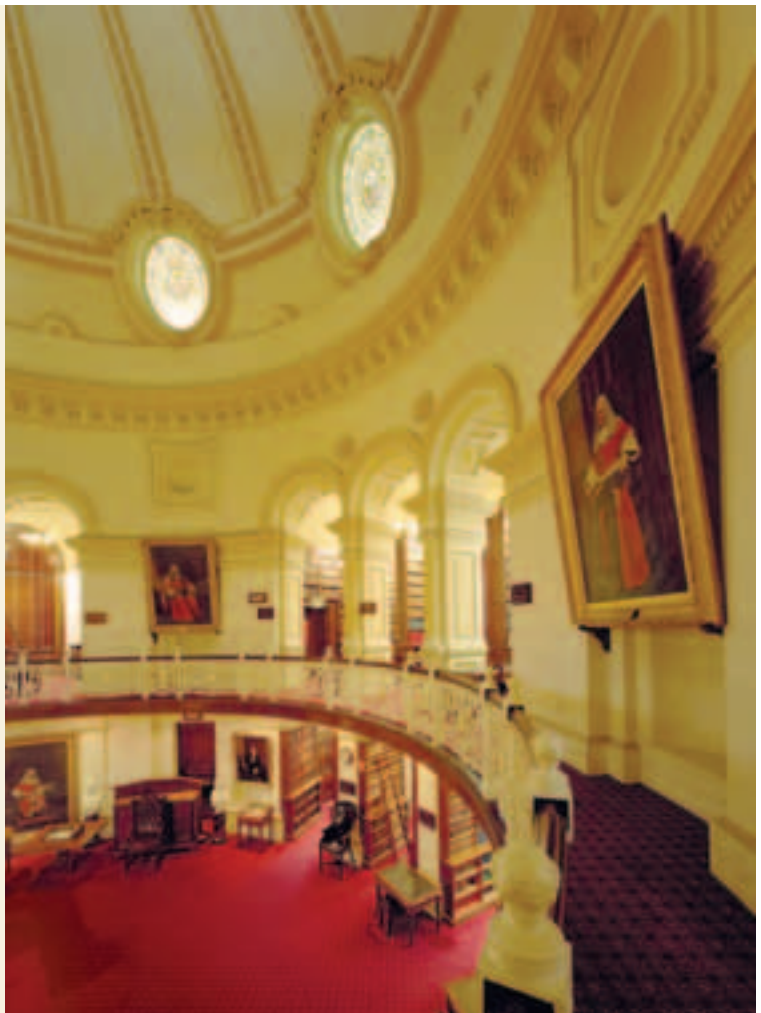
Court 4

Court 4 is the original central criminal court. Equally elaborate as the Banco Court and beautifully restored, it was the venue for the first sitting held in the complex on 15 February 1884. Court 4 remains the venue for many of the state's murder trials.



Supreme Court Library

Located in the courtyard in the centre of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court Library provides information and reference services to the judges of the Supreme Court and the legal profession, as well as to court staff. It houses one of the largest law collections in the state, with well over 100,000 books.

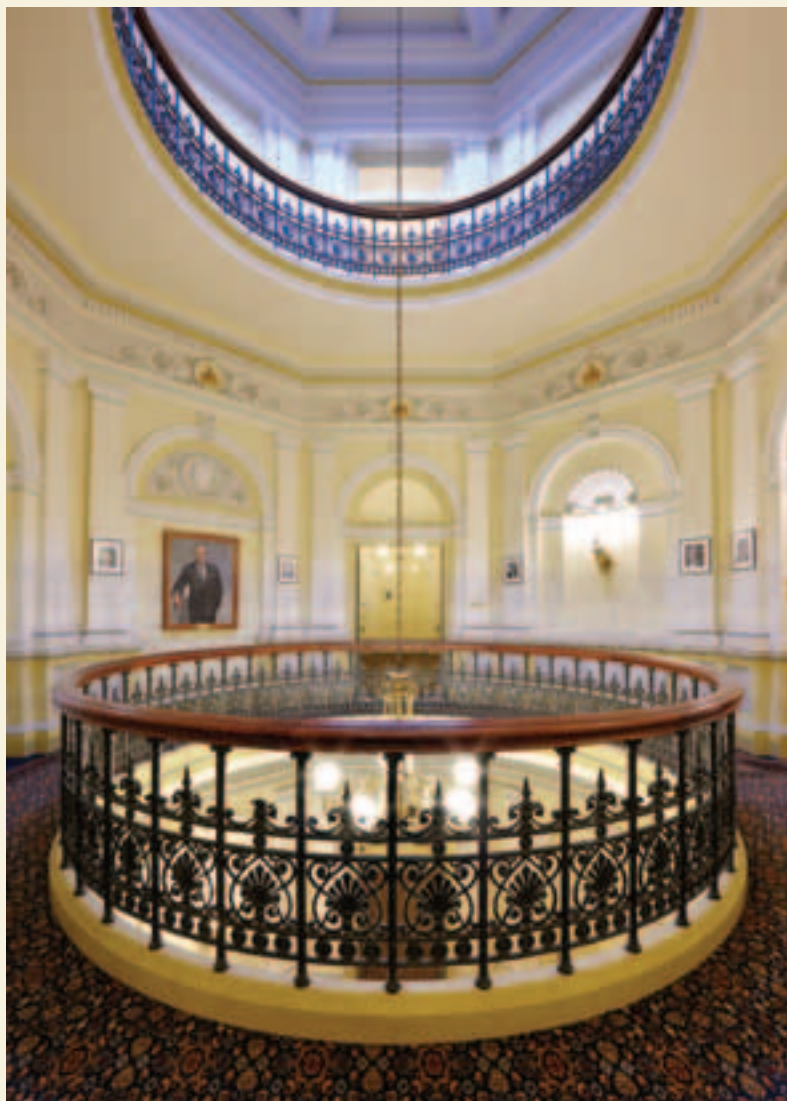


Court 15

Court 15 was constructed in 2008, and its modern design is in stark contrast to the original courtrooms that surround it. Court 15 is a civil court for multi-party, non-jury commercial trials with modern facilities such as video conferencing, drop-down screens, ample space for court books and transcript providers, extra bar tables, and large expert witness facilities.

Court of Appeal

The Court of Appeal is located at 459 Lonsdale Street. The building was originally constructed in 1892–1893 as offices for the Attorney-General and Crown Law Department. It was designed by S.E. Bindley in an Academic Classical style. The Crown Law Department occupied the building from 1893 until 1977 when the building was renovated to become the Supreme Court Annexe. The building now houses the Court of Appeal and was renamed after the creation of that division of the Supreme Court in 1995.

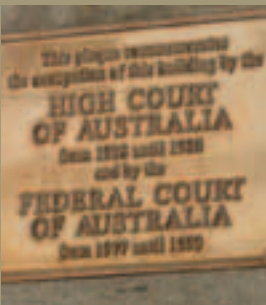




Old High Court Building

The old High Court building, located at 450 Little Bourke Street, was completed in 1928 and served as the first purpose-built home of the High Court. Designed by John Smith Murdoch, the Commonwealth's Chief Architect, the former High Court building exemplifies the clean lines associated with the Stripped Classical style. It is constructed of Melbourne red brick with Footscray bluestone dressings.

Between 1928 and 1982 the building was the High Court's Melbourne home and its principal registry. Many landmark cases were heard and decided in this building, including the famous *Communist Party Case* in 1951, in which the High Court struck down the Menzies Government's attempt to ban the Australian Communist Party. Between 1977 and 1999, the building also housed the Federal Court during its initial operation. Today, the building houses Supreme Court judges' chambers and courtrooms. It is the main centre of the Commercial Court of the Supreme Court and is sometimes used by the Court of Appeal.



More information about the Supreme Court of Victoria can be found at www.supremecourt.vic.gov.au



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