

ROYAL MELBOURNE REGIMENT DRILL HALL

Welcome to the Royal Melbourne Regiment Drill Hall.

Designed by architect George Hallandal, the Drill Hall was built in 1937 at a cost of £18,500. Hallandal, an architect for the Commonwealth Department of Works, was famous for designing military buildings around Melbourne in the 1930s.

The Drill Hall was built to provide improved military facilities for the Royal Melbourne Regiment. It stands proudly today as one of Melbourne's most detailed and intact military halls from the 1930s. The two-storey complex includes two drill halls, an armoury, mess rooms, a musical band room, a basement rifle firing range, a caretaker's flat and lecture rooms. You are visiting the ground-floor drill hall today.

The Royal Melbourne Regiment was formed in November 1854 as the Melbourne Volunteer Rifles. Renamed the City of Melbourne Regiment in 1927, it was formally granted the title 6th Battalion, Royal Melbourne Regiment eight years later, making it the only infantry regiment within Australia to be honoured with a Royal prefix at that time. In 1960 it was absorbed into the Royal Victoria Regiment. Over these years, the Regiment served overseas in the Second Boer War and at Gallipoli and on the Western Front in World War I. During World War II, it performed garrison duties around Australia, defending the realm against possible invasion.

About the building

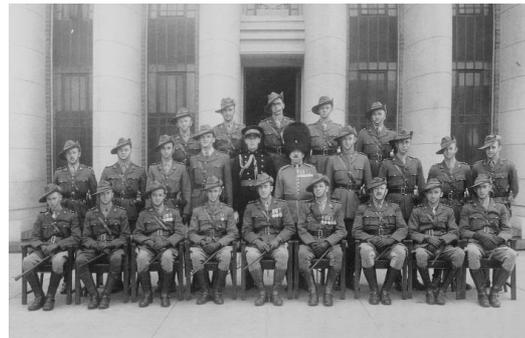
This building is a fine example of interwar Moderne architecture, which emerged in the 1930s as a late stage of Art Deco. You may know this architectural movement for its aerodynamic curves, long horizontal grooves and corner windows. So popular was this styling that manufacturers of radios, clocks and other appliances soon embraced it in their own product designs.

If you're in the main drill hall now, look up. Do you see the ornate 'stepped' pattern of the fully restored plaster ceiling? This is typically Moderne. A number of rooms not on view today are also opulent spaces that boast elaborately detailed iron grill motifs, mouldings and timberwork. One example is the senior rank mess hall. This is lined with dado rails and includes a ribbed ceiling and inglenook fireplace, giving it the air of a smoky men's club.

If you walk outside around the building you will see more intricate finishes.

Can you see the decorative wrought iron gates and window screens or the green ventilation grills beneath the windows?

As you wander, do you notice the 'stepped' shape of the building's footprint? This is just like the ceiling inside and is another common feature of Moderne architecture. This feature also allows the building to fit onto a triangle-shaped plot of land.



Officers Drill Hall forecourt

National Archives of Australia. B712/0 120/1.



Anteroom fireplace

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This Drill Hall is where the Regiment has created close ties with the City of Melbourne and the wider public over four important phases of history:

1. Pre-World War II

In the lead-up to World War II, the Regiment put its motto to the test: *semper paratus* – ‘always prepared’. This was where army men forged strong bonds as they were drilled for military parades and trained to be battle-ready.

2. World War II

This building was used for various purposes during wartime. New recruits were trained here to replace those who had volunteered to fight abroad as part of the Second AIF. Some of those men later received medical outpatient care here. In 1941, the building was transformed to a first-aid unit where the Red Cross performed medical treatment demonstrations for air-raid casualties in the presence of interstate delegates.

3. Post-war

The Regiment was disbanded in 1944 but remobilised in 1948. During these years, the Drill Hall took on an increasing social role. In 1947, the Regiment’s Former Officers’ Association hosted a Christmas party here for notable colonels and lieutenant-colonels. Army square dances and fêtes followed. In October 1948, the reformed Regiment marked its first official post-war public appearance with a march from here to St Paul’s Cathedral.

In the early 1950s, the Victorian Korean Auxiliary for the Royal Australian Regiment met regularly here to prepare comfort packs for Australian troops in Korea and assist their next-of-kin in Victoria. This era saw the building evolve from its military and administrative function to become a public sporting space. One example was the use of the basement firing range for a national pentathlon event in the 1950s.

4. The wider community

In the late 1990s, the Drill Hall was purchased by the Melbourne City Council. The cylindrical columns in the ground-floor hall were erected in 2011 to support the residential development above and the recently introduced pendant light fittings sensitively complement its original features.

Since 2013, it has formed part of the Multicultural Hub (managed by AMES Australia) and is used as a hire venue for events and meetings. The hall is suited to a range of activities including forums, expos, launches, celebrations, workshops and fitness sessions.



Exterior Drill Hall



Interior Drill Hall MFWF 2015

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For information on how to book the Drill Hall or to arrange a viewing, contact 9092 1500 or bookings@multiculturalhub.com.au

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