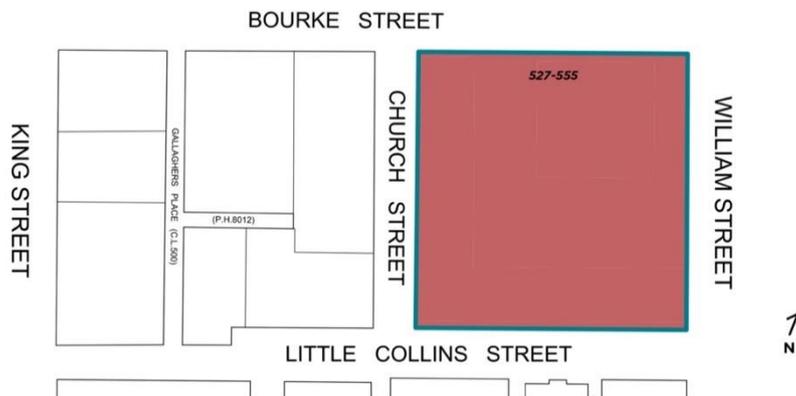


SITE NAME	AMP Tower and St James Building Complex
STREET ADDRESS	527-555 Bourke Street, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	101155



SURVEY DATE: October 2019

SURVEY BY: GJM Heritage

HERITAGE INVENTORY	No	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
		FORMER GRADE	Ungraded
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	Skidmore Owings & Merrill in association with Bates Smart & McCutcheon	BUILDER:	E A Watts Pty Ltd
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Postwar Period (1945-1975)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1965-1969

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation focused on the post-war history of the site and did not address associations with Aboriginal people or organisations	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here
POSTWAR THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
1 Shaping the urban landscape	1.8 Expressing an architectural style 1.9 Beyond the curtain wall
3 Building a commercial city	3.2 Business and finance

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Office, Hall, Carrier
1920s	Office, Merchant, Education, Workshop
1960s	Café/Restaurant, Merchant, Office, Retail, Studio

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Extent of overlay: To extent of property boundary

SUMMARY

The AMP Tower, the St James Building, and the associated public plaza were designed by the international architectural firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill, in association with the prominent Melbourne firm Bates Smart & McCutcheon, the latter also serving as the structural, mechanical and electrical engineers. The commercial complex was constructed in 1965-69, by builders E A Watts Pty Ltd.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The period from 1945 to 1975 was one of radical transformation for Melbourne; from the low-rise city that still reflected its colonial origins to a bustling international centre of commerce and culture. The surviving buildings from this period are evidence of the evolving economic and social conditions in Melbourne at the time and demonstrate the city's transition from its nineteenth century manufacturing origins to its current banking, office and service industry focus. These buildings reflect the increasing commercial and cultural role of Melbourne in the international context of globalisation and postwar optimism as well as a radically altered economic environment which saw an influx of foreign capital and ideas. Collectively, these buildings represent a transformative period in the life of the city; a period that is categorised by significant change, growth and evolution across all aspects of life – social, political, economic and cultural.

Expressing an architectural style in the postwar period

Multi-storey commercial buildings made a significant contribution to postwar Melbourne, particularly from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. With the resumption of building construction in the 1950s after the hiatus of World War II, the advent of curtain wall construction – enabling the application of a non-load bearing skin to the face of a building – radically altered the appearance of the modern city commercial building.

Constructed predominantly for the financial and business sectors, there was an eagerness amongst clients to establish a dominant city presence and to project a modern, progressive and prestigious approach to commercial building design. The resulting Post-War Modernist style of multi-storey buildings, influenced particularly by steel and glass office tower design in the United States, were in stark contrast to the pre-war city buildings in central Melbourne and presented architects of the day with a completely new design challenge.

Thirty major city buildings were completed in Melbourne in four years alone from 1955 to 1958 and 22 were office buildings within, or on the fringes of, the CBD (Saunders 1959:91). Largely influenced by the American skyscraper, the earliest office buildings of the 1950s utilised innovative curtain walling, formed from continuous metal-framing filled principally with glass. The curtain wall is described by Miles Lewis as 'essentially a continuous, non-bearing skin on the face of a building' and is one of the 'leitmotifs of modernism, both in Australia and overseas' (Lewis 2012:185). The curtain walled 'glass box' aesthetic was embraced by the local architects, and many buildings followed to the extent that high-rise office buildings with curtain walling became a defining characteristic of the new buildings in the latter half of the 1950s (NTAV 2014:5-6).

Amongst the first curtain walled buildings to be constructed in Melbourne was the 13-storey glass-fronted Gilbert Court at 100 Collins Street (J A La Gerche 1954-56), which was built to the height limit of 132 feet (40m), and – perhaps the most influential – the free-standing ICI House, 1 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1955-58). Located on the outskirts of the Hoddle Grid, ICI House was clad on all four facades with glass curtain walling and exceeded the well-established maximum building height within the Hoddle Grid. Large numbers of similarly designed city commercial buildings followed, often displaying bold horizontal contrast between alternating rows of glazing and coloured spandrels.

Beyond the curtain wall

The dominant glass box design of the late 1950s was challenged in the 1960s as the shortcomings of the fully glazed curtain wall became apparent – in particular its poor thermal performance – and new technologies became available. Advances in concrete technology, including the development of precast concrete, impacted greatly on both the appearance and structure of the commercial tower form from the 1960s onwards.

By the mid-1960s, architects were experimenting with a range of solid cladding materials for tower buildings including precast concrete, stone, reconstituted stone, tile and brick, as well as various metals for cladding, screening and detailing. A number of buildings continued to adopt true curtain wall construction; however, a different aesthetic was created by the use of solid external cladding in place of the typically glazed spandrels of the 1950s. This aesthetic is evident in a number of existing buildings in the city centre including the Guardian Building at 454-456 Collins Street (1960-61), with its stone-faced precast concrete panelled facades.

Concrete advances saw an increase in the use of reinforced column and slab construction in 1960s multi-storey building design, however concrete-encased steelwork also continued to be used. Some buildings incorporated structural elements in their main facades (for example load-bearing precast concrete panels or structural mullions) so were therefore not of true curtain wall construction. The structural nature of these facades was not necessarily apparent to the observer and the buildings continued to display the well-established repetitive characteristics of the true curtain wall façade, such as at Australia-Netherlands House, 468-478 Collins Street, designed by Peddle Thorp & Walker in association with Meldrum & Partners (c1968-70).

A broad range of design approaches became apparent in multi-storey commercial buildings of the 1960s and early 1970s. The horizontality of curtain walling was often balanced by the addition of vertical elements such as façade columns, strips or fins, which introduced textural patterns and visual strength to the facades of a number of buildings. Other multi-storey towers clearly expressed their structure externally with grid-like facades which clearly reflected the internal trabeated structural system. Sun screening provided additional patterning to facades, either as a repetitive decorative motif across the façade, as an expression of the window frames (such as at Royal Mail House, 253-267 Bourke Street designed by D Graeme Lumsden, 1961-63), in the form of balconies (as at the Melbourne Office of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney building, 251-257 Collins Street, 1971-73), or occasionally as an entire screen attached to the exterior face of the building.

Buildings also varied with towers set within plazas or on dominant podiums. The State Savings Bank of Victoria at 45-63 Swanston Street, designed by Buchan Laird & Buchan (c1974), is one example of a building constructed with a dominant podium. Buildings were sometimes set back from the street line behind public plazas – a strategy adopted to gain council approval for additional building height and evident in the Bates Smart McCutcheon designed Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building at 359-373 Collins Street (c1972-1975) – while others were built within larger plaza spaces, such as the AMP Tower & St James Building Complex (1965-69), designed by US-based firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM).

Business and finance in the postwar period

The postwar period was one of fluctuating fortunes in the business and finance sectors. In the main however, economic confidence and financial deregulation came together to create a period of growth that would radically change the appearance of central Melbourne.

Speculative investment in Melbourne increased after the Commonwealth government lifted restrictions on share dealings in 1947, which resulted in a dramatic increase in new company registrations (Marsden 2000:44-45). Subsequently, during the 1950s, a number of national and international companies sought to assert a physical presence in the country, constructing corporate buildings in the city centre. In Melbourne, up to the mid-1960s, investment was predominantly driven by British and American companies, government bodies, large Australian corporations such as AMP and BHP, and property developers, including Lend Lease (formerly Civil and Civic) and L J Hooker Ltd. Later in the 1960s, it was also driven by private developers such as Grollo and Lustig & Moar (Marsden 2000:46-47).

The construction of large bank buildings was also prolific during the postwar period with the passing of the Banking Act 1947, which led to an increase in the number of bank branches established in Victoria. One of the most significant changes in banking in Australia at this time was the creation of the new Reserve Bank of Australia in 1959, which replaced the central bank known as the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (Heritage Alliance 2008:17). Bank buildings constructed in the central city during this period included the State Savings Bank of Victoria at 233-243 Queen Street (1967-68), the Bank of Adelaide Building at 265-269 Collins Street (1959-60) and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Building at 251-257 Collins Street (1971-73).

The period between 1961 and 1963 was one of business recession, while the years between 1967 and 1969 was a time of growth due to two mineral booms. From 1967 to 1971 the construction of new office space in the city centre more than doubled that of the previous five years (City of Melbourne Strategy Plan 1974 in Clinch 2012:66-67). The property boom ended during the economic crash of the early 1970s and the 1974 oil crisis when many British institutions that had founded the commercial property industry left Australia. Government bodies and banks subsequently took over much of the building construction in the city centre (Marsden 2000:48).

SITE HISTORY

The AMP Tower, the St James Building, and the associated public plaza were designed by the international architectural firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill, in association with the prominent Melbourne firm Bates Smart & McCutcheon, the latter also serving as the structural, mechanical and electrical engineers. The commercial complex was constructed in 1965-69, by builders E A Watts Pty Ltd (Goad et al. 1993; *Cross-Section*, Dec 1969; *Architect*, May/June 1970:13).

The AMP Tower forms part of a collection of postwar high-rise buildings at the intersection of Bourke and William streets, which originally included the AMP Tower, BHP House, ACI House and Shell House (the last demolished in the 1980s) (Goad 2001: 270-271). A contemporary article published in 1970 (*Architect* May/June 1970:14) commented that each building was a:

...careful exercise in the modern classical style. Taken together, the same classic principles should help to bring them into a coherent group. The variations, however, prove to be a powerful disruptive force. The result is merely a further contribution to Melbourne's visual chaos (Architect May/June 1970:14).

The site was formerly occupied by St James School (associated with St James Cathedral adjacent; Melbourne's earliest surviving church, which was relocated to the corner of King and Batman streets), St James Street and St James Buildings (1889). The two-acre site was acquired from the Anglican Church by the AMP Society in 1963 (Goad et al. 1993; NTAV: VHD; *Cross-Section* Mar 1963:2).

While the architectural drawings (Figure 1 - Figure 3, Figure 5) note that Bates Smart & McCutcheon were the architects and engineers and Skidmore Owings & Merrill were the consulting architects, contemporary publications reported that Skidmore Owings & Merrill were the leading design firm. The San Francisco office of Skidmore Owings & Merrill were appointed in 1963 and carried out a three stage process comprising a programme, schematic design and design development. All documentation past the design development stage and supervision of construction was the responsibility of Bates Smart & McCutcheon, with Skidmore Owings and Merrill acting as consultants. The designers in the San Francisco office were Chuck Bassett, Richard Foster and Mark Goldstein, with Helmut Jacoby responsible for the perspective drawings (Goad 2004b:198).

Goad et al. (1993) noted that the design was informed by the precedent of Eero Saarinen's CBS Tower in New York (1962-64). The AMP Tower was designed to accommodate the client's needs and future expansion, while the St James Building was designed for tenancies on lease, with shops at the plaza level and five floors of office space above (*Architect*, May/June 1970:13). The entire site below ground level was designed to provide a car park and staff amenities, including a 248-seat theatre, cafeteria for 290 people, an executive dining room for 80 people, a gymnasium, squash court and games room (*Architect*, May/June 1970:13). The inclusion of the plaza was an important design aspect of the overall composition (Goad et al. 1993; Taylor & Stewart 2001:270).

The AMP Tower was a concrete encased steel post and beam construction, while the St James Building was a reinforced concrete beam and slab construction, 'complicated by torsional stresses induced by the angled colonnade' (*Architect*, May/June 1970:13). Both were finished externally with polished panels of reconstructed granite, and bronze-tinted glass in anodised aluminum frames (Goad et al. 1993; Taylor & Stewart 2001:270; *Architect*, May/June 1970:13). An advertisement in a 1974 architectural journal noted that the AMP Tower was clad with 'reconstructed granite-faced precast concrete wall units' (AIA, Nov/Dec 1974:8). The mullions on the face of the AMP Tower were used as vertical droppers for the dual-duct air conditions system (*Architect*, May/June 1970:13). The top level of the St James Building originally had copper cladding to the exterior (BAP).

Artist Clement Meadmore was commissioned to create a sculpture for the plaza, 'Awakening' (created in 1968; Figure 10 & Figure 11), a 'massive bent box of Corten steel' (Goad et al. 1993) (removed in 2010). Meadmore (1929-2005) earned international fame for his sculptures, many of which were designed for public spaces in Australia and the USA (DAOO; Clement Meadmore; *Architect* May/June 1970:14). Artist Michael Young received the commission for a stainless steel sculpture for the foyer of the St James Building. The two sculptures were 'important examples of the uncompromisingly minimalist expression of art of the late 1960s' (Goad et al. 1993).

The complex was the first project to enclose space with a mix of high and low-rise buildings in the central activity district (Goad et al. 1993). The AMP Tower, rising 26 storeys to 372 feet above plaza level, was temporarily Melbourne's tallest building, until 1972 (*Architect*, May/June 1970:13; CoMMaps). The total cost of the project was \$20,000,000 (Goad et al. 1993; Taylor & Stewart 2001:270).

The project prompted discussion in the architectural world at the time. The publication *Architect* discussed the complex in 1969 (May/June 1969:12):

The design, nevertheless, is pure S.O.M. [Skidmore Owings and Merrill] and it is as clever as to be expected. A low L-shaped block is the minor of the two elements. It exploits to good effect two fashionable devices: the light-angle set-back in section, and the 45-degree

diagonal line in plan. It hugs the two back streets of the island block and makes a handsome background and foil to the major element: a strong, straight, square tower on the corner of the intersection.

Architect further discussed the project in their May/June edition in 1970 (p13):

The complex is monumental; but it is ivy-league monumental masonry, a premature gravestone marking the last resting place of a far-from-moribund financial giant. The resulting image is "hyper-real", belonging to another, sinister, space-time continuum, parallel but not identical with our own. This quality of other-worldliness is becoming more commonplace in the architecture of U.S.A. ...

The external surfaces of both the A.M.P. Tower and the St. James building consist mainly of glass and reconstructed granite. The finish is perfectly smooth and highly polished, so that the buildings appear to be carved out of monoliths, rather than as sets of joined elements.

The 1970 article continues to comment on the dynamic design of the sloping walls of St James and their interplay with the plaza space.

The Melbourne University publication *Cross-Section* published articles with images in 1969 and 1970 (Figure 11). The January 1970 issue of *Cross-Section* (Jan 1970) noted:

... the most outstanding visible feature is the unusual angled façade to the St James building. This is sloped away from the tower block to permit maximum sunlight to the plaza and lower floors. It is also angled 45° towards Bourke and William Streets to provide maximum daylight in offices ... The whole of the façade of both buildings is faced in reconstructed granite slabs up to 30' high and 4' wide. Contracts were let to two suppliers to provide the 305,000 square feet of cladding required. To ensure uniformity of colour from both suppliers a new granite quarry was opened at Mudgee in N.S.W. ... It is apparent that a great deal of thought has gone into the selection of both exterior and interior finishes to achieve an effective balance of two major requirements – beauty and ease of maintenance. Reconstructed granite, anodized aluminium and blue stone paving are used extensively on the outside while marble, stainless steel and vinyl wall coverings are featured internally.

In 1972, *Architect* published the following (Mar/Apr 1972:17):

...the complex is a simple massing that is one of several possible solutions to the planar and volumetric requirements of the client and the various controlling government bodies. Granted that, is very little more. The sole attempt to avoid banality within the buildings themselves, seem to lie in the external faceting of the columns, and in the splayed and angled colonnade.

A low-scale addition has more recently been constructed off the AMP Tower providing for shopfronts, and the plaza partially infilled in 2012-13 (NTAV 2014:70). The St James Building was refurbished c2014 by Metier 3 Architects, which included a vertical addition (CoMMaps).

Skidmore Owings & Merrill

Skidmore Owings & Merrill is a US-based firm, established in Chicago in 1936 by architects Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings, with engineer William Merrill joining the practice in 1939. It grew to become one of the largest architectural practices in the US and in the 1950s was particularly admired for its expertise in curtain wall construction.

Skidmore Owings & Merrill has collaborated with a number of Australian practices since its establishment. In the 1960s, the firm worked with Buchan, Laird and Buchan on the design of Shell House on the corner of Bourke and William streets (1960, demolished), with Bates Smart & McCutcheon on the AMP Tower & St James Building Complex at the corner of Bourke and William streets (1965-69), and with Yuncken Freeman on BHP House, 140 William Street (1967-73) (Goad 2012:631).

Skidmore Owings & Merrill remains one of the largest architectural, interior design, engineering and urban planning firms in the world, with offices in New York, San Francisco, LA, Washington DC, Seattle, London, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Dubai and Mumbai.

Bates Smart & McCutcheon

Bates, Smart & McCutcheon was formed when Osborn McCutcheon joined the existing firm of Bates & Smart in 1926. Bates & Smart had itself been born out of previous iterations of a firm that could be traced back to Reed & Barnes, making it one of the oldest practices in the country (Goad 2012:72). By the 1960s the firm had become one of Australia's largest architectural firms. It exists today as Bates Smart (Goad 2012:72).

During the 1930s, Bates, Smart & McCutcheon had earned a reputation for designing Georgian-style residences, but also went on to win RVIA awards for their work on the AMP Building in Collins Street (1926-31), Buckley & Nunn Building in Bourke Street (now David Jones, 1933), and the Second Church of Christ Scientist in Camberwell (1936-37).

By the 1950s, Bates, Smart & McCutcheon had become Australia's 'expert' in high-rise office buildings design (Goad 2012:73). Much of their work at this time was large structures with glass curtain walls. In Melbourne this was exemplified by ICI House, which broke the city's existing 132-foot (40m) height limit in 1955-8 (Goad 2012:73). Other work completed by the firm in the 1950s included the first of the Sleigh Buildings at 158-172 Queen Street Melbourne (1953-55 & 1964), Union House at 43-51 Queen Street Melbourne (1957) and the AMP Building at 402-408 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne (1956-58).

Bates, Smart & McCutcheon continued to expand into the 1960s and 70s, with its design approach shifting from glazed curtain walls to facades of artificial stone or prefabricated concrete panels. Works in Melbourne during this period included AMP Tower and St James Building Complex, Bourke Street (1965-69) in association with US firm, Skidmore Owings and Merrill; the Guardian Building at 454-456 Collins Street (1960-61); the South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street (1961-62) and the Methodist Church Centre at 130-134 Little Collins Street (1966-67) with F C Armstrong.

In the 1970s the firm designed the Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building at 359-373 Collins Street, Melbourne (c1972-75); the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Building at 251-257 Collins Street (1971-73) and the double tower and plaza complex of Collins Place, Collins Street (1970-80), undertaken in collaboration with international architecture practice, I M Pei. Other notable works by the firm include the large collaborative designs of Melbourne Central with Kisho Kurokawa (1983-92) and Federation Square with Lab Architecture Studio (1997-2002) (Goad 2012:74).

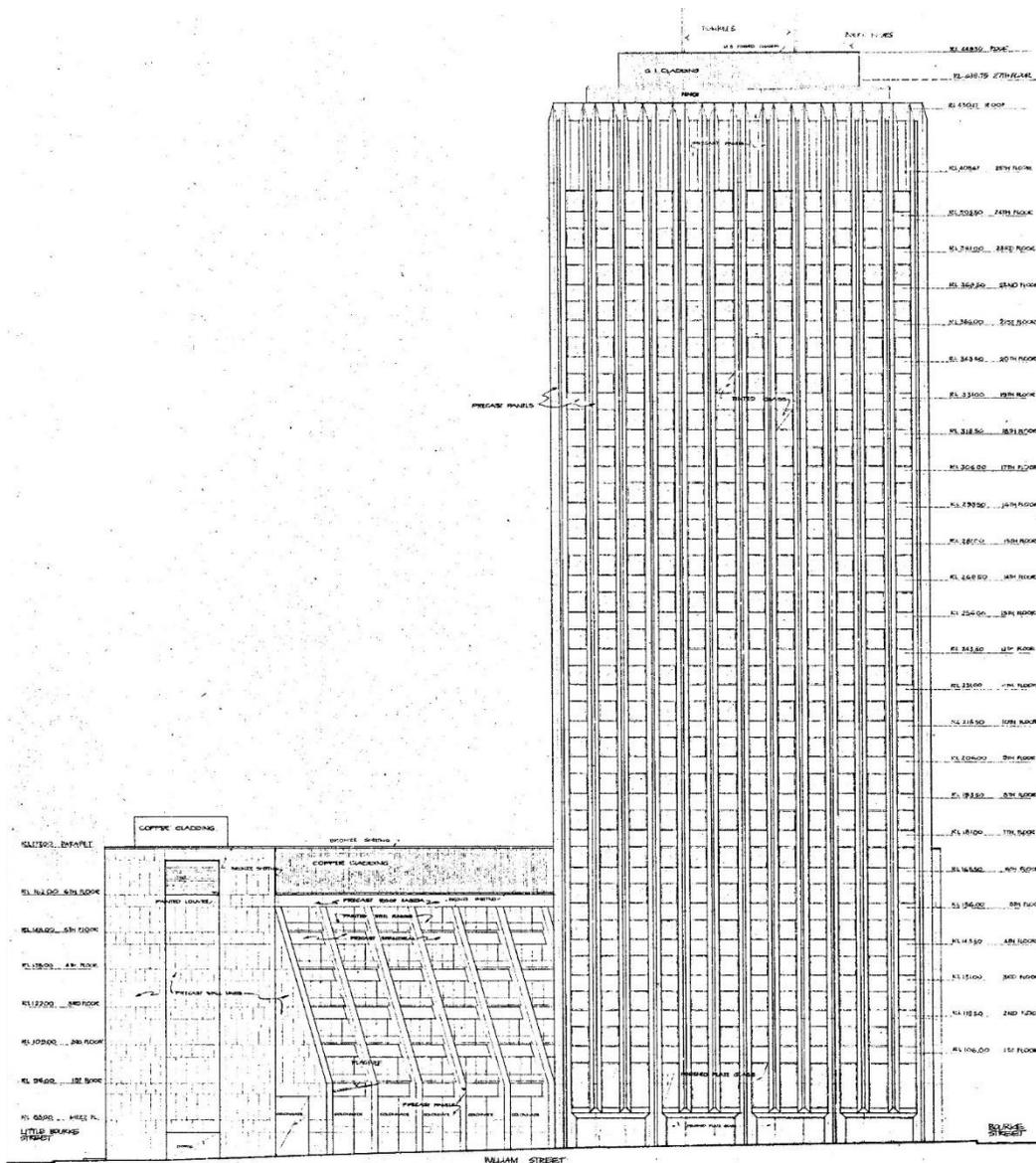


Figure 1. East elevation from William Street. Drawing by and Skidmore Owings & Merrill in association with Bates Smart & McCutcheon, dated October 1965 (BAP).

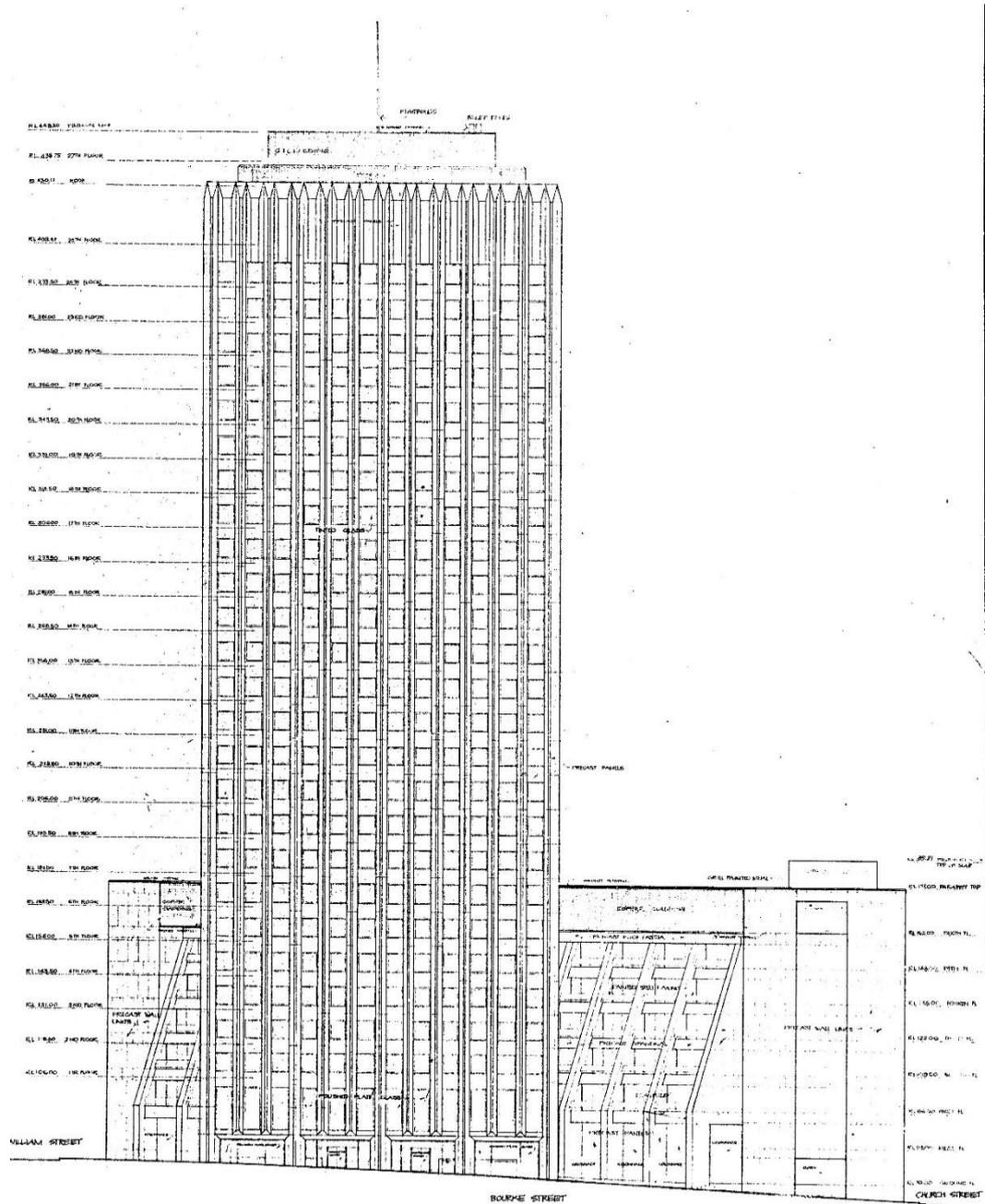


Figure 2. North elevation from Bourke Street. Drawing by and Skidmore Owings & Merrill in association with Bates Smart & McCutcheon, dated October 1965 (BAP).



Figure 4. Illustration of the complex, viewed from William Street (Taylor & Stewart 2001:68).

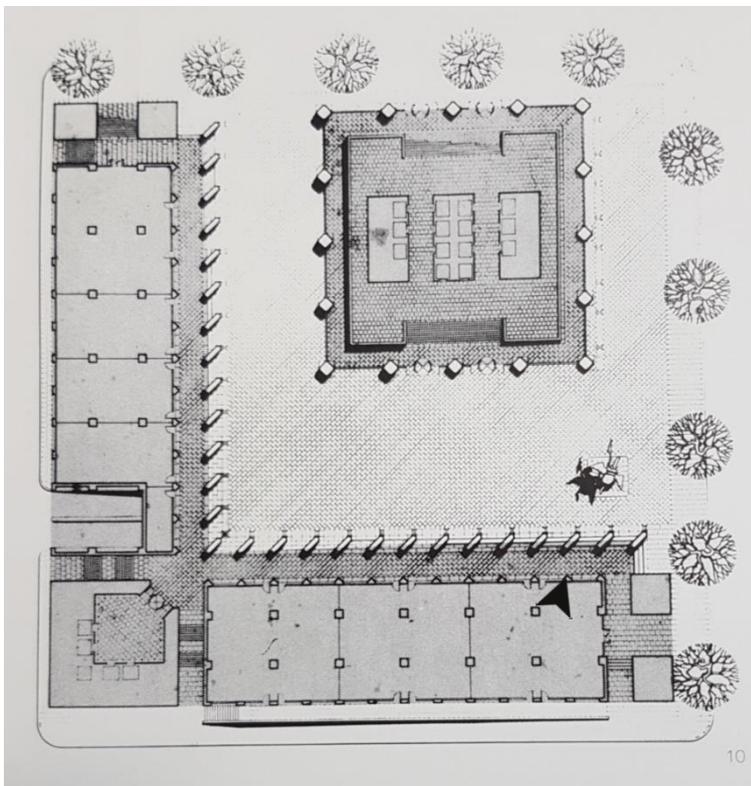


Figure 5. Site plan of the complex by architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon (date not confirmed) (Taylor & Stewart 2001:68).

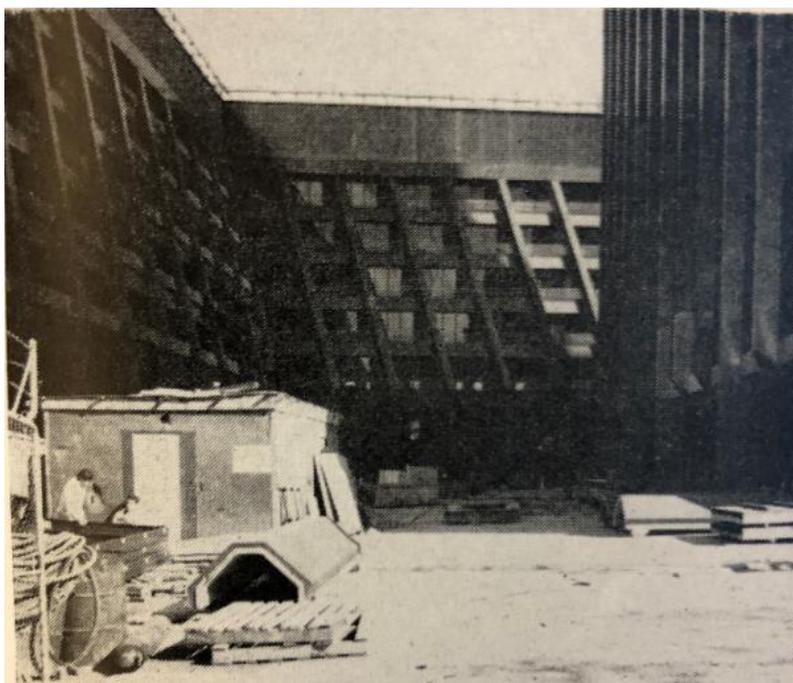


Figure 6. The buildings under construction, image published in the May/June 1969 edition of *Architect*.



Figure 7. The complex under construction in 1969 (NLA, Wolfgang Sievers, photographer, object 160948487).



Figure 8. The AMP Tower under construction in 1969 (NLA, Wolfgang Sievers, photographer, object 160948175).



Figure 9. Photo of the newly completed complex, published in the May/June 1970 edition of *Architect* (May/Jun 1970:12).



Figure 10. The complex and Meadmore sculpture; date of photo not confirmed (Taylor & Stewart 2001:68).



Figure 11. Detail of the St James building and Clement Meadmore's sculpture in the plaza. Photo published in January 1970 (*Cross-Section*, No. 206, 1 January 1970).



Figure 12. The complex in 1970 (SLV, Wolfgang Sievers, photographer, Image H99.50/214).



Figure 13. The complex and Meadmore's sculpture in 1970 (SLV, Wolfgang Sievers, photographer, Image H99.50/217).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The AMP Tower and St James Building Complex at 527-555 Bourke Street is a 26-storey commercial tower building and adjacent six-storey commercial building, set in a bluestone-paved urban plaza at the south-west corner of Bourke and William streets. Occupying half a city block, it is a substantial complex with tall tower at the intersection and low-scale L-shaped St James Building which wraps around the south and west sides of the tower. Constructed in 1965-69 to designs by American

architects Skidmore Owings and Merrill, in association with Melbourne architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon, the complex is an example of the Post-War Modernist style.

The tall AMP Tower is a free-standing building which provides the focus at the corner of the large 1.9 acres (.77 hectares) site. Square in plan with four identical grid-like facades, the tower is of concrete encased steel column and beam construction with central service core providing lateral stability. In contrast, the low-scale L-shaped St James Building is of reinforced concrete column and slab construction. Both buildings are clad with large reconstructed granite-faced precast concrete wall panels, with granite obtained from a new quarry opened for this purpose, and have bronze-tinted glazing in anodised aluminium frames.

The identical facades of the AMP Tower are grid-like in appearance with a dominant vertical emphasis provided by angled piers which are formed from precast concrete panels. Recessed behind these solid piers are alternating rows of precast concrete spandrels and windows which are divided into repetitive square units. The vertical piers rise to the top of the building, where a deep cornice is created by the addition of intermediary elements, formed from precast concrete panels.

Accentuated by double-height windows at first floor level, the base of the building was originally recessed behind a colonnade which was formed from the four angled corner piers and the continuation of three of the intermediate piers at each façade. Other piers terminate at first floor level with a chamfered edge. Despite some infill of the resulting colonnade, this arrangement is clearly visible at the north façade facing Bourke Street.

The L-shaped St James Building provides a background to the major tower element and encloses the site. The main facades of this building face north and east, towards the tower and into a paved plaza located between buildings. Secondary facades face Little Collins Street to the south and Church Street to the west and a service core is located at the junction of the two wings. The main facades appear as a complex grid of solid concrete elements with projecting piers which are angled at 45 degrees in plan from the main building. An additional light-angle set back of the plaza facades above ground level, incorporates cranked balustraded balconies.

Various modifications have been made to the two buildings and the plaza. These include:

- A two-storey glazed pavilion-like structure has been added at street-level to the east façade of the tower
- Single-storey glazed pavilion-like structures have been added to the main facades of the St James Building
- A substantial roof top addition has been made to the St James Building
- Shopfronts have been inserted in the ground floor colonnades of parts of the tower
- The western portion of the plaza has been covered with transparent roofing.

Parts of the original bluestone paving of the plaza may have been retained, however garden beds have been inserted, ramps have been installed, the original sculpture has been removed and additions to the buildings have reduced the amount of open area.

INTEGRITY

The AMP Tower and St James Building Complex, including the original form and the detailing of the exterior of the buildings above street level, remains largely intact to its original construction in 1965-69. Works to the building, including street level alterations and additions, and roof top additions to the

St James Building, have altered the original design. The overall form of the public plaza has been substantially retained.

Overall, the complex retains a high degree of architectural integrity to the Post-War Modernist style in fabric, form and detail. While it has undergone some alterations, these changes do not diminish the ability to understand and appreciate the buildings and their plaza setting as a fine example of a Post-War Modernist multi-storey commercial building.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Set on a large and prominent city site, the AMP Tower and St James Building Complex at 527-555 Bourke Street is a complex which comprises three important elements – a high-rise tower, a low-rise L-shaped horizontal block and an open plaza. The complex is a representative example of the Post-War Modernist style and the tower clearly demonstrates the typical characteristics of 1960s to mid 1970s multi-storey commercial building design. In combination these elements form a rare example of a public space enclosed by a tower and perimeter block in the CBD.

This large-scale urban and architectural design was a major Melbourne landmark in the 1960s and was widely critiqued in contemporary architectural journals. The size and complexity of the development, the design of the two related buildings, the unusual provision of a large public plaza in association with office development (the corporate concern for open public space and public amenity within the city was commonly noted) and the association with the American architects Skidmore Owings and Merrill were all considered to be notable aspects of the development.

The Buildings

The grid-like walls of the freestanding multi-storey AMP Tower, the innovative grid-like walls of the associated St James Building and the extensive use of reconstructed granite-faced precast concrete panels and bronze-tinted glazing in anodised aluminium frames, can be clearly observed from surrounding streets and from within the plaza itself. Despite additions and alterations made to the complex, the plan form of the complex and the upper facades of the buildings remain highly intact to illustrate the important period of construction of the buildings.

The AMP Tower itself can be compared with a number of multi-storey commercial buildings in the City of Melbourne which were built in the same period and display similar characteristics. These are detailed below.

State-significant places

A small number of 1960s to mid 1970s buildings in the Hoddle Grid within the City of Melbourne have been assessed as being of State-level significance and are included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). These include:

- Total House, 170-90 Russell Street (Bogle & Banfield 1964-65; VHR H2329 & HO1095)
- Former Hoyts Cinema Centre, 134-44 Bourke Street (Peter Muller 1966-69)
- Victorian Government Offices, Treasury Reserve Precinct (Yuncken Freeman 1967-68 – outside the Hoddle Grid)
- Eagle House, 473 Bourke Street (Yuncken Freeman 1971-72; VHR H1807 & HO901)
- BHP House, 130-148 William Street (Yuncken Freeman 1969-72; VHR H1699 & HO767).

Locally-significant places

As only a piece-meal evaluation of postwar buildings within the Hoddle Grid in the City of Melbourne has previously occurred, few buildings from this period are currently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme on a permanent basis. Those that are, are generally currently included within Heritage Precincts but are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as Individual Heritage Places, as follows:

Precinct Heritage Overlay



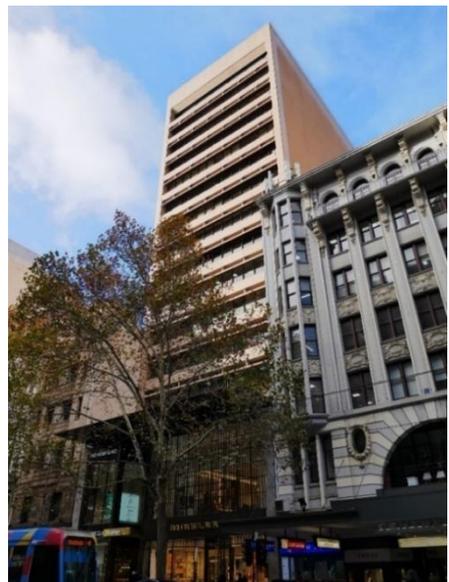
Former Reserve Bank of Australia, 56-64 Collins Street (Commonwealth Department of Works, 1964-66) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Contributory place.



Former State Savings Bank of Victoria, 45-63 Swanston Street, (Buchan Laird & Buchan, 1974) included in HO505 Flinders Gate Precinct (Non-contributory).



Wales Corner, 221-231 Collins Street (Stephenson & Turner, 1964-66) included in HO502 The Block Precinct (fronting Collins Street) & HO506 (fronting Swanston Street) Collins East Precinct as a Contributory place.



Former Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Building, 251-257 Collins Street, (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1974-73) included in HO502 The Block Precinct (fronting Collins Street) & HO506 (fronting Flinders Lane) (Non-contributory).

One individual heritage place recently included in a site-specific Heritage Overlay on a permanent basis is the Scottish Amicable Building, 128-146 Queen Street (Yuncken Freeman, 1966) (HO1213):



Scottish Amicable Building, 128-146 Queen Street

Other examples

Despite the demolition of many 1960s and 1970s multi-storey commercial buildings in the City of Melbourne, a number of fine and highly representative examples of this building type that are not currently included in the Heritage Overlay on a permanent basis have been retained with sufficient integrity to demonstrate this class of place. These buildings clearly illustrate the advancement of construction techniques from the 1960s through to the mid 1970s and demonstrate the broad range of design approaches of the period. The podiums of the majority of these places have been modified at street level. Examples include:



Former RACV Club, 111-129 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1961) (Interim HO1068)



Former Australia Pacific House, 136-144 Exhibition Street (McIntyre McIntyre & Partners, 1975-78)



Royal Insurance Group Building, 430-442 Collins Street, (Yuncken Freeman, 1965) (Interim HO1010)



Office Building, 516-520 Collins Street (architect unknown, c1974)



Former Guardian Building, 454-456 Collins Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1960-61)



Former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building, 155-161 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1961-62)



Former State Savings Bank, 258-264 Little Bourke Street (Meldrum & Partners, 1961)



MLA Building, 308-336 Collins Street (Stephenson & Turner, 1963)



Royal Mail House, 255-267 Bourke Street (D Graeme Lumsden, 1963)



Former Sleigh Corner Building, 158-164 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1964)



The Former Houston Building, 184-192 Queen Street (E & G Kolle & Associates, 1965)



Office Building, 178-188 William Street (McIntyre McIntyre & Partners, 1972-73)



Former Dalgety House, 457-471 Bourke Street (Peddle Thorp & Walker, 1966-68)



Former State Saving Bank of Victoria, 233-243 Queen Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes Mewton and Lobb, 1967-68)



Former Legal & General House, 375-383 Collins Street (B Evans, Murphy, Berg & Hocking, 1967)



Former AMP Building, 344-350 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes Mewton and Lobb, 1966-68)



Equitable House, 335-349 Little Collins Street (unknown architect, 1968)



Former Australia-Netherlands House, 468-478 Collins Street (Meldrum & Partners with Peddle Thorp Walker, 1968-70)



Former Methodist Church Centre, 130-134 Little Collins Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1966-67)



Cowan House, 457-469 Little Collins Street (E & G Kolle, 1969)



Lonsdale Exchange, 447-553 Lonsdale Street
(Commonwealth Department of Works, 1969)



Former Dillingham Estates House, 114-128 William Street
(Yuncken Freeman, 1976) (Interim HO1180)



Former Bryson Centre, 174-192 Exhibition Street
(Perrot Lyon Timlock & Kesa, 1970-72)



Former Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building,
359-373 Collins Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon,
c1972-75)



Nubrick House, 269-275 William Street
(Buchan Laird & Buchan, 1972)



Former Law Department Building, 221-231 Queen Street
(Fischer Group, 1972)



Former National Bank of Australasia Stock Exchange Branch, 85-91 Queen Street (Meldrum & Partners, 1973)



Former MLC Building, 303-317 Collins Street (Demaine, Russell, Trundle, Armstrong & Orton, c1970-1973)



Office Building, 589-603 Bourke Street (Peddle Thorp de Preu, 1973-75)

Analysis

As a fine and highly intact representative example of Post-War Modernist office building, the AMP Tower at 527-555 Bourke Street clearly demonstrates an important phase in the architectural development of multi-storey commercial buildings within the Hoddle Grid in the City of Melbourne. Similar to the small number of 1960s to mid-1970s buildings presently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme – and a number of other examples identified above – the AMP Tower clearly demonstrates this class of place.

The associated low-rise St James Building is an integral part of the overall design of the complex and displays unusual architectural detailing that complements the AMP Tower.

The Public Plaza

The AMP Tower and St James Building Complex was noted in 1993 as the ‘first project to enclose space with a mix of high and low rise in the CBD’ (Goad, Lewis, Mayne, Raworth & Turnbull ‘Central City Heritage Study Review’ 1993). The creation of large open plazas in association with postwar multi-storey building development was uncommon, although a number of multi-storey building

designs incorporated small plazas, usually to gain council approval for additional building height. These included the Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Building, 308-336 Collins Street (Stephenson & Turner 1963) as well as later buildings such as the CBC of Sydney Bank, 251-57 Collins Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1968-73) and the Commonwealth Banking Corporation Building, 363-71 Collins Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1972-75).

One of the first large public plazas associated with a free-standing tower was part of the National Mutual Centre, 435-55 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes Mewton & Lobb 1965). It was described in *Building Ideas* March 1965 as follows:

The creation of a much needed open plaza in the heart of the office district was made possible by the City Council's move in buying the whole block and leasing it back to National Mutual with the requirement that only half the area should be built upon and the other half be paved and planted for the use of the public with parking underneath.

Similarly the Southern Cross Hotel, 121 Exhibition Street (L M Perrott & Partners 1962) incorporated a public plaza in the design of the building. This was described in the March 1965 edition of *Building Ideas* as 'a desirable innovation in its outdoor plaza, surrounded on all sides by a two-level promenade of shops, with a fountain and seats at ground level'.

Both these buildings have been demolished and the former public plazas consumed by building development.

The form of the public plaza at the AMP Tower and St James Building Complex has been retained as the setting for the two buildings on the site and remains as a rare feature in within the Hoddle Grid. Despite additions made to the buildings, and the removal of the original sculpture, the plaza remains substantially intact to clearly demonstrate the original urban design concept of a bluestone-paved urban plaza in association with city office building development.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓	<p>CRITERION A Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION B Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).</p>
	<p>CRITERION C Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION D Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).</p>
✓	<p>CRITERION E Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION F Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)</p>
	<p>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 (social significance).</p>
	<p>CRITERION H Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-4)	No
INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

REFERENCES

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- Building Application Plans (BAP), City of Melbourne.
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- 'AMP Square - AMP Tower, St James Building, plaza & Clement Meadmore 'Awakening' Sculpture', 527-555 Bourke Street, Melbourne
- 'Former St James Buildings', 527-555 Bourke Street, Melbourne.
- State Library of Victoria (SLV), picture collection, photographers and images as cited.
- Taylor, Jennifer & Susan Stewart (2001), *Tall buildings : Australian business going up : 1945-1970*, Sydney [NSW].

PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985** B

**Central City Heritage
Review 1993** A

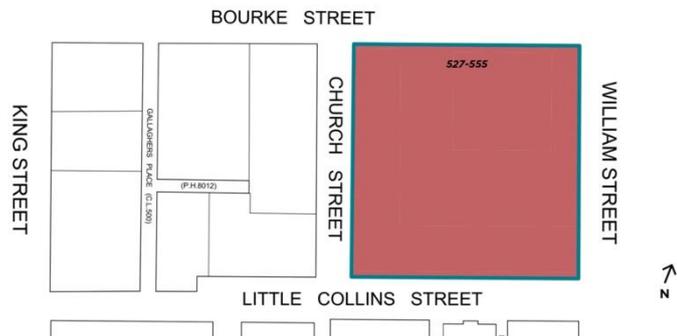
**Review of Heritage
Overlay Listings in the
CBD 2002** Ungraded

**Central City Heritage
Review 2011** Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: AMP Tower and St James Building Complex

PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

AMP Tower and St James Building Complex, 527-555 Bourke Street, a multi-storey office building and plaza complex constructed in 1965-69.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The original external form, materials and detailing of both buildings
- The high level of integrity to the original design of both buildings
- The form of the public plaza.

Later alterations made to the street level facades of both buildings and the roof-top addition to the St James Building are not significant. The garden beds, ramped walkways and in-built furniture within the plaza are not significant.

How it is significant?

The AMP Tower and St James Building Complex at 527-555 Bourke Street is of historical, rarity, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

Constructed in 1965-69 to a design by Skidmore Owings & Merrill in association with Bates Smart & McCutcheon, the AMP Tower and St James Building Complex has a clear association with the postwar building boom which transformed central Melbourne into a modern high-rise city. The design of these commercial buildings from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s – many of which were architect designed –

was driven by the commercial demands and the prestige afforded by a dominant city presence (Criterion A).

The AMP Tower and St James Building are fine and intact representative examples of Post-War Modernist commercial buildings. Lead design by American architects Skidmore Owings & Merrill, the buildings strongly reflect the style which was popular in the 1960s to the mid-1970s, particularly in central Melbourne. Constructed as a 26-storey office tower on a prominent corner site, the freestanding AMP Tower clearly demonstrates typical characteristics of a 1960s to mid-1970s structure, including four identical grid-like walls formed from dominant vertical piers and repetitive square window and spandrel units, a podium base and deep crowning cornice, and the use of materials such as reconstructed granite-faced precast concrete panels, bronze-tinted glazing and anodised aluminium window frames. Utilising the same materials, the sloping and angled grid-like walls of the low-rise St James Building similarly demonstrate typical characteristics of a grid-like 1960s to mid-1970s structure. Despite alterations and additions made to the two buildings, the AMP Tower and St James Building clearly demonstrates the principle characteristics of a postwar multi-storey commercial complex (Criterion D).

The AMP Tower and St James Building Complex is a well-considered and carefully detailed example of a designed urban space in the Melbourne CBD. Widely discussed and illustrated in contemporary architectural journals during and after construction, the site – with prominent corner tower, L-shaped building which encloses the site and associated public plaza – presents as a well-designed and now rare urban space in the CBD. Despite alterations, including the removal of the original Clement Meadmore sculpture 'Awakening' from the plaza, the overall form of the original 1960s urban space can be understood and appreciated (Criterion B & Criterion E).

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)

