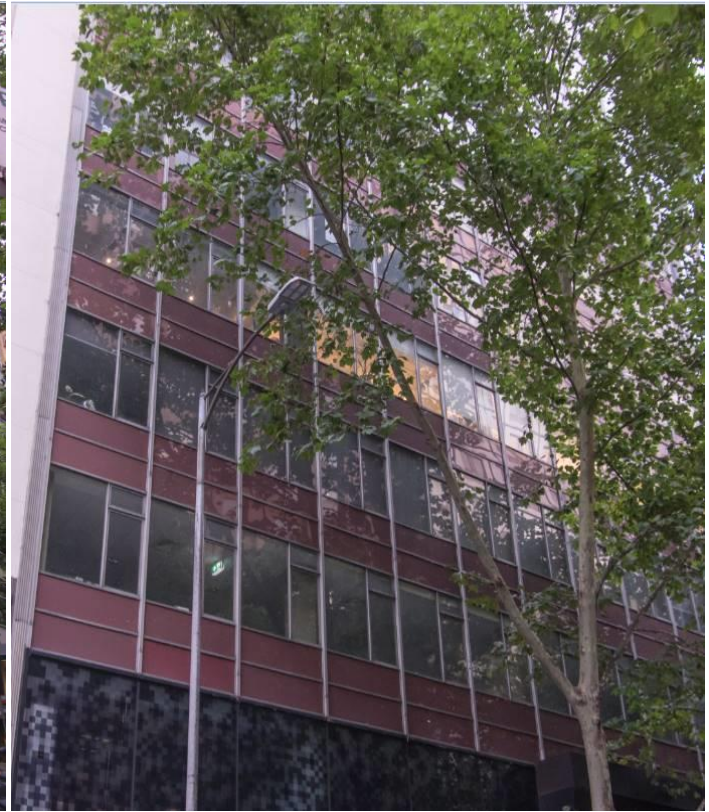
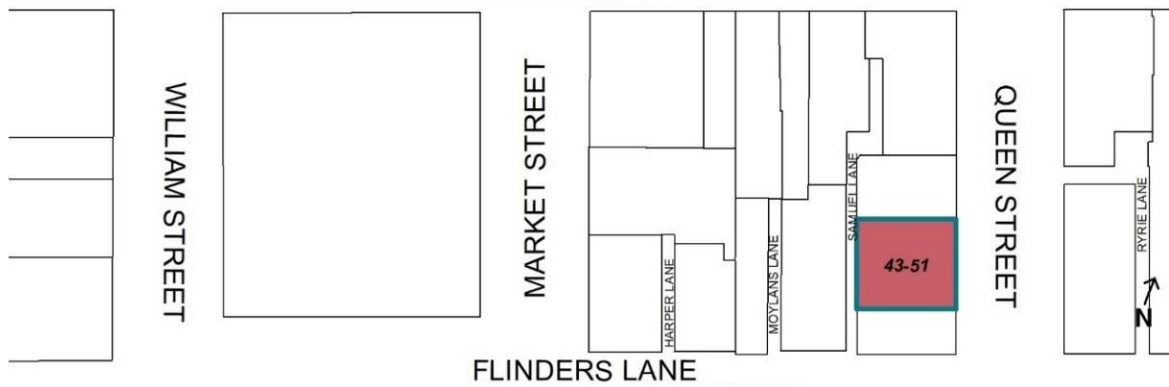


SITE NAME	Former Union House [also known as Union Insurance of Canton Building and Canton Insurance Building]
STREET ADDRESS	43-51 Queen Street, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	108062



COLLINS STREET



SURVEY DATE: March 2019

SURVEY BY: Context

HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
		FORMER GRADE	C
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	Bates Smart & McCutcheon	BUILDER:	E A Watts
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Postwar Period (1945-1965)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1957

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any 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
3 Building a commercial city	3.2 Business and finance

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Not able to be determined
1920s	Office
1960s	Office

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Extent of overlay: refer to map

SUMMARY

The former Union House at 43-51 Queen Street is an 11- storey postwar curtain wall commercial office building built in 1957 in the Post-War Modernist style. It was designed by architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon and constructed by builder E A Watts for the international company Union Insurance Society of Canton who occupied the building from 1957-70. The building has been used for commercial offices from that time.

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.

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

Prior to the construction of the subject building at 43-51 Queen Street, the subject site, part of Crown Allotment 10, Block 3, was occupied by a four-storey building named the York Chambers (Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 18, 1925). York Chambers, a brick building comprising a basement, ground and three upper floors, was auctioned in February 1952. An auction advertisement for the site described its 'valuable position on the west side of Queen Street, south of Collins Street. Situated as it is in the heart of the financial centre of Melbourne, should be of special interest to insurance companies' (*Age* 20 February 1952:10).

Construction of the subject building had started by February 1957 (*Age* 7 February 1957:3). Constructed for the Union Insurance Society of Canton, the building was designed by architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon, and was due to be completed for a budget of £600,000 (*Age* 7 February 1957:3).

The first commercial cargo insurance entity established in China to pay claims in China was the Canton Insurance Society in 1805, formed in Macau by two independent trading houses, Dent & Co

and Jardine Matheson & Co. In 1835 Dent left the partnership to set up the Union Insurance Society of Canton (initially called the China Insurance Company), which moved to Hong Kong in 1842 when the island was ceded to Britain. The society was reorganised into an insurance company along modern lines in 1874 (Swiss Re 2017:6). In its new legal form, the Union expanded rapidly, opening branch offices in London in 1874 and Melbourne in 1883 (UISC 1952:16).

The Union acquired China Traders Insurance Co in 1906, the China Fire Insurance Co in 1916, and the Yangtze Insurance Association in 1925. By 1920 the Union was said to be the largest marine insurance company in the world (UISC 1952:10; Smith & Middleton 1920:194). By 1952, a branch had been established in every major Australian city (UISC 1952:16).

The Union Insurance Society of Canton was acquired by the Guardian Assurance Company in 1967, which was itself acquired by Axa in 1999 (Guardian 2019). Constructed to the height limit of 40.2 metres (132 feet), the building made full use of the 82-foot frontage to Queen Street, however, was purposely constructed to be only 60-foot deep, which allowed for a parking area to the rear (Age 7 February 1957:3; National Trust 2014). The insurance firm intended to take up only three floors of the site, leaving the rest of the building to be leased as offices. A Tom Bass abstract sculpture was placed above the main entrance, which represented the clipper ship symbol of the insurance company. A mosaic mural was installed at ground floor level by Sydney artist Eric Smith. A clock was also to be fixed to the front of the building (see Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3). (Age 7 February 1957:3).



Figure 1. The Union Insurance Society of Canton Ltd building at 43-51 Queen Street in 1970 showing the clock at its southern end (Source: Sievers, 1970 SLV [copyright](#))

The subject building was constructed with precast concrete wall panels and imported coloured glass spandrels. The glass spandrels gave a sense of horizontality to the building (National Trust 2014). As the site was silty, the building required 25-foot piles driven into the ground (Age 7 February 1957:3). The Union Insurance Society of Canton building opened on 15 March 1958 (Age 24 March 1958:11).

In 1958, the architecture magazine *Cross Section* described the building thus:

An unusual sight, a sign of the times, was the simultaneous completion of these neighbouring office blocks in Queen-Street, Melbourne. On the right is the Norwich Union Insurance Society's building, designed by Messrs Yuncken, Freeman Bros, Griffiths & Simpson; on the left the Canton Insurance Co building, by Messrs Bates, Smart & McCutcheon. Both are neat comfortable & dignified. Canton House offers passers-by the pleasure of a mosaic mural at ground floor level. Sydney artist Eric Smith was commissioned to design it; the final outcome so retires into the restrained character of the building front that the designer might well have been Mr McCutcheon himself. A sculpture over the doorway is by Tom Bass. (Canton Insurance, E A Watts, builders; £633,000, 82-ft frontage) (Cross Section 1958:1).

The building has been primarily used as offices by various companies, with the Union Insurance Society of Canton, the company that constructed the site, occupying part of the building from 1958 until 1970 (S&Mc 1970). Another long-term tenant, an accounting firm named Marquard & Sons, were tenants from 1960 until at least 1983 (S&Mc 1960; *Age* 23 February 1983:27). Another insurance firm, Economic Insurance Co Ltd, was present at the site from 1960 until at least 1974 (S&Mc 1960, 1974). Other occupants have included management consultants, real estate agents and value assessors at different periods (S&Mc 1960, 1965, 1970, 1974).

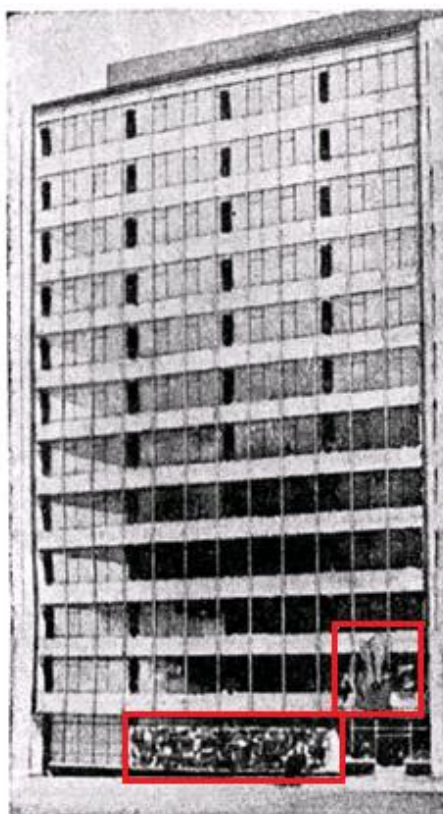


Figure 2. An illustration of the subject building in 1957 prior to its completion. The mosaic mural at street level can be seen, as can the sculpture above the main entrance (both outlined in red). (Source: *Age* 7 February 1957:3)



Figure 3. The Union Insurance Society of Canton Ltd building at 43-51 Queen Street (middle), and the Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society at 53-55 Queen Street (RHS), both under construction in December 1957. (Source: Fowler 1957, SLV **copyright**)

The most significant change to the building since its construction has been the removal of the mural, sculpture and clock from the ground floor façade. This seems most likely to have occurred in 1977 when alterations were carried out to the ground floor (MBAI 47822). The building has otherwise been subjected to internal partition changes (MBAI).

The site now contains 19 businesses, two shops and two food and drink outlets (CoMMaps).

Bates Smart & McCutcheon, architects

Bates, Smart & McCutcheon (BSM) 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, thus making it one of the oldest practices in the country (Goad 2012:72). By the 1960s the firm had become one of the largest practices in the country (Goad 2012:72).

During the 1930s, BSM 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, Buckley & Nunn Building in Bourke Street (now David Jones), and a church in Camberwell (Goad 2012:73).

By the 1950s, BSM had become Australia's 'expert' in high-rise office buildings (Goad 2012:73). Much of their work at this time were large structures with glass curtain walls, and in Melbourne this

was exemplified by ICI House which broke the city's height limits (Goad 2012:73). This work was considered to have 'changed the skyline [of Melbourne] forever' (Goad 2012:73).

At the time, the firm also developed a reputation for their work on university and other educational facilities. They were responsible for much of the laying out of Monash University, as well as the construction of some of the original buildings, and also had a hand in designing RMIT (Goad 2012:73). Commissions for schools include Yarra Valley Grammar School, Wesley College's Syndal campus, and the Peninsula Grammar School (Goad 2012:73). Their best-known piece of educational work is most likely Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne (1956), which was built on the site of an earlier Reed & Barnes Gothic structure (Goad 2012:73). Wilson Hall features a sculpture by Tom Bass, as does 158-164 Queen Street Melbourne (also designed by BSM and built in 1964), and the subject site (the sculpture of which is missing), showing a relationship between BSM and the sculptor.

BSM has continued to be an influential firm in the time since the construction of the subject site. Notable work by the firm includes the Crown Casino and promenade, and the Royal Children's Hospital (Goad 2012:74). BSM has also been involved in large collaborative designs in Melbourne with international architects, such as Melbourne Central with Kisho Kurokawa, Collins Place with I M Pei, and Federation Square with Lab Architecture Studio (Goad 2012:74).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The former Union House at 43-51 Queen Street is an 11-storey commercial curtain wall building in the Post-War Modernist style, designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon and constructed in 1957. The subject site is positioned on the western side of Queen Street with Collins Street to its north and Flinders Lane to its south. The building has a secondary frontage to Samuel Lane at its rear.

The building exhibits key characteristics of the postwar International style, particularly the lightweight fine graded modular curtain wall façade. The facade to Queen Street comprises an aluminium framed nonloadbearing curtain wall, with alternating clear glazed and coloured opaque glass spandrel panels providing a lightweight grid across the façade. Every glazed panel is fitted with a large fixed window adjacent to an openable casement sash as the building predates the use of air-conditioning. The frame is natural aluminium finish and the solid panels are opaque red glass divided by glazing bars reinforcing a horizontality to the composition.

The façade has been substantially altered at the ground and first floor level with the replacement of original shop fronts and lower portion of the curtain wall. The original Tom Bass sculpture, Eric Smith mosaic mural and clock have also been removed.

The building has no formal termination or parapet at the top level, as is typical of the style.

The rear elevation facing Samuel Lane comprises full width spandrel panels that appear to be of reinforced concrete, separated by rows of aluminium framed windows similar to the pattern of the Queen Street facade. The building maintains its original set back off Samuel Lane above street level, however at ground level the original carpark has been built over.

INTEGRITY

The former Union House is largely intact with some changes visible to original or early fabric. Above first floor level the principle façade facing Queens Street retains its original non-loadbearing aluminium curtain wall with its alternating clear glazed and opaque coloured glass spandrel panels.

The rear façade facing Samuel Lane also retains its precast concrete spandrels and natural aluminium glazing system. Alterations to the Queens Street façade include the first-floor section of the curtain wall being replaced with a projecting modular panel. At street level the retail and office foyer shopfronts have been altered and the original Tom Bass sculpture, Eric Smith mosaic mural and clock have been removed. The original open car parking area fronting Samuel Lane has been built over with the set back above street level maintained. Notwithstanding these alterations overall the building has high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The 1950s saw the development of the modern multi-story office building in Melbourne, often built for insurance companies or finance companies, or for professional offices. Reinforced concrete frames provided the structural systems, allowing the façade to be clad in a non-load bearing curtain wall. In early examples, curtain walls were typically fully glazed, while in later examples, a greater range of materials were used to achieve variety of expression.

There are a number of buildings in the Hoddle Grid within the City of Melbourne which were designed in the same period and display similar characteristics to the former Union House. These are detailed below.

State-significant places

A comparative example in the City of Melbourne which is located immediately adjacent to the Hoddle Grid is ICI House, 1-4 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1958). This place is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H0786).

Locally-significant places

Precinct Heritage Overlay

As only a piece-meal evaluation of postwar buildings within the Hoddle Grid in the City of Melbourne has previously occurred, few buildings from the early postwar period are currently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme. Those constructed in the 1950s that are included in the Heritage Overlay are currently included as part of Heritage Precincts, but are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as Individual Heritage Places. These places are:



Former Gilbert Court, 100-104 Collins Street (John A La Gerche, 1954-55) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Significant place.



Former Hosie's Hotel, 1-5 Elizabeth Street & 288-290 Flinders Street (Mussen McKay & Potter, 1954-55), included in HO505 Flinders Gate Precinct as a Significant place.



Coates Building, 18-22 Collins Street (John A La Gerche, 1958-59) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Significant place.



Former Bank of Adelaide Building, 265-269 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton & Lobb, 1959-60) included in HO502 The Block Precinct as a Contributory place.



Former Allans Building, 276-278 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton and Lobb with Charles N Hollinshed, 1956-57) included in HO502 The Block Precinct as a Significant place.

Other Examples

Despite the demolition of many 1950s 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 initial period of curtain wall construction in Melbourne and demonstrate similar characteristics to the subject building. The following examples are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as Individual Heritage Places as part of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review:



Lauren's House, 414-416 Lonsdale Street (Harold Bloom, 1956) (Interim HO1254).



Former Atlas Assurance Building, 404-406 Collins Street (H Garnet Alsop & Partners, 1958-61) (Interim HO1008).



Former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, 376 Flinders Lane (Commonwealth Department of Works, 1957).



Former AMP Building, 402-408 Lonsdale Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1956-59).



Former Ajax House, 103-105 Queen Street (HD Berry, 1956).



HC Sleigh Building, 166-172 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1953-55).



London Assurance House, 468-470 Bourke Street (Bernard Evans, 1960).



Coles & Garrard Building, 376-378 Bourke Street (Meldrum & Noad, 1957).

Analysis

The former Union House compares strongly with other examples of the style in central Melbourne.

With its highly intact upper floor levels of lightweight aluminium framed, fine-graded modular curtain wall façade, with alternating clear glazed and coloured opaque glass spandrel panels, it is comparable to Gilbert House at 100-104 Collins Street, one of the earliest curtain wall offices built in central Melbourne built in 1955 (Significant in HO504 Collins East Precinct) and the Coates Building at 18-20 Collins Street (significant in HO504 Collins East Precinct).

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

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

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 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

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Postwar Thematic Environmental History 1945-1975

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PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985** D

**Central City Heritage
Review 1993** C

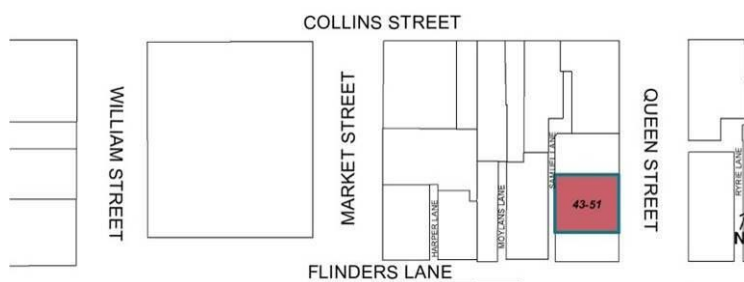
**Review of Heritage
overlay listings in the
CBD 2002** Ungraded

**Central City Heritage
Review 2011** Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Union House

PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The former Union House building at 43-51 Queen Street, Melbourne, completed to a design by Bates Smart & McCutcheon in 1958, is significant.

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

- Original building form and scale;
- Original nonloadbearing curtain wall including natural aluminium frame windows and opaque glass spandrel panels to its principle (Queen Street) façade; and
- Original expressed reinforced concrete spandrels and natural aluminium frame windows to its rear (Samuel Lane).

Later alterations, particularly at street level, are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Union House building at 376-378 Bourke Street is of local historic and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Union House building, designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon and built by E A Watts in 1958, is historically significant as a part of the postwar development and rapid growth of corporate architecture in Melbourne of the 1950s-60s. The building was constructed for the international company Union Insurance Society of Canton, who owned and occupied the building from 1958 to 1970. Located in the financial and commercial precinct of Queen Street, the building is significant historically as a

reflection of the growth of insurance and assurance companies in Victoria during the 1950s-60s, that cemented

Melbourne's pre-eminent role in the state for financial institutions. The building was designed by architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon, the architectural practice responsible for the design of many notable buildings in Melbourne. By the 1950s, at the time the subject site was built, the firm had become one of the largest practices in the country and had become Australia's 'experts' in high-rise office buildings, exemplified in Melbourne by ICI House (1958). (Criterion A)

The former Union House building is significant as a largely intact example of an architect-designed commercial development in central Melbourne, utilising the Post-War Modernist style that characterised the new wave of development in the postwar period. These buildings represented the new modernism in their modular, industrial Bauhaus inspired aesthetic incorporating features such as consistent access to daylight and open floor plans to meet new standards for commercial office accommodation. The building retains defining characteristics of its style, including the lightweight aluminium framed, fine-graded modular curtain wall façade, with alternating clear glazed and coloured opaque glass spandrel panels providing a lightweight grid across the façade, as well as the rear elevation facing Samuel Lane with full width spandrel panels that appear to be of reinforced concrete, separated by rows of aluminium framed windows similar to the pattern of the Queen Street façade. (Criterion D)

Primary source

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