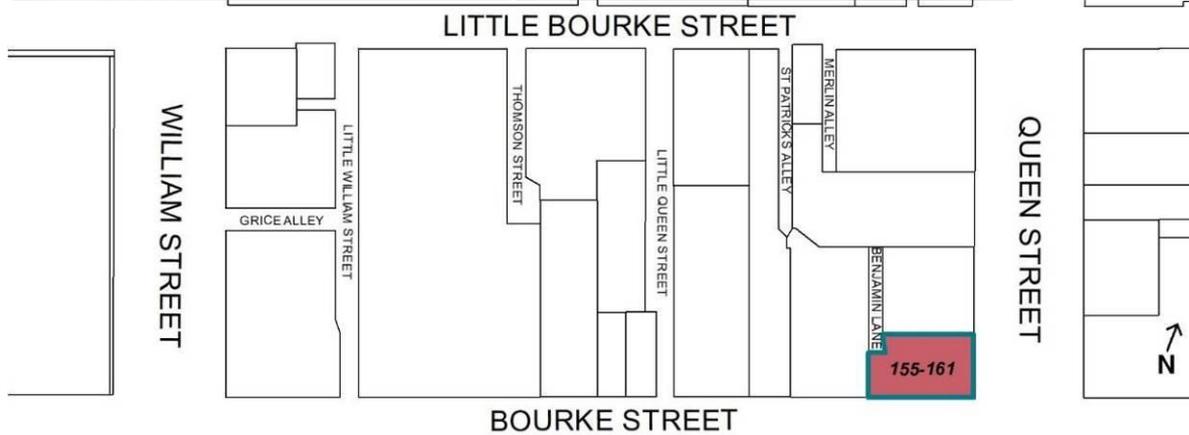


**SITE NAME** Former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building

**STREET ADDRESS** 155-161 Queen Street, Melbourne

**PROPERTY ID** 108071



**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:** Costain, Hansen & Yuncken

**DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:** Postwar Period (1945-1975)

**DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:** 1961-62

**THEMES**

<b>ABORIGINAL THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>
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
<b>POST WAR THEMES</b>	<b>DOMINANT SUB-THEMES</b>
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**

<b>THEMATIC MAPPING AND LANDUSE</b>	
1890s	Offices
1920s	Offices
1960s	Offices

**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 South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street is a 13-storey postwar office building, constructed in 1961-62 by Costain, Hansen & Yuncken to a design by Bates Smart & McCutcheon for the South British Insurance Company. It has been used for offices since 1962.

## 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

Prior to the construction of the subject building, its site, part of Crown Allotment 8, Block 19, was occupied by a series of buildings that ranged from two to five storeys. The buildings at the corner of the site, at the intersection of Bourke and Queen streets, were known as the Sun Buildings, built by 1895, in which year the subject site was addressed as 448-450 Bourke Street (Mahlstedt Map Section 1, no 16, 1925; CoMMaps).

The subject building was completed for the South British Insurance Company Ltd in 1962 (See Figure 1). Architects Bates Smart & McCutcheon were responsible for the design and engineering of the building, and Costain, Hansen & Yuncken were the builders (*Cross Section* 1962:3). The building was completed at a cost of £370,000 (*Cross Section* 1962:3).

The South British Insurance Company was founded in New Zealand in 1872 as the South British Fire & Marine Insurance Company of New Zealand, issuing their first policy in August of that year (Aviva 2019). By 1906, the company offered insurance policies across most sectors, including accident insurance, while maintaining their interests in maritime risks. In 1907, the company introduced its first motor insurance policy, a reflection of an increase in car ownership at the time. In 1907, the company was incorporated to become the South British Insurance Company Ltd (Aviva 2019).

By 1886, the South British Insurance Company Ltd had established branches in almost every major city in Australia, and was beginning to acquire other insurance companies, such as the Commercial

Insurance Company of Australia. The firm was registered at 11 Queen Street, Melbourne, by 1889, and in 1908 it purchased a site in Queen Street where it planned to build an office for £20,000 (Aviva 2019).

After the 1967 takeover of Australian Capital Assurance Ltd, the South British Insurance Company Ltd the company continued to grow, establishing branches in many Australian regional cities, as well as internationally (Aviva 2019).

The South British Insurance Company Ltd amalgamated with the New Zealand Insurance Company Ltd in 1981, at which point the firm was named the New Zealand South British Group Ltd. In 1984, New Zealand South British changed its name to the NZI Corporation Ltd, which was acquired by the General Accident Fire & Life Assurance Corporation in 1989, which the Aviva Group took over in 2002 (Aviva 2019).

When it opened in 1962, the building was described by the architecture journal, *Cross Section*:

*In the trend from slick glass curtain wall cladding to more heavily modelled facades there will come a stage in which development becomes decadence. This building may bring about the fall, not because it is itself decadent, but because there are few architectural firms that can attempt this sort of surface enrichment and get away with it. South British succeeds by tasteful choice of colour and texture and by the consistent articulation of the different elements of the facade as separate entities. The cruciform white artificial stone panels (each 11 feet high and weighing half a ton) are delineated floor-by-floor by a continuous band of black vitreous tiles, and a small gap between adjacent units prevents the facade from tending to assume a monolithic character. The Skidmore Owings & Merrill design for a building in Brussels has a comparable system of articulated panels, but in the SOM design these panels were also the structural system — and this is where the danger lies, that in using a motif that began as a structural concept as a device for getting "expression" into wall cladding, caprice and whimsicality may oust common sense and sound design. The ground floor of South British is devoted to a luxurious lift lobby and some very good planting and landscaping. Air conditioning: low velocity to central zone, individually controlled high velocity induction units around the perimeter (Cross Section 1962:3).*

The planting and landscaping referred to in the article in *Cross Section* and seen in Figure 2 was removed in 1975 as part of substantial remodelling work carried out to the building at this time. The illuminated roof of this section of the building, also seen in Figure 2, was also removed as part of the 1975 work (MBAI 45891). Other work to the building consisted of the construction of internal partitions to the offices at varying times (MBAI). The building was auctioned in 1986, when it was described in a sales notice as 'a prominent city building in the heart of the commercial district'. It was refurbished in 1988 (*Age* 4 December 1986:31; 28 March 1988:32).



Figure 1. South British Insurance building, corner of Bourke and Queen Streets, 1961. (Source: Sievers 1961, SLV copyright)



Figure 2. The entrance to the subject building as it appeared when it was built in 1961-62. (Source: Sievers 1961, SLV copyright)

The building has been used as offices, with multiple tenants in addition to the South British Insurance Company. By 1965, the building was tenanted by the offices of the Home Insurance Company, Harford Fire Insurance, a values assessor, the head office of Alcoa of Australia Pty Ltd (located in the building from 1962), and a shipping agency. All these firms were still present in 1970 (S&Mc 1965, 1970; *Age* 20 June 1962:22). By 1974, of this tenant group only the South British Insurance Company and the value assessor remained (S&Mc 1974). By 1977 the building was tenanted by Mutual Permanent Building Society and an image of the subject site can be seen in an advertisement from that time (see Figure 3). South British Insurance Company remained at the site until at least 1977 (*Age* 15 November 1977:7, *Age* 1 January 1977:41).

Since the mid-1990s, the building has been used as offices by multiple tenants, including accountants, solicitors and employment agencies (*Age* 1 November 1995:33; *Age* 27 September 1996:7; *Age* 1 August 1998:125). It is currently occupied by 19 businesses and four shops (CoMMaps).



Figure 3. The subject site, as it appeared in advertisements for the Mutual Permanent Building Society. (Source: *Age* 15 November 1977:7)

*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 was 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).

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 their original buildings, and 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, 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 160 Queen Street Melbourne (also designed by BSM), 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).

#### *Costain, Hansen & Yuncken, builders*

Otto Yuncken was born in Lyndoch, South Australia in 1865 and trained as a carpenter under his German-born father. Together they built simple structures in the Barossa Valley before Otto left for Port Adelaide at the age of 18 (Carland 2009). By 1885 Yuncken had moved to Melbourne and taken up work with Clements Langford, one of the city's largest building companies. During his time with Clements Langford, Yuncken studied at the Working Men's College and attained first class in architectural drawing and carpentry (Carland 2009). After leaving Clements Langford, Yuncken partnered with Lauritz Hansen in 1918 to form Hansen & Yuncken (Hansen Yuncken 2019).

In 1962-63, the firm Hansen & Yuncken became Costain, Hansen & Yuncken Ltd (*Cross Section* 1 April 1963:1; NSW State Records 741116).

Hansen & Yuncken was responsible for some of Melbourne's 'most memorable buildings' (Carland 2009). Earlier works include the Collingwood Football Club Grandstand, the Port Authority building in Market Street (Carland 2009). The firm was responsible for renovations to Myer buildings and constructed the new spires at St. Patrick's Cathedral. The company also devised an innovative suspended scaffold to replaster the domed ceiling at the State Library of Victoria (Carland 2009).

The company exists today as Hansen Yuncken and has built many notable structures over the past decade, including the Myponga Dam (1959), The Alfred Hospital (1969-77) and Council House 2 for the City of Melbourne (2006) (Hansen Yuncken 2019).

#### **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street is a 13-storey commercial building in the Post-War Modernist style, designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon and constructed in 1961-62. Located on the northwest corner of Queen Street and Bourke Street, it also has rear access to Benjamin Lane.

With its use of nonloadbearing precast concrete panels incorporating fixed vertical glazing and recessed transoms as the main cladding material, it is a later example of the style that developed in the 1960s which moved away from the use of modular aluminium frame glass curtain wall systems to more heavily articulated and three dimensional façade systems. The facades to both Queen Street and Bourke Street comprise vertical modules of recessed glazing and opaque transom panels set between concrete (referred to in the 1962 *Cross Section* article as 'artificial stone') mullions or 'pilasters' that are disconnected at each floor level to create a horizontal shadow line that also forms a continuous narrow band to demarcate each floor level. The building demonstrates the overall design aesthetic of the Post-War Modernist style which is based on repetitive horizontal and vertical modules. The building has no formal termination or parapet at the top level, as is typical of the style.

The original concrete peripheral columns of the main structural grid are extant at street level, however the original high undercroft area with its glazed entry lobby and garden set back within a colonnade (see Figure 2) have been replaced with contemporary shopfronts with an angled set back frontage to the corner surmounted by a projecting cantilevered box awning added to the Bourke Street frontage.

### **INTEGRITY**

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building is largely intact with some changes visible to original or early fabric.. Above the street level, the building retains its original modular pattern of fenestration, and the materiality of the precast panels with their recessed window openings and transom panels set between concrete 'pilasters' appears as originally constructed.

At ground level, the original set back glazed entry lobby and garden have been replaced, and the undercroft area infilled with contemporary shopfronts and a projecting cantilevered box awning. Such alterations at ground level are common within Hoddle Grid. Overall the building is of 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. From the late 1950s through into the 1970s and even beyond, the Post-War Modernist style enjoyed widespread popularity, particularly for medium and high-rise commercial buildings. 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 with an aluminium frame, while in later examples, a greater range of materials such as precast concrete panels were used to achieve variety of expression.

The following examples are comparable with the former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street, being of a similar use, scale, style and/or construction date.

#### **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*



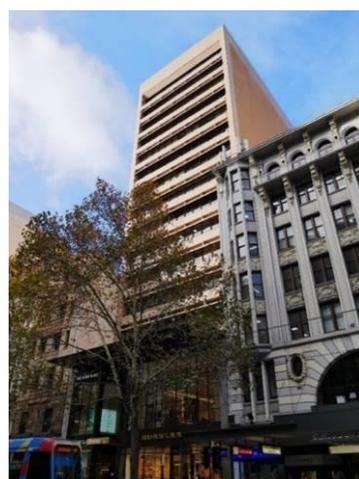
Former Reserve Bank of Australia, 56-64 Collins Street (Commonwealth Department of Works, 1964-66) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Contributory place.



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)



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



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)



AMP Tower and St James Building Complex, 527-555 Bourke Street (Skidmore Owings & Merrill in association with Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1965-69)



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

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street is comparable to a number of central Melbourne buildings included – or proposed for inclusion – in the HO including the Scottish Amicable building at 126-146 Queen Street (HO1213) and the Royal Insurance Group building at 430-442 Collins Street (Interim HO1010). The buildings demonstrate the prominent Bauhaus grid design aesthetic of the Post-War Modernist style, based on repetitive nonloadbearing precast concrete façade modules to achieve a more three-dimensional depth to the facades and to maximise access to daylight. However, unlike the other HO examples, the subject building lacks the Bauhaus inspired minimalism and geometric clarity.

The VHR and HO listed Victorian State Offices at 1 Macarthur Street and 1 Treasury Place (H1526, HO174 Treasury Reserve Precinct) constructed in 1969, are also comparable to 155-161 Queen Street in terms of scale and architectural style. Both the subject building and the Victorian State Offices use multiple narrow precast concrete panels incorporating the window modules to create a

three dimensionality to the composition. Also designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon, the Macarthur Street/Treasury Place group of buildings is however more sophisticated and geometrically resolved in their innovative use of precast concrete cladding.

155-161 Queen Street is also comparable to 158-164 Queen Street which has been assessed as individually significant as part of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review. Both buildings were designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon and demonstrate a refined use of modular precast concrete panels that became popular during the 1960s, to create a three dimensionality to the composition. 151-155 Queen Street is an earlier example of this technique.

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**ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**


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✓

**CRITERION A**

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

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**CRITERION B**

Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

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**CRITERION C**

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).

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✓

**CRITERION D**

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

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✓

**CRITERION E**

Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

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**CRITERION F**

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)

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**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).

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**CRITERION H**

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

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**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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## PREVIOUS STUDIES

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**Central Activities District  
Conservation Study 1985** D

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**Central City Heritage  
Review 1993** C

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

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**Central City Heritage  
Review 2011** Ungraded

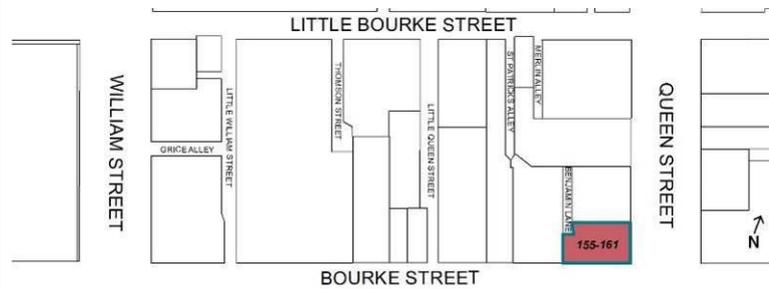
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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Heritage Place:** Former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building



**PS ref no:** HOXXXX



### What is significant?

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street, Melbourne, completed in 1962 to a design by Bates Smart and McCutcheon, is significant.

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

- Original building form and scale; and
- Original non-loadbearing precast concrete curtain wall cladding including recessed window openings and transom panels set between concrete 'pilasters'.

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

### How it is significant?

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building at 155-161 Queen Street is of historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

### Why it is significant?

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building, designed and engineered by Bates Smart & McCutcheon and constructed in 1961-62, is historically significant for the evidence it provides of the rapid growth of corporate architecture in 1950s-60s' Melbourne that reflected the expansion of large national and international companies opting for construction and naming rights of new city office buildings as a form of promotion and fund investment. Located in the financial and commercial precinct of Queen Street, the South British Insurance Company Ltd Building is significant historically as a

reflection of the growth of insurance and assurance companies in Victoria during the 1950s-60s, cementing Melbourne's pre-eminent role in the state for financial institutions. The South British Insurance Company owned and occupied the building from 1962 to 1977. (Criterion A)

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building is significant as a largely intact example of postwar commercial development in central Melbourne in the Post-War Modernist style that characterised this new wave of development. These buildings represented the new modernism in their modular, industrial Bauhaus inspired aesthetic and incorporated features such as consistent access to daylight and open floor plans to meet new standards for commercial office accommodation. The subject building exhibits the key characteristics of the style, including its non-loadbearing precast concrete curtain wall cladding, recessed window openings and transom panels set between concrete 'pilasters'. (Criterion D)

The former South British Insurance Company Ltd Building is aesthetically significant as a refined and substantial example of the later development in curtain wall design constructed during the 1960s when a mix of materials was utilised to create a greater modularity and three-dimensional quality to the facades. Its aesthetic significance lies in the retention of the fine detailing of its facades to both Queen Street and Bourke Street, where vertical modules of recessed glazing and opaque transom panels set between concrete mullions or 'pilasters' that are disconnected at each floor level create a horizontal shadow line and give a refined modularity to the facade. (Criterion E)

#### **Primary source**

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