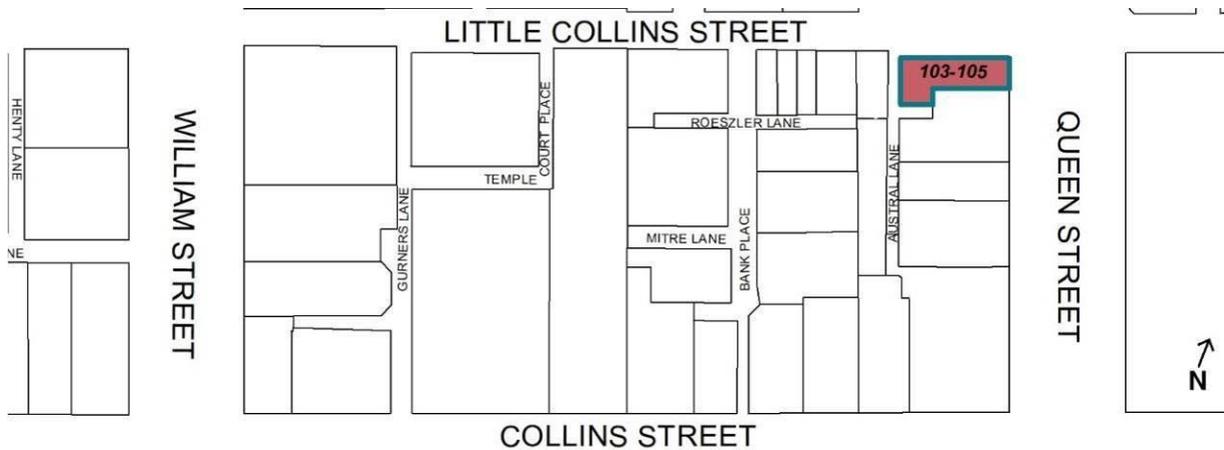


SITE NAME	Former Ajax House
STREET ADDRESS	103-105 Queen Street, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	108067



SURVEY DATE: March 2019		SURVEY BY: Context	
HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	No
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	H D Berry	FORMER GRADE	C
		BUILDER:	Hansen & Yuncken Pty Ltd
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Postwar Period (1945-1965)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1956

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	Hotels and lodging
1920s	Pubs
1960s	Offices, Services

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

A six-storey commercial office building with a basement, named Ajax House constructed in 1956 to the design of architect H D Berry for the Australian company Ajax Insurance Company. It was used as the company headquarters and for its Victorian branch for twenty years, until 1976. The design reflects the new modernism of the early postwar period, emphasising a modern and progressive aesthetic.

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

The L-shaped subject allotment at 103-105 Queen Street is part of Crown Allotment 9, Block 14, purchased by James Connell in 1837 ('Town of Melbourne' 1838). The site was occupied by the Temple Court Hotel, which, by 1954, had existed on the subject site for 118 years (*Herald* 13 February 1954:5; *Argus* 26 April 1855:5).

The hotel was auctioned in 1953, with its location being described as 'a magnificent corner site in the hub of the insurance, commercial and financial world, suitable for immediate development'. However, it was passed in at £62,500 (*Age* 11 November 1953:6; *Argus* 22 January 1954:7). Ajax Insurance Co Ltd purchased the subject site for £72,500 in January 1954. The plans to demolish the hotel and replace it with a new building, as tall as the 40 metre (132 foot) height limit, was announced at the same time (*Argus* 22 January 1954:7).

Australian company Ajax Insurance Company Limited was registered as a company in August 1934 (*Argus* 9 August 1934:6). With its head office in Melbourne, the company's objectives included the provision of insurance for fire, accident, employers' liability, fidelity guarantee, and all other kinds of

insurance (except life insurance) (*Dun's Gazette for New South Wales* 1934:5). In 1951, the company was absorbed by the Industrial Acceptance Corporation Ltd (IAC), a closely associated company (*Age* 17 February 1951:6) but continued to trade as Ajax Insurance Company. In 1981, the company became Citigeneral Insurance Australia Ltd, and later, Citicorp General Insurance Ltd. From 2005, the company operated as Metlife General Insurance Ltd, closing in 2013 (ABD; NIC).

The architectural plans for a building at 103-105 Queen Street, a six-storey office building, were prepared by architect H D Berry in March 1955, and the building permit application was lodged with the City of Melbourne in August 1955. Hansen & Yuncken were appointed as the building company for the construction work, estimated at £196,000 (*Age* 21 November 1956:58; MBAI 29299).

By September 1956, the building was under construction, with the reinforced concrete framework and external panelling underway (see Figure 1). The building was one of the major 40 metre high building projects carried out between 1954 and 1956, when Melbourne saw an office-building boom, especially along Queen Street (*Argus* 7 August 1956:4).

The head office and Victorian Branch of the Ajax Insurance Co Ltd was to operate from the new building. Named Ajax House after the company, the building was opened in March 1957 (see Figure 2) (*Age* 1 March 1957:6).

Internally, the ground, first and second floors were purpose-designed for the Ajax Company's Victorian branch (ground and first level) and head office (second level) operations, with the fourth and fifth floors reserved as open-plan office spaces for lease. The top level contained caretaker's rooms and a recreation room. The main ground-floor lobby and staircase were paved in terrazzo, while the main office areas were carpeted (PROV VPRS 11200/P7 unit 1066).

With the three lower levels of the building occupied by the Ajax Insurance Co, in 1960 the fourth and fifth level offices were leased to financial companies and professionals including Surrey Insurance Co Ltd; Ham, P Walter & Co, stock and share brokers; L B Wallace & Son, accountants; and Ross Wallace & Co, accountants (S&Mc 1960).

Featuring a non-loadbearing curtain walled section on each elevation, the building originally had a terracotta tiled finish to the Queen and Little Collins street elevations (see Figure 2 and Figure 3) (PROV VPRS 11200/P7 unit 1066). Only one formal entrance existed on Queen Street, with an opening made to the ground level façade of the Little Collins Street elevation, possibly in 1982, when alterations were made to the ground floor offices and the basement at a cost of \$100,000 (MBAI 54805).

In 1976, Ajax Insurance Co Ltd sold the building (*Age* 8 April 1976:23; CT:V9161 F608). Following the sale, the building continued to be tenanted through to the 1990s by professionals such as solicitors and auctioneers (*Age* 8 January 1977:99; 21 November 1990:62).

The removal of the terracotta tiling and the addition of concrete panels as recladding to today's ground retail spaces fronting Little Collins Street are likely to be alterations from 1996 when the building was refurbished (MBAI; CoMMaps).

Today, 103-105 Queen Street houses six business tenants and three food and drink outlets (CoMMaps).



Figure 1. 103-105 Queen Street during construction work in September 1956. (Source: *Cross-Section* 1956)



Figure 2. A newspaper illustration from March 1957, showing the completed building named Ajax House. (Source: *Age* 1 March 1957:6)

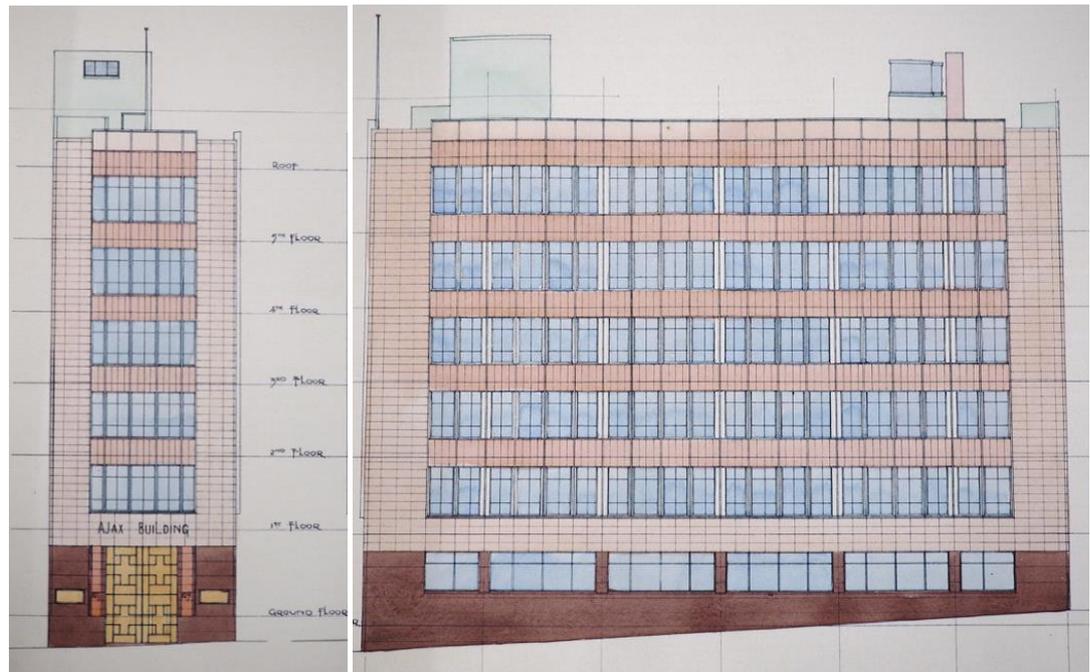


Figure 3. Original plans from 1955, showing the tile-clad Queen Street elevation (left) and Little Collins elevation (right) of the subject building at 103-105 Queen Street. (Source: PROV VPRS 11200/P7 unit 1066)

Australian company Ajax Insurance Company Limited was registered as a company in August 1934 (*Argus* 9 *Argus* 1934:6). With its head office in Melbourne, the company's objectives included the provision of insurance for fire, accident, employers' liability, fidelity guarantee, and all other kinds of insurance (except life insurance) (*Dun's Gazette for New South Wales* 1934:5).

In 1951, the company was absorbed by the Industrial Acceptance Corporation Ltd (IAC), a closely associated company (*Age* 17 February 1951:6) but continued to trade as Ajax Insurance Company. In 1981, the company became Citigeneral Insurance Australia Ltd, and later, Citicorp General Insurance Ltd. From 2005, the company operated as Metlife General Insurance Ltd, closing in 2013 (ABD; NIC).

H D Berry, architect

After serving in World War One, H D Berry passed his Professional Practice Examination in architecture in 1921, and by 1927 had opened his architectural practice at his residence 'Neangar' in Warragul Road, Oakleigh (RVIA 1921:158; November 1921:119 and March 1927:2). Berry's commissions included other city developments as well as buildings in Oakleigh. City projects included a design for a new building 'Central Hotel', located on the south side of Bourke Street between Russell and Exhibition streets (since demolished) (*Argus* 24 August 1939, as cited in AAI record no 17298) In 1959, after Ajax House, Berry was involved in the reconstruction of a hire car company depot at 60 Collins Place, Melbourne, for use by new owners the Industrial Acceptance Corporation (the parent company of Ajax Insurance Co), again with Hansen & Yuncken as builders (*Cross-Section* 1 August 1959:4, as cited in AAI record no 89035). The building has since been demolished.

Other buildings designed by Berry included the Oakleigh Memorial Hall and RSL at 95-97 Drummond Street, Oakleigh, opened in 1922; and a second wing for the Camberley Flats, at 17a Milton Street, Elwood (part of HO7, City of Port Phillip).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The former Ajax House, at 103-105 Queen Street, Melbourne, is a six-storey commercial building located on the south-west corner of Queen Street and Little Collins Street with Austral Lane at its rear. It was constructed in 1956 to a design by architect H D Berry, as the offices and headquarters of the Ajax Insurance Company. The building has a narrow frontage to Queen Street with a longer frontage to Little Collins Street. Although it was constructed after 1945, the building exhibits some characteristics of the new modernism and of the Interwar Functionalist style, particularly the three-dimensional expression of the window modules, although with a vertical rather than a horizontal expression as is more common for the style. The design incorporates modern features such as enhanced access to daylight and open floor plans to meet new standards for commercial office accommodation.

The principal facades to Queen Street and Little Collins Street are of painted render, probably over nonloadbearing brickwork. The building structure is of reinforced concrete post and slab construction. Above ground level both elevations are symmetrical, and heavily articulated with projecting painted frames around and separating the panels of window openings, providing a strong vertical emphasis. A plain recessed spandrel finished in painted render separates the window modules at each floor level. The window modules do not extend to the perimeters of the building, and are framed by areas of plain painted render walls. The original architectural drawings show these areas of wall were originally clad in terracotta tiles, which appear to have been removed in 1996.

The façade to Queen Street is divided into five vertical panels of glazing with the outer panels being narrower than the three centre panels. The Little Collins Street façade is divided into twenty vertical panels of glazing. Whilst this results in the façades having a strong vertical emphasis, the continuous bands of windows and solid spandrels reinforce the horizontal plane. What appear to be original openable multi-paned steel frame windows are extant, and are indicative of the building predating the use of air-conditioning.

The rear (western) elevation facing Austral Lane (and its return down a service lane) is an unadorned facade finished in roughcast render. A regular pattern of four narrow openable windows at each level provide light and ventilation to the amenities block positioned at the southern end of the building.

At the ground level along both Queen Street and Little Collins Street, the building has been substantially altered over time, with contemporary shopfronts replacing the original windows and masonry walls.

INTEGRITY

The former Ajax House at 103-105 Queen Street is largely intact above ground level with some changes visible to the original fabric. The building retains key characteristics of its early postwar design and construction that exhibit the new modernism and elements of the interwar Functionalist style, including in the fenestration and detail at the upper floor levels. The original reinforced concrete slab and post construction with vertical glazing and metal fins remain extant as do original openable sash windows across all facades. The original terracotta tiles to the upper levels have been replaced and the ground floor level altered with removal of windows and masonry walls. Despite the changes, 103-105 Queen Street retains its original scale and form, and characteristic stylistic details of the building remain highly legible, reflecting the era and original design in which it was developed. Overall the place is of high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

During the early 1950s, following the end of the World War Two, building activities in central Melbourne slowly revived. The Post-War Modernist style, which accompanied the development of the curtain wall, was becoming popular and was used in many corporate buildings. While some examples adopted fully glazed curtain walls, in other examples a greater range of materials were used to achieve variety of expression. A group of buildings built in the mid-1950s to early 1960s combined expansive glazed panels with solid masonry sections to achieve a distinctive aesthetic.

While embracing the new curtain wall technique, the design of Ajax House at 103-105 Queen Street displays some characteristics of the Functionalist style. The style was fashionable pre-World War Two and continued to be popular in the postwar period, especially for modern service facilities such as car showrooms and institutional buildings, as well as for infrastructure buildings such as the Russell Street Automatic Telephone Exchange and Postal Building at 114-120 Russell Street. The style was also adopted for some medium-rise commercial buildings such as Ajax House.

The following examples are comparable with the former Ajax House, being of a similar style and use and construction date, although scale varies.

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).



Canton Insurance Building, 43-51 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1957).

Analysis

Ajax House at 103-105 Queen Street displays characteristics typically seen in the 1950s corporate buildings built in the Post-War Modernist style. While some early examples such as Gilbert House (individually significant in HO504) adopted a fully curtain-walled façade, the juxtaposition of light-weight curtain wall and solid masonry was not uncommon. Some examples assessed and recommended as individually significant places in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review share similar characteristics, exhibiting an operable glazing section surrounded by solid tiled areas. Similar examples from this study include Laurens House at 414-416 Lonsdale Street (interim HO1254), former Atlas Assurance Company at 404-406 Collins Street (interim HO1008), Sleigh House at 166-172 Queen Street and 376-382 Flinders Lane.

103-105 Queen Street also exhibits some influences of the interwar Functionalist style, reflecting the new modernism of the early postwar period, especially as its main façade elements demonstrate a vertical rather than the usual horizontal emphasis of the style. The Queen Street and Little Collins Street façades feature the expressed window modules projecting from a simple recessed masonry form which are typical of the style.

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 43.01-3)	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

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985**

D

**Central City Heritage
Review 1993**

C

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

Ungraded

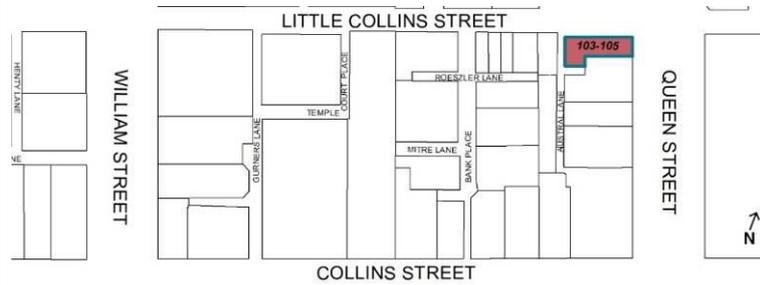
**Central City Heritage
Review 2011**

Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Ajax House

PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

Former Ajax House, at 103-105 Queen Street, Melbourne, constructed to a design by architect H.D Berry in 1956, is significant.

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

- Original building form and scale;
- Original pattern of fenestration, including projecting frames around and separating panels of window openings, projecting from a simple recessed masonry form, and pattern of window openings; and
- Original openable multipane steel frame windows.

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

How it is significant?

The former Ajax House at 103-105 Queen Street is of local historical and representative significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

Former Ajax House is historically significant as a part of the postwar development and rapid growth of corporate architecture in central Melbourne of the 1950s-70s 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. The building was purpose-built in 1956 for Australian company Ajax Insurance Company Limited to house the company's head office (second level), and its Victorian branch (ground and first level) with the upper two floors reserved as open-plan office spaces for lease.

The Ajax Insurance Company occupied Ajax House until 1976. 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-70s, cementing Melbourne's pre-eminent role in the state for financial institutions. (Criterion A)

Former Ajax House is a significant example of early postwar commercial development in central Melbourne. It retains its original form, scale and stylistic details which reflect the era in which it was constructed. It exhibits a similar design aesthetic and quality as other examples of its type, being medium-rise commercial office buildings designed to convey a modern and progressive aesthetic. Key stylistic details include the heavily articulated fenestration with projecting frames around and separating the panels of window openings. It is unusual for this articulation to have a strong vertical rather than horizontal emphasis. It also retains its original openable multipane steel frame windows to the upper commercial floors. (Criterion D)

Primary source

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

