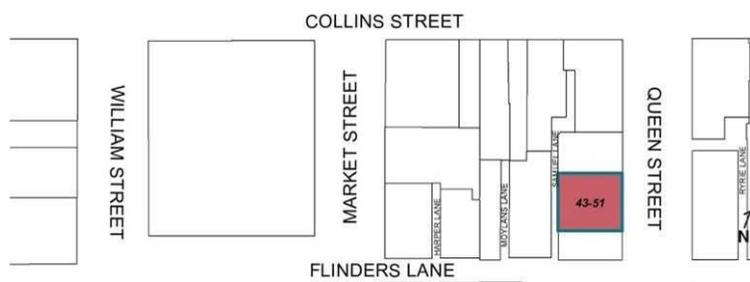


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Union House



PS ref no: HO1365



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)