

PLUMBERS AND GASFITTERS UNION BUILDING



Plumbers & gasfitters



Plumbers & gasfitters



Plumbers & gasfitters
stairwell



Plumbers & gasfitters



Plumbers & gasfitters
second floor



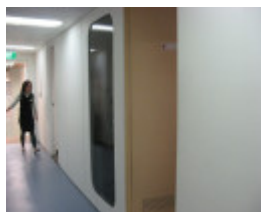
Plumbers & gasfitters
garage



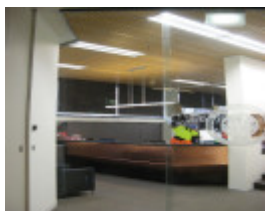
Plumbers & gasfitters
ground floor corridor



Plumbers & gasfitters
etched glass doors on
reception entrance



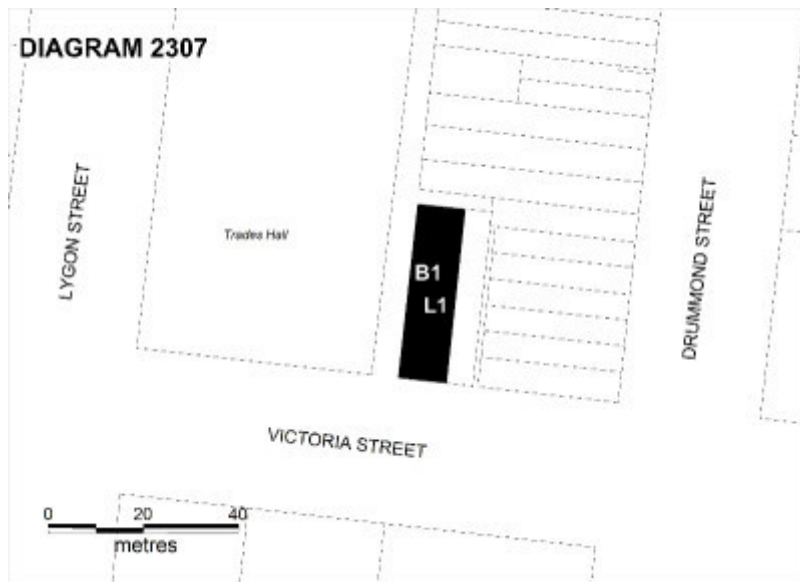
Plumbers & gasfitters
ground floor corridor



Plumbers & gasfitters
reception area



Plumbers & gasfitters



plumbers and gasfitters plan.jpg

Location

50-52 VICTORIA STREET CARLTON, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2307

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO1092

VHR Registration

September 13, 2012

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is a highly distinctive building designed by Graeme Gunn and built in 1969-71 in Victoria Street, Carlton. It is one of the earliest and finest examples of the Brutalist style in Victoria.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees' Union was formed in 1911 and was originally housed in the Trades Hall complex on the corner of Victoria and Lygon Streets, Carlton. By the late 1960s the union had outgrown these premises and the architect Graeme Gunn was commissioned to design a new building on a site adjacent to the Trades Hall.

The design of the office building was intended to establish an identity for the union, meet their increased space requirements and provide for possible future expansion. Gunn designed a three storey building with car parking and mechanical services at ground level, office space for the client on the first floor and lettable space on the floor above. The structure, designed to enable the addition of two extra floors, is of reinforced concrete with an off-form finish on all external and major internal surfaces. Windows are aluminium framed with dark smoked glazing and are deeply recessed on the west facade to provide some sun control.

Adopting a tough Brutalist exterior, the building is a bold statement of growing trade union power. The design emphasises both structure and material with an unorthodox and purposeful arrangements of masses and voids. The vertical imprint of the patterned tempered formwork lining, and the regular set of filled holes which indicate the rod supports for the formwork, show an honest use of construction materials and exposure of natural finishes. The clear indication of circulation patterns, as evident in the dominant front staircase, is an important Brutalist characteristic.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building received a Victorian Architectural Award Citation in 1971 and the 25 Year RIAA Victorian Architecture Award for Enduring Architecture in 2007, and the design influenced architecture in Victoria throughout the 1970s.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Kulin Nation.

How is it significant?

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is of architectural and historical significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is of architectural significance as one of the earliest, finest and most influential examples of the Brutalist style in Victoria. It is notable for its use of bold forms constructed in off-form concrete and its tough exterior provides the client with an identity signifying union power. It is recognised as a major work of the Melbourne architect Graeme Gunn, who has remained highly influential in the architectural profession. He was recognised with the RIAA Victorian Chapter President's Award for Lifetime Contribution to Victorian Architecture in 2001 and the Australian Institute of Architects highest award, the Gold Medal for Architecture in 2011.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is of historical significance as a substantial physical reminder of the strength and influence of the union movement in the 1970s.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or

activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Theme

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce

Construction dates	1969,
Architect/Designer	Gunn, Graeme C.,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	45055
Property Number	

History

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees' Union was formed in 1911 and was originally housed in the Trades Hall complex on the corner of Victoria and Lygon Streets, Carlton. By the late 1960s the union had outgrown these premises and architect Graeme Gunn Pty Ltd was commissioned to design the new building on a site adjacent to

the Trades Hall in 1969. This was described as being in creative collaboration with landscape designed Ellis Stones and Merchant Builders, and construction was completed in 1971. It cost \$17,000. The builder was T R & L Cochram and engineer S Ramschin & Associates.

The brief called for an office building which would establish an identity for the union, meet their increased space requirements and provide for future expansion. Gunn's response was a bold statement of growing trade union power and it became a local Brutalist landmark.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building received a Victorian Architectural Award Citation in 1971 and was selected as one of 36 best buildings by the architectural profession in *Judging Architecture* in 2003. The architect Graeme Gunn received the President's Award for Lifetime Contribution to Victorian Architecture in 2001, the 25 Year RIAA Victorian Architecture Award for Enduring Architecture for the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building in 2007 and the Gold Medal for Architecture in 2011.

Miles Lewis suggests that the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is the 'stand out' example of Brutalism, which he says was 'linked with left-wing architectural programmes' that sought to improve the lives of the masses.

Brutalism

A critique of the uniformity of pre-war Modernism was New Brutalism, a term coined in 1952 by London architects Peter and Alison Smithson. It built on the work of modern architecture pioneer Le Corbusier. Exposed structure and materials, especially brick and off-form concrete and graphically functional external expression were the 'honest' design recipe. Inspiration varied and included outright emulation of the off-form concrete postwar architecture of Le Corbusier. In Melbourne, the Harold Holt Pool and Plumbers and Gasfitters' Union Building are two of the best examples.

Characteristics included:

Unorthodox arrangement of masses and voids
Honest valuation of construction materials and exposure of natural finishes
Transparency of programme through the plan
Emphasis on circulation

The Brutalist movement emerged in Victoria in the late 1960s with both aesthetic and ethical imperatives. The latter was a social concern which placed the user at the centre of the design and expressed construction materials as finished surfaces. Circulation elements were clearly evident and functional systems articulated.

In the 1960s, houses in Melbourne indicated a shift towards New Brutalism and the Total Carpark, 170-190 Russell Street, 1964-65 Bogle, Banfield and Associates, heralded the arrival of the style in Victoria. There were Japanese influences in many Brutalist designs, including the use of off form concrete, emphatic structural and functional expression.

Menzies College, La Trobe University (Bundoora Romberg and Boyd 1965-70) is designed in the Brutalist idiom with a robust use of off-form concrete, pod projections and bold angled struts. The Harold Holt Pool, Glen Iris (Kevin Borland and Daryl Jackson 1967-69) uses concrete block and off-form concrete construction, industrially glazed walls and timber trusses, circulation elements which become sculptural features, chamfered walls and skillion roofs.

Graeme Gunn

Gunn studied architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology between 1955 and 1960 and became a registered architect in 1963. From 1961 to 1963 he was employed in the office of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd and in 1964 he commenced architectural practice in his own right. From 1971 to 1982 the firm operated as Gunn Hayball Architects and from 1982 to 1986 as Gunn Williams Fender. From 1986 to 2009 the practice was Graeme Gunn Architects and from 2009 has been Gunn Dyring Architects.

Gunn made an important contribution to architectural education, first as Head of the School of Architecture and Building at RMIT (1972-77) then as Foundation Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Building at RMIT (1977-1982).

He has received a number of architectural awards for his designs and practice. These include the President's Award for Lifetime Contribution to Victorian Architecture in 2001, the 25 Year RIAA Victorian Architecture Award for Enduring Architecture for the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building in 2007 and the Gold Medal for Architecture in 2011. The jury citation for the latter describes the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union building as

'spectacular' and testimonials describe it as one of the State's iconic buildings.

He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Architecture from RMIT University in 1966 and is a Life Fellow of the RAIA.

REFERENCES

Architect, vol 3, no 14 July-August 1971, p 22, 'New Union Building'

Architecture in Australia, vol 61, no 4, August 1972, 'Office, Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union'

P Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, p 203

J Taylor *Australian Architecture since 1960*, p 85

'Our modern heritage is set in concrete' in *The Age*, 24 December 2005

Gunndyring Website <http://www.gunndyring.com.au>

National Trust Register

Australian Institute of Architects Website <http://www.architecture.com.au>

Assessment Against Criteria

a Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building provides a substantial physical reminder of the strength and influence of the union movement in the 1970s.

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is one of the earliest, finest and most influential examples of Brutalist architecture in Victoria. It is notable for its use of bold forms constructed in off-form concrete and for its tough exterior which provides the client with an identity signifying union power. In 2007 the building was awarded the 25 Year RAIA Victorian Architecture Award for Enduring Architecture.

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e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

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.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is recognised as a major work of the Melbourne architect Graeme Gunn, who has remained highly influential in the architectural profession. His outstanding contribution to architecture in Victoria was recognised with the RAIA Victorian Chapter President's Award for Lifetime Contribution to Victorian Architecture in 2001 and the Australian Institute of Architects highest award, the Gold Medal for Architecture in 2011.

Plaque Citation

Designed by architect Graeme Gunn, this highly distinctive and influential building was constructed in 1969-71. As an early and outstanding example of the Brutalist style, it provided the union with a powerful identity.

Extent of Registration

1. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2307 held by the Executive Director being all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 914314 and Lot 1 on Title Plan 754812.
2. All of the building marked B1 on Diagram 2307 held by the Executive Director.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>