

Plumbers & Gasfitters Employees Union Building

Address 52 Victoria Street, Carlton

Practice Gunn, Graeme C

Designed 1969

Completed 1970

History & Description By the late 1960s, the Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees' Union had outgrown its Trades Hall premises around the corner in Lygon Street and required separate offices. In 1969 Graeme Gunn was commissioned to design their new premises, on a site next door. In 1993 the union amalgamated with others to become the Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union of Australia.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees' Union Building (PGEUB) has proven to be a seminal essay in the development of the Brutalist vernacular. Along with the Harold Holt Memorial Swimming Pool (1969), it articulated key ethical and aesthetic directives for 1970s architecture. Such directives include the unorthodox arrangement of masses and voids; the honest valuation of its materials of construction 'as found' (i.e. rough sawn off-form concrete finishes and industrial glazing); transparency of program through the formal legibility of the plan and the clear exhibition of structure, and; the emphasis on circulation, which denotes 'people-first', or the centrality of the user/s in the design. The West façade, along the Trades Hall Place, is also constructed of textured concrete walls and tinted glass windows. For climate control reasons, however, the windows on this side are smaller, and deeply recessed by chamfered sills. Access to the car park is via Trades Hall. The rear of the building also features smaller windows. A rough-sawn timber stairwell relieves the strictness of concrete and glass uniformity. (extracts from National Trust citation)

Statement of Significance The PGEU Building is significant as an important example of the Brutalist vernacular used in the commercial context on a small in-fill site. It broke new ground at the time as a possible foretaste of a 'brave new world' for inner-urban development.

Graeme Gunn was an important practitioner and also, as Head of the RIMIT Architecture School, educator during the 1960s and 1970s. Better known for his residential work with Merchant Builders and the promotion of 'clustered titles' as a suburban alternative, this building has long been recognised as one of his best commercial projects.

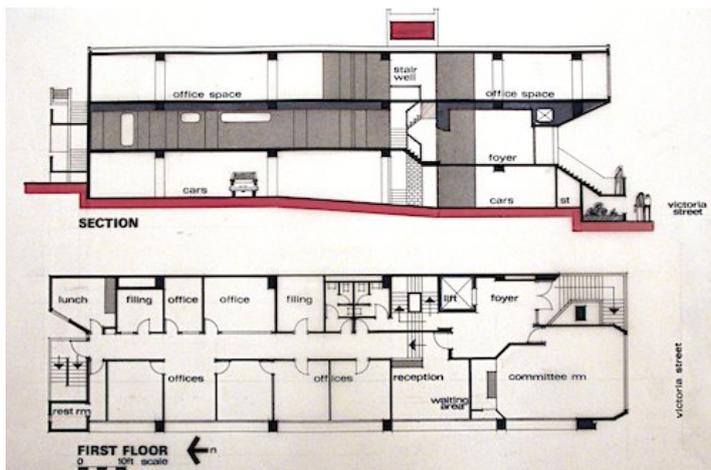
Criteria Applicable N1 - Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design.
N2 - Significant heritage value in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
N5 - Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history.



Street view 2008, photo by Rory Hyde



View of south-west corner 2008, photo by Rory Hyde



Design drawing, Graeme Gunn Collection, SLV



West elevation 2008, photo by Rory Hyde