

# PLUMBERS AND GASFITTERS UNION BUILDING

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HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

No. 52 Victoria Street, Carlton, Victoria

December 2023

Prepared for

THE PLUMBING AND PIPE TRADES  
EMPLOYEES UNION

Prepared by

LOVELL CHEN



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

This report was prepared on the lands of the Wurundjeri people who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge their stories, connection to land, water and culture which is embedded in Country. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge that this report includes a post-contact history that forms only a small part of the ongoing story.

No. 52 Victoria Street is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, who are, and have always been the custodians of this land. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present, and acknowledge the stories, traditions and cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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The following quality assurance register documents the development and issue of this report prepared by Lovell Chen Pty Ltd in accordance with our quality management system.

Project no.	Issue no.	Description	Issue date	Approval
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Cover: South elevation of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building, 2023 (Lovell Chen)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	The subject property	1
1.2	Why are the works required?	2
	1.2.1 Growth	2
	1.2.2 Compliance	2
	1.2.3 Conservation	2
1.3	Documentation	3
	1.3.1 Policy and guidance	3
	1.3.2 Documentation submitted for approval	3
1.4	Statutory heritage controls	3
	1.4.1 Heritage Act, 2017 (Victoria)	3
1.5	Pre-application meetings	4
<b>2.0</b>	<b>SUMMARY HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	Select contextual chronology	6
2.2	Brutalism	9
2.3	Graeme Gunn (1933 -)	11
2.4	Description	12
	2.4.1 Context	12
	2.4.2 Plumbers and Gasfitters building	13
<b>3.0</b>	<b>PROPOSED WORKS</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1	Compliance	19
3.2	Internal refurbishment	19
3.3	External works	21
	3.3.1 Roof	21
	3.3.2 South elevation	21
3.4	Conservation works	21
<b>4.0</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACTS</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1	Cultural heritage significance	22
4.2	The extent to which the works would affect the cultural heritage significance of the registered place.	23
	4.2.1 Impact on historical significance	23
	4.2.2 Impact on architectural significance	24

4.2.3	Impact on social value	25
4.3	The extent to which the application, if refused, would affect the reasonable or economic use of the registered place	26
4.4	Other matters	27
4.5	Conclusion	27

**APPENDIX A PLUMBERS AND GASFITTERS UNION BUILDING, HERITAGE ASSESSMENT, APRIL 2023  
(LOVELL CHEN)**





## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) has been prepared for the Plumbers and Pipe Trades Employees Union (PPTEU). It addresses impacts arising from a package of conservation, compliance and upgrade works to the Union's headquarters building at 52 Victoria Street, Carlton, Melbourne.

The property is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) as the 'Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building' (H2307) and is generally referred to by this name below.

We note that the subject site is located on Wurundjeri Country.

### 1.1 The subject property

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Building is located at 52 Victoria Street, Carlton, directly behind (east) of Trades Hall (Figure 1). The three-level building, constructed of reinforced concrete, occupies a constrained site (10.13 metres wide by 37.19 metres deep, covering 376.7 square metres) which slopes up to the north from Victoria Street. Access to the ground level car park is via Trades Hall Lane, a bluestone-paved laneway to the west of the union headquarters. The laneway also provides access to the rear of the building, which features an external staircase. The principal pedestrian entry is via another external staircase which provides access to the first-floor reception.

In views looking north-east from Victoria Street, with Trades Hall Lane in the foreground, the full length of the structure is evident. A nineteenth century townhouse, set back from Victoria Street, abuts the building's east elevation.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Building forms part of an urban landscape that has strong associations with unionism and the Labor movement (discussed further at Section 2.4.1).



Figure 1 Aerial view of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Building (indicated): Trades Hall is to its west  
Source: Nearmap, September 2023 (accessed 31 October 2023)

## 1.2 Why are the works required?

The package of works proposed is required to meet the current and future needs of the PPTEU, as well as matters of compliance and fabric conservation.

### 1.2.1 Growth

The PPTEU is a fast-growing organisation. Membership numbers and demand for training and educational services are rising, trends that are anticipated to continue. The key driver is the Victorian Government's response to the changing climate.

A major emphasis of the Union today is on renewable energy installations and supporting Victoria's growing and evolving renewable energy sector. The PPTEU's core activities include working with materials, substances and systems that are fundamental to achieving a net zero carbon future, including water, gas, hydrogen, fire protection and air conditioning.

In recent years, and in anticipation of the diverse and substantial challenges ahead, the Union has been involved in the development of industry training facilities at Brunswick and Narre Warren. These facilities are owned and operated by the Plumbing and Fire Protection industry in the form of an industry partnership, the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre (PICAC).<sup>1</sup>

The proposal for works to the Union's headquarters building arise in this context of expansion. As well as performing a symbolic role (the Union's home), the building is intended to serve as the centre of operations, providing a range of administrative, training and social functions. The building's present condition, internal plan and scale means that this breadth of uses is not possible.

Aside from issues of compliance and condition (discussed below) a critical challenge is the provision of flexible open plan spaces of a sufficient scale to accommodate these and other activities. The existing committee room – the southernmost space on Level 1 – has a seating capacity of approximately 30 (see Figure 13). This is a space that is used intensively, for committee meetings (attended by 50-plus people fortnightly), delegates meetings (attended by 50-plus people weekly) and organisers meetings (12 people weekly). Meetings of Members (typically attended by 50-100 people, held quarterly) are currently hosted at Trades Hall.

### 1.2.2 Compliance

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building does not comply with the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards (Premises Standards) which have effect under subsection 31 (1) of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

Access to the first-floor foyer is via external staircases, and there is no vertical circulation through the building – a lift shaft was installed at the time of construction, but a lift was not (for budgetary reasons, it is understood).

### 1.2.3 Conservation

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is an ageing asset – it was completed in 1971 – that requires an active programme of conservation works, principally to the exterior.

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<sup>1</sup> As well as the PPTEU, other partners in PICAC are the Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association and the National Fire Industry Association.



## 1.3 Documentation

### 1.3.1 Policy and guidance

This report has been prepared with regards to relevant principles and policy documents, including:

- *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, ICOMOS, 2013
- *Principles for considering change to places in the Victorian Heritage Register*, Heritage Victoria, December 2022
- *Reasonable or economic use policy*, Heritage Victoria, June 2021
- *General permit exemptions*, Heritage Victoria, December 2022

### 1.3.2 Documentation submitted for approval

The following documents are referred to in this report and are submitted for approval (subject to conditions):

- Architectural drawings, Kennedy Nolan Architects and Graeme Gunn, 1 December 2023 (TP1: A000, A001, A002, A050-A053, A100-A103, A110-A113, A150, A151, A130, A200-A206, A300-A305, A400, A401, A500, A600, A601)
- Schedule of Conservation Works, Lovell Chen, Revision, 7 December 2023

## 1.4 Statutory heritage controls

### 1.4.1 Heritage Act, 2017 (Victoria)

Through its inclusion in the VHR, the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is subject to controls under the *Heritage Act, 2017* (Victoria). The building was included in the VHR on 13 September 2012.

The Statement of Significance for H2307 is as follows:

#### *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 RAI A Victorian Architecture Award for Enduring Architecture in 2007, and the design influenced architecture in Victoria throughout the 1970s.

*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 RAI A 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.

As noted at Section 4.1, a review of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building against the Heritage Council of Victoria's *Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines* (as updated, 1 December 2022) was undertaken in April 2023. The outcomes of that assessment are at Appendix A.

## 1.5 Pre-application meetings

Two pre-application meetings were held with Heritage Victoria officers.

### Meeting #1, 30 May 2023 (Microsoft Teams)

*Attendees*

- Janet Sullivan and Jessica Antolino, Heritage Victoria
- Paddy McCrudden, Assistant Secretary of the PPTEU
- Shayne La Combre, CEO of PICAC
- Rachel Nolan, Kennedy Nolan Architects
- Adam Mornement, Lovell Chen

### *Presented*

- An overview of the work of the PPTEU
- Lovell Chen presented the outcomes of additional research/analysis, and the updated assessment of the subject property against the Heritage Council of Victoria's *Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*
- The condition and operational shortcomings of the subject property, and the reasons for the proposed works (as summarised at Section 1.1)
- The core components of the proposal: compliance works; external conservation works; internal refurbishment, all levels; and a roof-top addition

### *Feedback*

Written feedback (email) was provided, as follows:

There is a level of comfort with the approaches for universal access and internal refurbishment presented at the meeting, subject to detailed design.

There would be an expectation that a suite of conservation works would be included in any application for works at the registered place.

When assessing applications for works at VHR places where the original architect for the place is involved, there is less emphasis placed on unrealised elements of the original design, and the significance of the structure as built is a greater influence. To that end, the design of any proposed roof-top addition should strike a balance between meeting the needs of the Union and its staff and being as visually discrete as possible.<sup>2</sup>

### **Meeting #2, 26 October 2023 (Microsoft Teams)**

#### *Attendees*

- Nicola Stairmand and Jessica Antolino, Heritage Victoria
- Paddy McCrudden, Assistant Secretary of the PPTEU
- Shayne La Combre, CEO of PICAC
- Rachel Nolan, Kennedy Nolan Architects
- Adam Mornement, Lovell Chen

### *Presented*

- Response to feedback from Meeting #1
- Design development of the compliance works, conservation works, internal refurbishment and roof-top addition

### *Feedback*

Written feedback (email) was provided, as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Email from Jessica Antolino, Heritage Officer (Permits), Heritage Victoria to Adam Mornement (Lovell Chen), 30 May 2023.

There is a level of comfort with the approaches proposed for universal access and internal refurbishment at the registered place.

It is positive that the proposed changes to provide universal access are discreet and will provide opportunity for meaningful interpretation of Graeme Gunn's original design for a 'cascade' at the front of the building.

The proposed internal changes appear to be reflective of the way the Union need to use the building, and/or affect areas already subject to previous alterations, and as such are generally supported in principle.

Heritage Victoria is pleased to see that a detailed conservation methodology is to be submitted as part of the permit application for the works. It is likely that Heritage Victoria would apply the requirement to complete the conservation works as a permit condition should a permit be issued for the proposed works. Further, it is likely that Heritage Victoria would seek to secure the conservation works via a Bank Guarantee, otherwise the option to complete the conservation and repair works as a first stage of works (prior to other works approved by any permit) could be given as part of permit conditions.

We acknowledge that the design for the proposed roof top addition has been developed having regard to Heritage Victoria's previous feedback. The additional setback to the western elevation is an improvement to the previous scheme, and the proposed material palette is considered to be appropriate and sympathetic to the heritage building.

Any application should be accompanied by reasonable use rationale under s101(2)(b) of the Act. In this regard Heritage Victoria would be seeking to understand how the proposed works – and in particular, the roof top addition – will contribute to futureproofing the building, and how the size and form of the addition has been dictated by the capacity required for a new enlarged training facility. Justification for proposed internal changes should also be referenced under reasonable use.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.0 SUMMARY HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION**

### **2.1 Select contextual chronology**

- 1858-59** The Trades Hall and Literary Institute was advised that land at the intersection of Victoria and Lygon streets, Carlton, had been reserved 'for the erection of a Trades Hall'. The first Trades Hall, a temporary structure, was opened in May 1859.
- c.1859** The Lygon Hotel (now the John Curtin Hotel) was built at the corner of Lygon and Earl streets opposite Trades Hall.
- 1874** The foundation stone of the present Trades Hall complex was laid on 26 January 1874. A document was laid under the foundation stone describing the history of the Eight Hours Movement (see '1924' below), the Trades Hall site and the names of the trustees and office-bearers of the different societies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Email from Jessica Antolino, Heritage Victoria, 14 November 2023.

<sup>4</sup> *Argus*, 27 January 1874, p. 5.

- 1880s** The Trades Hall complex evolved in multiple increments from the 1880s into the-1920s. Until the 1960s it provided accommodation for all unions and trades.
- 1911** The Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees' Union was formed and was housed in Trades Hall.
- 1915** The Lygon Hotel, by then a place with strong associations with the Union movement, was substantially rebuilt.
- 1924** The Eight Hour Day Monument was relocated to the south-west of the intersection between Russell and Victoria streets, facing Trades Hall. The monument (which had been located on Spring Street since 1903) commemorated the '8 Hours Movement' of the mid-1850s. The movement, initiated by the Eight Hours League, achieved profound and enduring improvements to worker's rights.
- 1967** In 1967, 27 unions (including the Plumbers and Gasfitters) were suspended from the Trades Hall Council, in what became known as the 'split'. The dispute stemmed from issues relating to leadership and representation, control of industrial disputes and the legitimacy of industrial action. It was not until April 1974 that the suspended unions were permitted to return.<sup>5</sup>
- 1969** By early 1969 architect Graeme Gunn was commissioned to design premises for the Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union which had outgrown Trades Hall, on a site directly to the east of Trades Hall. 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.
- c. 1969** The Lygon Hotel was renamed the John Curtin Hotel in honour of former Labor Prime Minister, John Curtin, who served from 1941 until his death in 1945.
- 1971** The Union moved into its new headquarters. The cost of the works delivered was \$17,000. Budget limitations meant that a lift was not installed (although a lift shaft was included); an artwork/installation (or 'cascade') in the ground level undercroft addressing Victoria Street was not delivered (Figure 2); and the internal fit-out of the Union's office space (on the first floor) was minimal in terms of detail and resolution. The upper level was provided as a shell for rent, and the basement was a car park. Also in 1971, the Union headquarters received a Victorian Architectural Award Citation (see contemporary photography at Figure 3 and Figure 4).
- 2007** The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building received the 25 Year RAI Victoria Architecture Award for Enduring Architecture.
- 2011** Graeme Gunn was awarded the Institute's Gold Medal for Architecture.
- 2012** The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Headquarters building was included in the VHR, primarily for its assessed qualities as, 'one of the earliest, finest and most influential examples of the Brutalist style in Victoria'.

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<sup>5</sup> Cathy Brigden, 'Reassessing the Victorian Trades Hall 'Split' of 1937-73', *Labour History*, No. 97, May 2009, pp. 136-137.

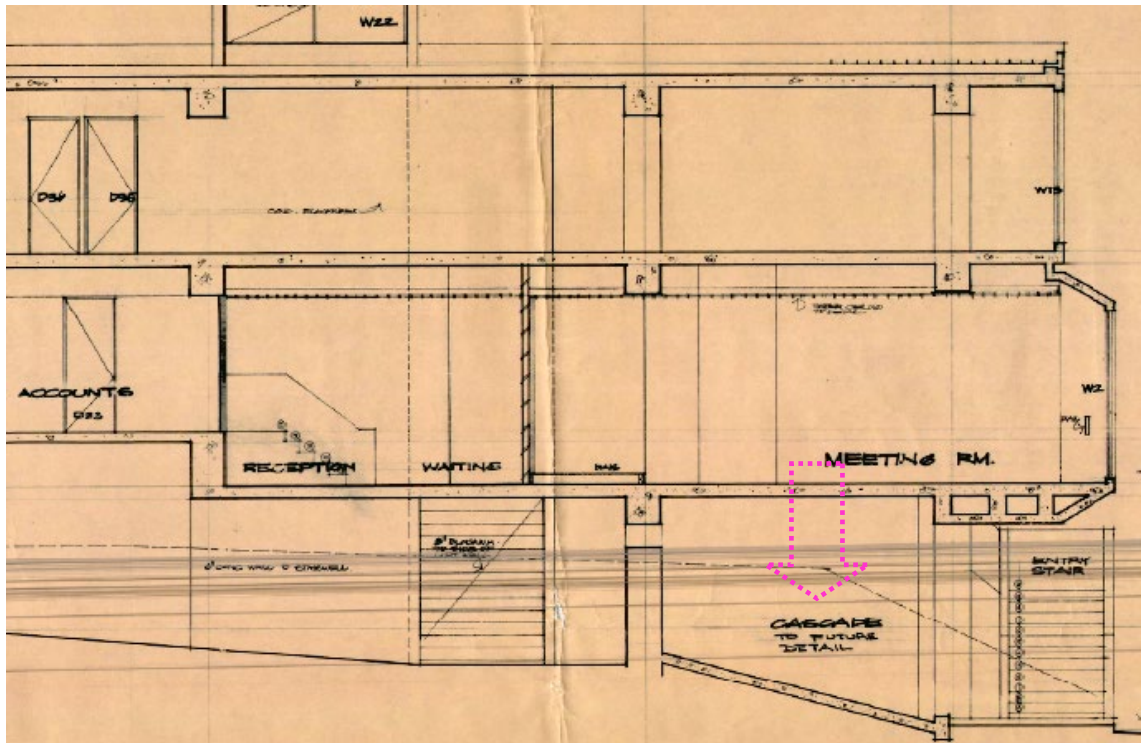


Figure 2 Longitudinal section (part), Graeme Gunn, 20 April 1969: note 'cascade to future detail'  
Source: Graeme Gunn Collection, State Library of Victoria



Figure 3 View of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building looking west along Victoria Street.  
1971: Trades Hall is visible at left  
Source: State Library of Victoria (Peter Wille\_8\_SLV\_H91.244)





Figure 4 South elevation of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building, 1971  
Source: State Library of Victoria (Peter Wille\_9\_SLV\_H91.244)

## 2.2 Brutalism

The term *Brutalism* derives from the French *béton brut* (raw concrete), used to describe cast concrete that reveals the seams and patterns left behind by its formwork.<sup>6</sup> This concern with an ‘honest’ expression of materials became more prominent in architecture during the 1940s as a reaction to the clinical, crisp lines and white rendered walls of modernism. The term ‘New Brutalism’ was adopted in 1953 by British architects Alison and Peter Smithson in reference to their design for a house in Fitzrovia, in which all materials were left exposed and unfinished.

The term gained traction on an international level following Reyner Banham’s essay ‘New Brutalism’ published in the *Architectural Review* (London) in December 1955. Banham identified key principles for the movement including formal legibility of plan, clear exhibition of structure and valuation of materials for their inherent qualities ‘as found’<sup>7</sup> This article strove to consolidate Brutalism as both an aesthetic sensibility and a philosophical framework.

Early manifestations of Brutalist principles in Australia included Robin Boyd’s own residence in South Yarra (1959) which demonstrates a raw and unfinished expression of structure and materiality. Boyd’s

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<sup>6</sup> Elain Harwood, *Brutalist Britain*, Batsford, London, 2022, p. 286.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia McLeod, ‘Brutalist Architecture: Past, Present, Future’ in *Atlas of Brutalist Architecture*, Phaidon, 2018, pp. 6-8.

design for the Black Dolphin Motel at Merimbula (1958), has also been described – by Professor Philip Goad of the University of Melbourne – as an ‘early example of Brutalism in Australia’.<sup>8</sup> From the early 1960s a more romantic expression of Brutalism emerged which, taking cues from Le Corbusier’s post-World War II work, celebrated the plasticity of concrete. Key physical characteristics of this strand of Brutalism included dramatic cantilevers, chamfered edges and bold angular forms.

The Harold Holt Memorial Swimming Centre in Glen Iris (1969), designed by Kevin Borland and Daryl Jackson, combined off-form concrete and concrete block. Boyd, and his partner Frederick Romberg, continued to experiment with Brutalist principles during the 1960s, with notable examples including Menzies College at La Trobe University (1968) and McCaughey Court at Ormond College (also 1968, Figure 5). The latter was a significant influence on the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building.



Figure 5 McCaughey Court, Ormond College, Melbourne (completed 1968)

Source: <https://stories.ormond.unimelb.edu.au/then-now-mccaughey-court/>, accessed 14 March 2023

<sup>8</sup> Philip Goad and Julie Willis (eds), ‘Grounds, Romberg & Boyd’ in *The Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge, Melbourne, 2012, p. 301.

As well as the Plumbers Union Building major essays in the style of the 1970s-80s included the High Court and National Gallery of Australia, in Canberra, and the Queensland Cultural Centre, on Brisbane's South Bank. Other trade union related facilities such as the Clyde Cameron National Training Centre (1977) at Wodonga employed a broadly brutalist sensibility. The training centre was commissioned by the Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) and executed by Architects Group led by Kevin Borland with the project architect Bernard Brown. The services were all exposed to showcase the skills of various trades.

### 2.3 Graeme Gunn (b. 1933)

The period from the late-1960s through to at least the mid-1970s was one of sustained success for Graeme Gunn. By that time, he had made his name as an architect, initially through his work for Merchant Builders, and achieved a high level of industry recognition.<sup>9</sup>

The commission for the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union headquarters (which came through a Merchant Builders client) was his first commercial project. It came at a time when Gunn was already experimenting with more sculptural forms and different materials notably concrete – see, for instance, the Merchant Builders townhouses at Molesworth Street, Kew (1969) and another group of townhouses at Yarra Grove, Hawthorn, designed for the Boston Timber Company (1968). 'The plasticity of the material was exciting,' Gunn explains. 'It was also the material that was most [readily] available at the time.'<sup>10</sup>

Gunn recalls that 'the design and materiality [for the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union headquarters] were selected after much discussion with the Union secretary and building committee'.<sup>11</sup> Negotiations included Gunn taking the committee on a visit to McCaughey Court at Ormond College (Figure 5). The structure, designed by Frederick Romberg and Robin Boyd, Gunn's former employers, was completed in 1968. In its expressed framing, use of unfinished concrete and robust character it embodied core Brutalist principles. The committee accepted Gunn's recommendation that an equivalent aesthetic be adopted for the new Union headquarters. 'The appearance and visual aspect of the [Plumbers and Gasfitters Union headquarters] reflected the attitude and aspirations of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union in terms of muscular strength and flexibility of form,' says Gunn.<sup>12</sup> 'The off-form concrete construction technology enabled the impactful expressive modelling of the building to signify an intriguing commercial introduction to the local city streetscape of Melbourne.'

Gunn was not a student of the Smithsons or Brutalist theory. His exposure to contemporary trends came, in part, through architecture and design journals, the majority of which included extensive coverage of Brutalist design from at least the mid-1960s, as well as familiarity with the work of Boyd, Romberg, Daryl Jackson and others in Australia.

As well as being stylistically 'of its time', Gunn's adoption of the style is consistent with his commitment to designing in sympathy with natural environments and natural systems. For similar reasons, he also designs for growth, recognising that while landscapes evolve through processes of succession and

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of Graeme Gunn's career see Philip Goad and Julie Willis, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, pp. 303-304. An overview of Merchant Builders' is at p. 451 of *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*.

<sup>10</sup> Pers comm, telephone conversation between Graeme Gunn and Adam Mornement, Lovell Chen, 3 December 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Graeme Gunn, written notes provided to Lovell Chen, 24 November 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Graeme Gunn, written notes provided to Lovell Chen, 24 November 2022.

evolution, there are no equivalents for architecture.<sup>13</sup> In this regard the influence upon Gunn, and his *milieu*, of the environmental movement of the 1960s is relevant in seeking to contextualise his work.

Professor Alan Pert, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne, promotes a reading of Gunn's work as 'modernism derived from nature,' and has described the Union headquarters as a 'cliff face in architectural form [...] you have to remember that Graeme was a Western District boy, he grew up in the shadow of the Grampians'.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building was originally envisaged as a four-level structure (the VHR Statement of Significance states that it was 'designed to enable the addition of two extra floors', see Section 1.4.1). As recalled by Gunn, 'It was proposed to have two office floors [for the Union] above an internal carpark at ground level for office members. A third floor was available to be extended as a future requirement for lettable use or for future union requirements.'<sup>14</sup> Funding constraints meant that only one office level was provided for the Union's purposes.

The dynamic nature of the Union, and its anticipated growth, were also themes in contemporary press coverage for the building: 'The Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees' Union [...] was designed to fit the expanding nature of the Union movement, one that is increasingly interesting itself in new activities – in the arts, in education, in housing and so forth. It therefore had to be a building that could be expanded easily both upwards and outwards and in a finish that wouldn't date. Space was the important thing, and no fussiness either inside or out.'<sup>15</sup>

In contemplating future works to the Plumbers and Gasfitters building in 2022, Gunn observed:

I have travelled past so many times and imagined a future extension [...]. It is not common for the original architect to extend and modify a building 50 years after its completion. He [or she] would normally be dead or incompetent [...].

I never thought that an extension would extend the existing general concrete walls and windows in a simple non-expressive visual rendition.

My proposed structural concept is to provide internal protected space based on the existing concrete floor slab and attach lighter weight elements with a series of skeletal components that visually relate to the existing building as graphically rhythmical posts and columns, allowing the top of the building to reflect a visually aerated termination or top.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.4 Description

### 2.4.1 Context

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Building is located within a mixed-use zone, comprised predominately of commercial and institutional uses. Victoria Street is a busy arterial road. Building heights in the vicinity vary considerably.

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<sup>13</sup> Professor Alan Pert, 'An Architecture of Incompleteness', essay in *The Total Environment*, a history of Merchant Builders, forthcoming from the Miegunyah Press, Melbourne.

<sup>14</sup> Graeme Gunn, written notes provided to Lovell Chen, 24 November 2022.

<sup>15</sup> 'What are Australian architects up to?', *The Bulletin, Incorporating the Australian Financial Times*, 8 April 1972, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Graeme Gunn, written notes provided to Lovell Chen, 24 November 2022.



The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building has a strong relationship, both historically and in physical proximity, to buildings and monuments that have longstanding associations with unionism and the Labor movement. These include Trades Hall (VHR 0663), the Eight Hour Monument (VHR 2084) and the John Curtin Hotel (VHR 2426) (see Figure 6).

#### 2.4.2 Plumbers and Gasfitters building

##### Exterior

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is a three-level structure that occupies a narrow and sloping site of approximately 376.7sqm. It is flanked by a bluestone laneway (to the west) and a Victorian terrace (to the east). The property addresses Victoria Street, with the sculpted form of the first-floor committee room appearing to reach towards the street (Figure 7).

The building is constructed of off-form board-stamped reinforced concrete. The concrete was originally a pale grey but has weathered to a darker hue. Windows are aluminium framed, with dark 'smoked' glazing.



Figure 6 Graphic showing The Plumbers and Gasfitters Building in proximity to Trades Hall, the Eight Hour Monument and the John Curtin Hotel

A distinguishing feature of the building is the sculpted front bay, an assured arrangement of solids and voids (or compression and release). Circulation is given visual prominence, in the form of an external staircase which wraps around an expressed column that leads to the first-floor lobby (Figure 8). The alcove on the underside is angled to mirror the balustrade of the stair below. The large window of the first-floor meeting room is a dominant feature of the composition. A band of full height glazing, set behind the projecting first floor window, extends across the second level. At ground level, the recess below the projecting first floor has been fenced as protection against occupation by rough sleepers (Figure 9). It presents as an undistinguished and unresolved feature of the building.

The rear (north) elevation features an escape stair (also external) flanked by projecting bays (Figure 10). The west elevation, facing the laneway, comprises five bays. The expanses of board-stamped concrete are punctuated, at the first and second levels, by narrow bands of deeply recessed glazing with chamfered sills. At the ground level, vehicle access is provided by an entry in the central bay. The east elevation, concealed by the Victorian terrace, is built of concrete block.

Signage is limited to two circular union logos, one applied at the south end of the west elevation (upper level), the other to the east face of the projecting bay on the first floor, at the top of the front stairs (evident in Figure 7 and Figure 8). The date of the signs has not been established (they are not original).

The flat roof, concealed in views from the public realm by a shallow parapet, is finished in metal sheeting, and there is a lift over-run to the east (Figure 11). The roof sheeting is in poor condition, as demonstrated by significant ingress to the upper level during weather events in 2021 and 2022.

Localised failure of the concrete has exposed the reinforcing steel which is most prominent on the south façade (Figure 12). Graffiti further diminishes the presentation of the building.

## Interior

With the exception of the first floor Committee Room (discussed below), the two upper levels are arranged as double-loaded corridors lined with cellular office spaces. All interior spaces are utilitarian and minimally detailed, the majority with suspended ceilings.

The first-floor foyer, reception and the Committee Room are set below the RL of the balance of the first floor, providing a greater ceiling height – there is a short flight of steps up to the east of the reception. Vertical circulation is via a full-height staircase to the east of the plan, to the south of which is the lift shaft. As noted, budgetary constraints meant that a lift was not installed.

In the early-1970s the first floor was fitted out – on a limited budget – for the Union. The committee room remains a single volume, albeit modified with a modern entry and dropped ceiling (Figure 13). Elements on the first floor that date to the 1970s include some of the doors, door furniture and ceiling-mounted lights – these elements are generally distinguishable by the use of round-edged details. These fittings are inexpressive of the Brutalist principles that distinguish the building's external presentation.

The upper level was originally provided as space for rent and was not fitted out to designs by Graeme Gunn. The space has been subdivided with lightweight partition walls to meet the needs of the various occupants over time, including the Union itself (the Union has occupied the upper level for many years). Carpets and floor treatments have generally been removed, a consequence of flood water damage in recent years (Figure 14).

Vehicle parking and services are provided on the ground floor.





Figure 7 West and south elevations: view from Victoria Street



Figure 8 South elevation, looking north-west from Victoria Street





Figure 9 Detail of undercroft: the area originally contemplated for a 'cascade'



Figure 10 Rear (north) and west elevations





Figure 11 View of the roof, looking south



Figure 12 Localised failure of concrete finish





Figure 13 Committee room facing north

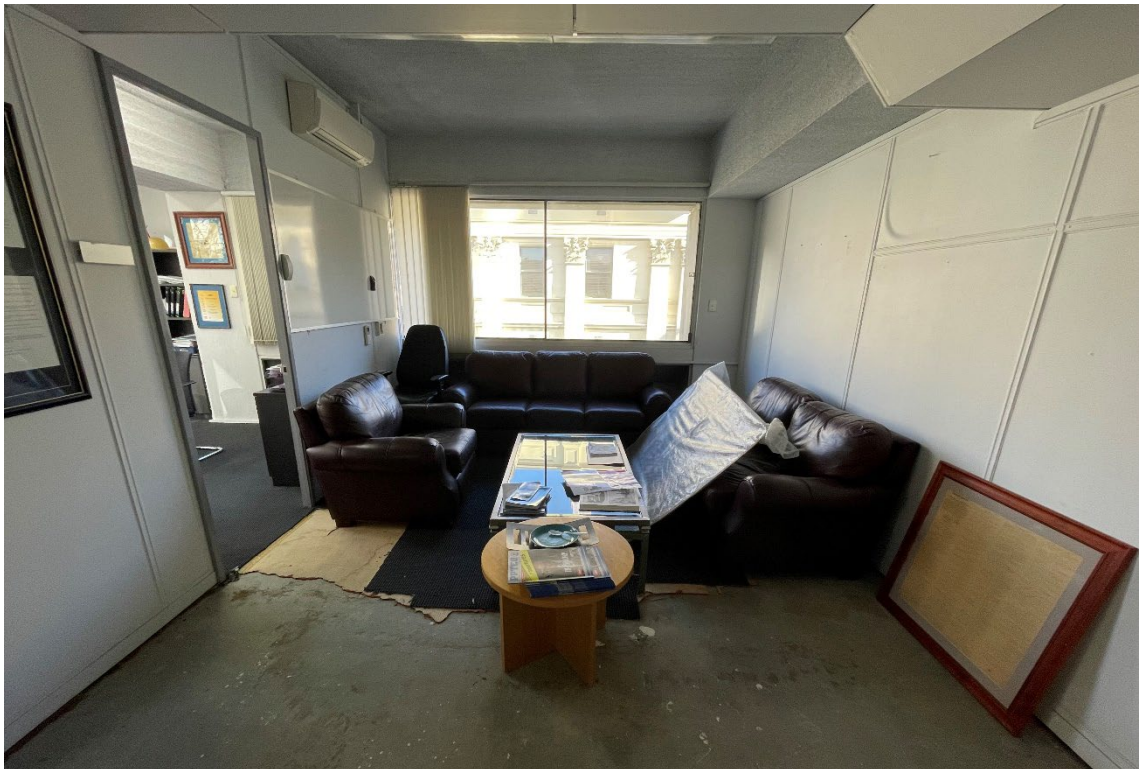


Figure 14 Finishes damaged by water ingress on Level 2

## **3.0 PROPOSED WORKS**

Principles that have guided the design response from a heritage perspective include, the works should support an understanding of the PPTEU – where it has come from and where it is going – and seek to deliver, retrieve or reference aspects of the original design that were unrealised or have been lost.

### **3.1 Compliance**

Works to deliver equitable access to and circulation within the building include a new at-grade entry to the east side of the undercroft (accessed from Victoria Street), and the introduction of a lift car within the shaft.

Demolition to accommodate the ground level entry includes the removal of the modern palisade fence and a punched opening in the wall that is located to the rear of the front staircase. That wall is arranged at a c. 45-degree angle, and largely concealed in views from Victoria Street (Figure 15). Non-original WCs to the rear of the wall will also be removed to facilitate access to the lift. A full height sliding glass door in a timber frame is proposed for the new entry.

Within the building the lift will open to the south and west on the ground level and Level 1, to manage levels and allow universal to all areas. Others include the replacement of the existing skylight over the internal staircase and the introduction of a lift over-run.

For reasons of compliance, alterations are also proposed to floor levels and, points of access to the lift shaft and stair core.

### **3.2 Internal refurbishment**

Upgrade and refurbishment works are proposed on each level, with the objective of achieving net zero energy and universal access. Lighting, services and amenities will be upgraded throughout to meet OH&S standards. Upgrades to the building envelope include lining external walls, floor slabs and the roof slab with insulation. The existing 'smoked' glazing to the west and south elevations will be retained, with a secondary layer of high-performance glazing introduced internally. The large south-facing window on Level 1 will not be lined. Fire regulations require replacement of glazing to the rear elevation.

Within the basement (other than the interventions referenced above) works are generally limited to the removal of non-original elements (i.e. the bar) and services (i.e. stores) for replacement by fit-for-purpose equivalents, as well as a bike store, end-of-trip facilities, a water tank and electric vehicle charging stations. The roller door to the west elevation will also be replaced, to comply with ventilation and fire requirements.

As well as the wall linings, the partitions on Levels 1 and 2. – many of which are not original and/or have previously been modified – will be removed. The proposed plan on both levels is similar, with open plan and visually permeable spaces to the west, optimising access to natural light, and cellular spaces to the east, including spaces dedicated to meetings, printing, a server and the like.

On Level 1, the existing Committee Room will be refurbished as a flexible reception space. The fit out will include integrated joinery (as per the existing); and the colour palette will reference the PPTEU logo, including use of reds and blues (Figure 16). The intent is for the fit out of the Committee Room to include interpretive displays, celebrating the history of the Union. As per the existing arrangement, offices for senior Union personnel will be located at the south end of Level 2.



Figure 15 Concept render of the south elevation, ground level, as proposed: the new entry is largely concealed  
Source: Kennedy Nolan



Figure 16 Concept render of the existing Committee Room on Level 1, looking north  
Source: Kennedy Nolan



### 3.3 External works

#### 3.3.1 Roof

Demolition works to the roof include the removal of the existing metal sheeting and surface-mounted services, replacement of the skylight with a new lift overrun and removal of the balustrade.

A single-level roof top addition is proposed. The flat-roofed structure is set back over eight metres from the south (Victoria Street), and approximately one metre from the west (Trades Hall Lane). The set back from the south aligns with the lift overrun. The parapet of the addition is RL 49.050, four metres above the existing roof level, and 3.470 metres above the parapet. The lift overrun rises to RL 50.160.

The new structure includes a 108sqm space with capacity to be configured for meetings and training, and maximum seating capacity of 79. The circulation core, WCs and a store are to the south of the addition.

The addition and lift overrun are clad in textured metal sheeting, a soft brown colour. A *brise soleil* is proposed to the west, to manage solar gain. A deep red/brown colour has been selected for the *brise soleil*, to manage contrast with the metal sheeting and concrete. Details are limited, and include downpipes and a grouping of four circular vents for the WCs (west elevation). A metal mesh screen is proposed to conceal the services to the north of the plan.

Arrays of photovoltaic panels are proposed to the south end of the existing roof. The panels will be concealed in views from the public realm by the parapet, which steps up at the south. Solar arrays are also proposed for the roof of the addition.

#### 3.3.2 South elevation

Works to the south elevation (other than the compliance upgrades described above) will include an artwork or installation that responds to Graeme Gunn's intent for a 'cascade' in this location. For the purposes of this submission, design detail for this artwork is unresolved (*note*: in the event that a permit is issued, it is anticipated that design development of the artwork to the satisfaction of the Executive Director would be conditioned). A fire booster is proposed beneath the staircase to the east of the south elevation, for reasons of compliance.

### 3.4 Conservation works

Conservation works will be delivered to the building exterior, which has been the subject of localised failure over time. A key challenge in this regard will be to establish a methodology that enables casting of the woodgrain finish to ensure a consistent presentation, particularly to the south and west elevations, accepting that there will be a colour differential until the repairs weather.

This methodology will include:

- Detailed inspection of affected areas to establish the extent of works required
- Confirmation of nominated extent of repair by Heritage Architect
- Recording of the areas surrounding the repair by way of photographs and castings to inform final approach
- Preparing samples of repair mortar to match adjacent concrete colour for review and approval by Heritage Architect
- Cut out all loose and defective concrete to sound substrate, exposing steel reinforcement

- Clean back steel reinforcement with non-ferrous wire brush to remove all deteriorated and corroded material
- Following exposure of full extent of reinforcing seek direction from Heritage Architect and Structural Engineer if minimum reinforcement cover will not be achieved with repair, or significant cross section of reinforcement has been lost
- Apply protection to surrounding concrete surface to allow for treatment of reinforcement
- Treat reinforcement with zinc-rich epoxy resin primer in accordance with the manufacturer's specification and requirements
- Prepare formwork for repair replicating the surrounding off-form woodgrain texture – formwork woodgrain is to seamlessly transition with existing at the perimeter of the repair
- Following installation of formwork apply approved repair mortar and allow to cure before removal of formwork
- Allow for review of repair following removal of formwork by Heritage Architect and undertake minor mortar repairs (filling) as directed

#### 4.0 ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACTS

In determining whether to issue a permit for works, Section 101(2)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017* requires that the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria weighs any detriment (or 'harm') that the application might cause to the heritage values of the place against any benefits that changes might bring.

In accordance with Heritage Victoria's *Principles for considering change to places in the Victorian Heritage Register*,<sup>17</sup> the starting point (Principle 1) for determining the significance of a place, and hence assessing the impact of works, is the Statement of Significance:

Principle 1. Understand why the place is significant

The heritage values and physical characteristics of a place must be clearly understood and articulated before contemplating change. The statement of significance is a useful starting point, but a more thorough analysis is often required.

The other four 'Principles' for considering change promoted by Heritage Victoria are as follows: *Principle 2*, A cautious approach; *Principle 3*, Protect significant settings and views; *Principle 4*, Respectful change and new built form; and *Principle 5*, Provide for upkeep.

#### 4.1 Cultural heritage significance

As per the VHR Statement of Significance, the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is of architectural significance to Victoria as 'one of the earliest, finest and most influential examples of the Brutalist style in Victoria'. It is also recognised as a 'major work of the Melbourne architect Graeme Gunn'.

In terms of historical significance, the building is described as 'a substantial reminder of the strength and influence of the union movement in the 1970s'.

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<sup>17</sup> *Principles for considering change to places in the Victorian Heritage Register*, [https://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/612402/Principles-for-considering-changes-to-places-in-the-Victorian-Heritage-Register-3.pdf](https://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/612402/Principles-for-considering-changes-to-places-in-the-Victorian-Heritage-Register-3.pdf), December 2022.

A review of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building against the Heritage Council of Victoria's *Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines* (as updated, 1 December 2022) was undertaken in April 2023 (Appendix A). The outcomes of this review were shared with Heritage Victoria and discussed at both pre-application meetings.

The assessment was prepared because it is considered that the existing Statement of Significance does not provide a complete summary of the cultural heritage values of the place and, as such, does not provide an adequate basis for assessing the merits of proposals for change.

Key outcomes of the 2023 assessment include:

- The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is a place of strong symbolic meaning and significance to the membership of the PPTEU. It was commissioned by the Union and has been its home and headquarters since the early 1970s. The building derives cultural heritage significance for its continuing occupation by the Union (Criterion 'G');
- The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building has a clear association with Labor history and trade unionism, a movement that has exerted a significant impact on the political and cultural life of Victoria (and Australia) since at least the mid-nineteenth century (Criterion 'A');
- The building is also part of an urban landscape that shares these associations including, but not necessarily limited to, Trades Hall, the Eight Hour Day Monument and the Curtin Hotel. Since at least the early-1900s, the intersection of Victoria and Lygon streets has been a rallying point for unionists and campaigns for worker's rights (Criterion 'A'); and
- The building embodies themes that are central to an understanding of Graeme Gunn's work from the early-1960s into the twenty-first century, including: designing for growth, a significant and consistent theme in Gunn's residential, commercial and institutional work since the early-1960s; and taking inspiration from nature.

## **4.2 The extent to which the works would affect the cultural heritage significance of the registered place.**

For the purposes of responding to s. 101(2)(a) of the *Heritage Act*, the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is considered to be a place of historical, architectural and social significance.

### *4.2.1 Impact on historical significance*

The subject property derives historical significance as part of an urban landscape that has strong associations with Labor history and trade unionism. These associations have evolved since the 1850s, when Trades Hall was established at the intersection of Lygon and Victoria streets.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters was the first union to build its own premises. All unions had previously been accommodated in Trades Hall. The building provides evidence of the strength and influence of the union movement in the late-1960s, an influence that endures today. The works proposed will enable the PPTEU to continue its relationship with its headquarters building, and with the precinct.

The building is also significant for having been designed by Graeme Gunn, an eminent Victorian architect of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Gunn has also been involved in the design of the addition and upgrade works, an unusual occurrence – instances of the original architect working on alterations to a registered building are uncommon. Gunn's role in the design of the alterations and additions has the potential to enhance his association with the building.

In summary, the works proposed will not result in detrimental impact on the historical significance of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building.

#### 4.2.2 *Impact on architectural significance*

The existing building at 52 Victoria Street, Carlton is valued for its Brutalist expression. Characteristics of the Brutalist style include its finish in textured off-form concrete and the legibility of the plan, including external staircases to the front and rear. 1

The building is distinguished by its sculpted south bay, a finely resolved composition of solid and void, with a projecting bay to the first floor that incorporates a large pane of dark ‘smoked’ glass. The key elements of this composition survive, albeit with evidence of localised failure to the concrete finish and an unsightly palisade fence around the west side of the undercroft. An installation proposed for this location was one of a number of elements that fell victim to budgetary constraints during design and construction. Another was the height of the building – as noted in the existing Statement of Significance.

The conservation works will make good the building’s external expression. As discussed above, all reasonable endeavours will be made to replicate the woodgrain finish of the existing in the patched areas.

As regards alterations to the south elevation, these are generally limited to the ground level. Works include the delivery of DDA access to the rear of the external staircase to the south elevation. Demolition to achieve this is limited to an opening in an original wall in this location, which is largely concealed by the staircase. Other works to the south elevation include the installation of a new booster, beneath the stair, and an artwork/installation within the undercroft.

Works to the west and rear (north) elevations are also ‘light touch’, including the replacement of the roller door (west elevation) and the replacement of glazing and a door to the north elevation, for reasons of compliance with fire regulations.

The major intervention is the rooftop addition, which is required for the reasons given at Section 1.2. Consistent with advice from Heritage Victoria, emphasis has been placed on concealing the addition, as far as possible, in views from the public realm. In seeking to identify an outcome that responds to this advice while simultaneously delivering sufficient GFA to meet the Union’s present and anticipated needs, a series of options was considered. The starting point, designed by Graeme Gunn, was for a volume with a saw tooth roof that extended across the roof and projected over the side of the building to the west. Over time the addition became progressively smaller while still delivering sufficient GFA to meet the Union’s present needs, with some capacity for ‘future proofing’.

The rooftop addition has been set back as far as possible into the site – over eight metres from the south (Victoria Street), and approximately one metre from the west (Trades Hall Lane). The set back from the south aligns with the lift overrun. In seeking to avoid an eye-catching form a flat roof has been adopted, with the photovoltaic cells set back from the west to ensure that they are not visible from the public realm. The addition is clad in mild steel with soft brown organic tones, a contrast with the grey concrete. Details are kept to a minimum and include a grid form *brise soleil* and a grouping of four circular vents to the WCs at the south-west of the addition.

The new structure on the roof will present as a discreet and obviously later addition to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building. It is of a scale, profile and architectural character that will not dominate the existing building or distort an ability for it to be read as a powerful and distinctive Brutalist landmark in its streetscape setting.

#### 4.2.3 *Impact on social value*

Based on research and engagement carried out in 2023, there is evidence that the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building derives significance for its association with the PPTEU, an identifiable community of common practice and identity.

As observed by Paddy McCrudden, Assistant Secretary of the PPTEU in March 2023:

[The Plumbers and Gasfitters Building] is part of the union, and the union is a part of the building. The two are inextricably linked. It is a nexus that cannot be broken without diminishing the social value of the building, the surrounding precinct and the operations and culture of the PPTEU.

The building's architectural character suits the raw and often heavy work of the men and women who make up the union. The assertive concrete building represents a union standing proud in its history and forever placed adjacent to Trades Hall [...].

Number 52 Victoria Street is the PPTEU's physical and spiritual home. It has been our home for over 50 years and it was never envisaged that we would ever want or need to find another home. The building is a great source of pride to the members. It is the place where their shared history is as much in the walls as it is in the old photos which adorn them. It is the building their father's generation built and it sits next door to the building where their grandfathers and great grandfathers attended rowdy meetings or mourned the loss of their fallen workmates while demanding safer workplaces.

The building reminds members that they are part of something bigger and stronger than themselves; it reminds us that disputes come and go but the union stands strong. And the other trade unions get a great source of comfort from knowing the plumbers are there, right next to Trades Hall. The Plumbers Union standing strong and in its rightful place signals to the other unions that the plumbers are always there to help their comrades, always in their place, right next to Trades Hall, ready to lead the way in a crisis.

Place matters in union life, and the Trades Hall precinct is the epicentre. It is the precinct where the key committees meet, and decisions are made. It is where events, elections, rallies and celebrations happen. Having ready access to Trades Hall is of critical importance to the PPTEU's ability to function to the best advantage of its members. Our home is a significant part of this culturally vital union district.

As intimated in the above quote, it is probable that the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is also valued by groups and communities with an interest in unionism and Labor history at a more generalised level.

The works proposed will enable the Union to continue to operate from its existing headquarters. It is estimated that the addition and improvements will meet the needs of the Union for at least a generation.

### 4.3 The extent to which the application, if refused, would affect the reasonable or economic use of the registered place

In considering s. 101(2)(b) of the *Heritage Act*, reference has been made to Heritage Victoria's *Reasonable or economic use policy* of June 2021. As advised by Nicola Stairmand, Principal of Assessments at Heritage Victoria, in relation to the works proposed to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Headquarters emphasis should be placed on reasonable use.<sup>18</sup>

Paragraph 14 of the *Reasonable or economic use policy* states:

When taking into account the circumstances of the permit application and the registered place or object, the Executive Director may consider: (1) the historic, recent and current uses of the registered place or object, (2) other compatible uses of the registered place or object, (3) the context and setting within which the place or object is located, and (4) other relevant matters.

A key consideration in relation to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is that the Union commissioned the building as its headquarters in 1968/69, a use that it continues to perform. As noted, the association between the building and the Union contributes to its significance. However, for the reasons described at Section 1.2 'Why are the works required?', alterations are needed to enable the Union to continue to operate from 52 Victoria Street.

The internal refurbishment of Levels 1 and 2, the compliance works and the rooftop addition have been developed with the objective of sustaining the association between the building and the Union. Growth in membership driven largely by the Union's role in Victoria's response to the changing climate, as well as changed work practice and increased requirements for training facilities, means that large, flexible spaces are required.

In seeking to 'future proof' the building, the Union originally sought a rooftop addition that was larger than that currently proposed. A preference for space with seating capacity of at least 100 was the starting point, an outcome that would have delivered a footprint that extended the full width of the building and extended further to the south. The works as proposed have been contracted, in response to advice from HV and seeking to manage the visibility of the additions.

Having regard to the above, and part '2' of the Paragraph 14 (above), the works proposed are 'compatible' as defined in the *Burra Charter*, Article 1.11:

Compatible use means a use which respects the cultural significance of a place. Such a use involves no, or minimal, impact on cultural significance.

The continued use of the building for its original purpose respects the cultural significance of a place. Works to enable the continued use of the building in a manner that meets current and future needs will not impact upon an ability to understand the Union building as a powerful and distinctive Brutalist landmark in its streetscape setting.

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<sup>18</sup> This advice was provided verbally at the pre-application meeting held on 26 October 2023, and re-iterated in Heritage Victoria's written comments, received (via email) on 14 November 2023.

#### 4.4 Other matters

The *Heritage Act*, at s. 101(3) enables the ED to consider the extent to which the works, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of adjacent or neighbouring properties as well as ‘any other relevant matter’.

In this case, a matter of relevance is the significance of Trades Hall, which was inscribed in the National Heritage List (NHL ID 106370) on 11 October 2023. The NHL entry notes that:

The size and scale of the Victorian Trades Hall building, its additions and alterations over time, commemorative elements and decorative features, all contribute to its ability to be read as a significant structure reflective of the growing force of the union movement and breadth of representation across industries.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building, located directly to the east of Trades Hall, is an expression of the growth of the union movement. The Eight Hour Monument and Curtin Hotel hold similar associations. The Union building is in its location because the PPTU had outgrown Trades Hall, setting a pattern followed by many others.

If the application is not approved, and the Union disposes of the building – possibly to a non-union aligned entity – there is potential for the cultural values of the setting for Trades Hall to be diminished.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

The package of conservation, compliance and upgrade works to the PPTU’s headquarters building has been calibrated to deliver an outcome that achieves a balance between the needs of the Union and the assessed significance of its headquarters at 52 Victoria Street, Carlton. The approach is also responsive to Heritage Victoria’s *Principles for considering change to places in the Victorian Heritage Register*, including: understanding why the place is significant; adopting a cautious and respectful approach to the upgrades and new works; protecting the relationship between the building and its setting; seeking to manage impacts on key views; and delivering an outcome that will enable the Union to remain in its headquarters building.

The building’s historical associations with unionism and the Labor movement will be sustained. The same applies to the building’s symbolic and sentimental significance to the PPTU. The external conservation works are demonstrably positive, as it the delivery of universal access and the intent to introduce an artwork/installation within the undercroft at the south of the site – responding to an unrealised idea by Graeme Gunn.

Upgrades to the interiors are consistent with the Union’s current and anticipated needs and include the provision of large open-plan spaces that can be configured to meet a range of activities, including training and meetings. The works, which will remove fit outs of varying age and integrity, will not result in changes to the building’s external presentation. They will also act as a showcase for the Union’s skills and expertise, particularly as related to net zero energy installations. Further, as noted, the refurbishment of the existing Committee Room on Level 1 will integrate interpretive displays associated with the history of the Union.

These positives are balanced against the requirement for increased GFA, notably in the form of a roof-top addition. Given the constrained footprint of the site, total concealment of the addition in views from the public realm is not achievable. However, further to advice from Heritage Victoria, all efforts to minimise the visibility of the addition have been explored, in terms of setbacks from the south and west,

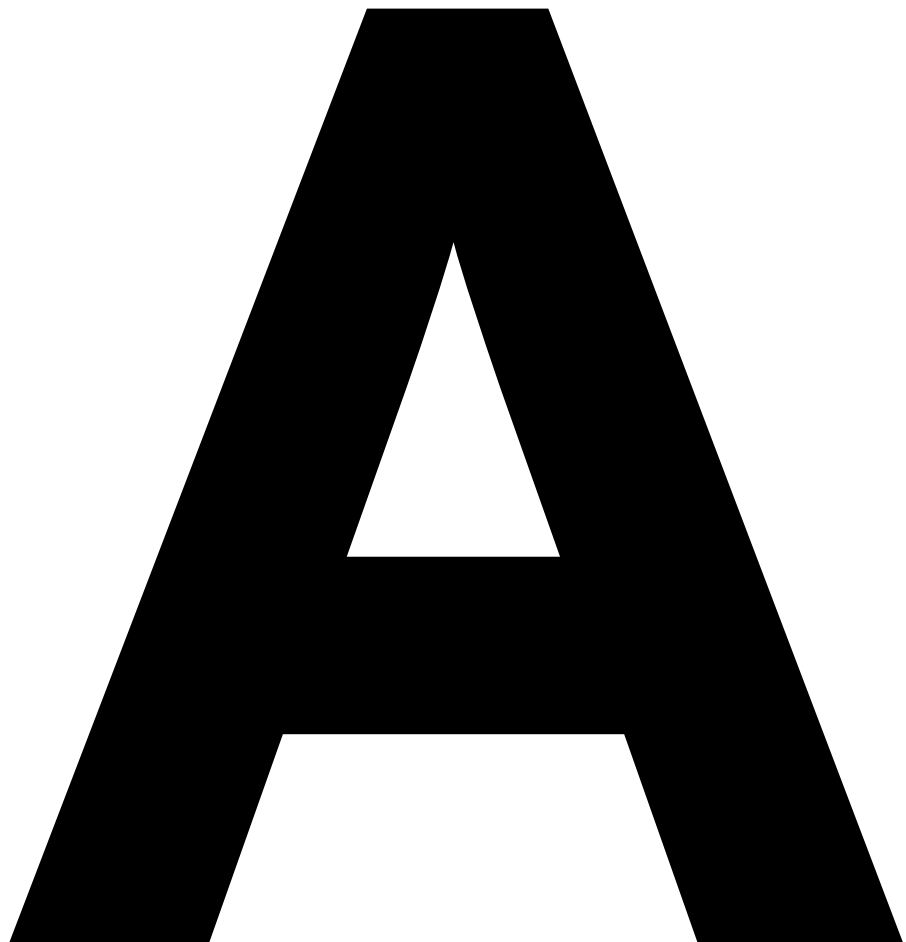


limiting the addition to a single level with a flat roof, adopting a limited materials palette and developing an architectural treatment with minimal applied details.

While acknowledging the architectural significance of the existing structure, it is considered that the roof top addition is within the limits of acceptable change. The addition will be understood as a later alteration and is of a scale and form that will not dominate the existing building or unduly detract from the prevailing qualities of the existing building as a powerful and distinct presence in the streetscape.

**APPENDIX A:  
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT,  
2023**

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The following assessment of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building was prepared in April 2023 by Lovell Chen. It was informed by physical analysis of the building, historical research and direct engagement with the following:

- Graeme Gunn, the architect of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building, and a pre-eminent Victorian architect of the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. Gunn made his name as the architect from the early 1960s through his work for Merchant Builders, a progressive project home builder;
- Paddy McCrudden, Assistant Secretary of the Plumbers and Pipe Trades Employees Union (PPTU);
- Professor Alan Pert, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne. Professor Pert is co-editor of *The Total Environment*, a history of Merchant Builders, forthcoming from the Miegunyah Press, Melbourne; and
- Earl Setches, Secretary of the PPTU.

The assessment follows *The Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines* (as amended, 1 December 2022).

**CRITERION 'A': IMPORTANCE TO THE COURSE, OR PATTERN, OF VICTORIA'S CULTURAL HISTORY**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

**STEP 1:**

**A1)** The place/object has a clear association with an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life in Victoria's cultural history.

**AND**

**A2)** The event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life is of historical importance, having made a strong or influential contribution to Victoria.

**AND**

**A3)** There is evidence of the association to the event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life in Victoria's cultural history.

**IF A1, A2 AND A3 ARE SATISFIED THEN CRITERION A IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

**STEP 2:**

**SA1)** The place/object allows the clear association with the event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life of historical importance to be understood better than most other places or objects in Victoria with substantially the same association.

**IF SA1 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION A IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

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.

*Assessment*

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building has a clear association with Labor history and trade unionism, a movement that has exerted a significant impact on the political and cultural life of Victoria (and Australia) since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The building is part of an urban landscape that shares these associations including, but not necessarily limited to, Trades Hall, the Eight Hour Day Monument and the Curtin Hotel. Since at least the early-1900s, the intersection of Victoria and Lygon streets has been a rallying point for unionists and campaigns for worker's rights.

The Plumbers and Gasfitters was the first union to build its own premises. All unions had previously been accommodated in Trades Hall. The building provides evidence of the strength and influence of the union movement in the late-1960s, an influence that endures today.

The building is of historical significance for having been designed by Graeme Gunn, an eminent Victorian architect of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Gunn 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. The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building received a Victorian Architectural Award Citation in 1971, and the RAIA's 25-year award for Enduring Architecture in 2007.

**CRITERION 'B': POSSESSION OF UNCOMMON, RARE OR ENDANGERED ASPECTS OF VICTORIA'S CULTURAL HISTORY.**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

**STEP 1:**

**B1)** The place/object has a clear association with an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life of importance in Victoria's cultural history.

**AND**

**B2)** There is evidence of the association to the event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom, way of life of importance in Victoria's cultural history.

**AND**

**B3)** There is evidence that the place/object is rare or uncommon, or has rare or uncommon features.

**IF B1, B2 & B3 ARE SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION B IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

**STEP 2:**

There is evidence that:

**SB1)** the place/object is rare or uncommon, being one of a small number of places/objects remaining that demonstrates the important event, phase etc

**OR**

**SB2)** the place/object is rare or uncommon, containing unusual features, and these features are of note and these features were not widely replicated in Victoria;

**OR**

**SB3)** the existence of the class of place/object that demonstrates the important event, phase etc is endangered to the point of rarity due to threats and pressures on such places/objects in Victoria.

**IF ANY ONE OF SB1, SB2 OR SB3 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION B IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

Criterion B does not apply to the existing VHR entry.

*Assessment*

This criterion does not apply to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building. It is one of a large number of buildings and places associated with the trade unions across Victoria. It is also one of a large number of buildings/places in the State in the Brutalist style and expressive of Brutalist principles.

**CRITERION 'C': POTENTIAL TO YIELD INFORMATION THAT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF VICTORIA'S CULTURAL HISTORY.**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

STEP 1:

**C1)** The:

- physical fabric, **AND/OR**
- documentary evidence, **AND/OR**
- associated oral history or cultural narratives,

relating to the place/object indicates a likelihood that the place/object contains evidence of cultural heritage significance that is not currently visible and/or well understood or available from other sources.

**AND**

**C2)** From what we know of the place/object the physical evidence is likely to be of an integrity and/or condition that it could yield information through detailed investigation.

**IF C1 AND C2 ARE SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION C IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

STEP 2:

**SC1)** The information that might be obtained through investigation has the potential to yield knowledge of significance to Victoria.

**IF SC1 IS SATISFIED, CRITERION C IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

Criterion C does not apply to the existing VHR entry.

*Assessment*

This criterion applies to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building.

Analysis of the documentary record and oral history does not indicate a likelihood that it contains evidence of cultural heritage significance that is not currently available or well understood from other sources.



**CRITERION 'D': IMPORTANCE IN DEMONSTRATING THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A CLASS OF CULTURAL PLACES AND OBJECTS.**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

**STEP 1:**

**D1)** The place/object is one of a class of places/objects that has a clear association with an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life in Victoria's history.

**AND**

**D2)** The event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life is of historical importance, having made a strong or influential contribution to Victoria.

**AND**

**D3)** The principal characteristics of the class are evident in the physical fabric of the place/object.

**IF D1, D2 AND D3 ARE SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION D IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

**STEP 2:**

**SD1)** The place/object is a notable example of the class in Victoria (refer to Reference Tool D).

**CRITERION D IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

Criterion D does not apply to the existing VHR entry.

*Assessment*

Criterion D does not apply to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building.

**CRITERION 'E': IMPORTANCE IN EXHIBITING PARTICULAR AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS.**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

STEP 1:

**E1)** The physical fabric of the place/object clearly exhibits particular aesthetic characteristics.

**IF E1 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION E IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

STEP 2:

**SE1)** The aesthetic characteristics are 'beyond the ordinary' or are outstanding as demonstrated by:

- evidence from within the relevant discipline (architecture, art, design or equivalent);

**AND/OR**

- critical recognition of the aesthetic characteristics of the place/object within a relevant art, design, architectural or related discipline within Victoria;

**AND/OR**

- wide public acknowledgement of exceptional aesthetic qualities of the place/object in Victoria expressed in publications, print or digital media, painting, sculpture, songs, poetry, literature, or other media.

**IF SE1 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION E IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

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 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.

*Assessment*

The Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building is a notable example of Brutalist architecture in Victoria. It is relatively early in the State context, following works embodying Brutalist principles by Robin Boyd and Frederick Romberg, among others, from the late-1950s.

The building is distinguished by the sculpted south bay, a finely resolved composition of solid and void (or compression and release), with a projecting bay to the first floor that is dominated by a large pane of glass dark 'smoked' glass. A ground level water feature (cascade) was one of a number of elements that fell victim to budgetary constraints (see also below). Other characteristics of the Brutalist style include its finish in textured off-form concrete and the legibility of the plan, including external staircases to the

front and rear. The building's muscular character is an architectural expression of the powerful of the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union, and the union movement generally.

The building was engineered to accommodate additional levels. In the late-1960s, it was envisaged as a four-level building, with two offices levels for the Union and one for rent. As built, only one office level was provided for the Union. The Union has since occupied the upper level.

Designing for growth is a significant and consistent theme in Gunn's residential, commercial and institutional work since the early-1960s. He is conscious that while natural landscapes grow and evolve, there are no equivalent processes for architecture. Another significant theme in Gunn's work is taking inspiration from nature – the south elevation of the Union headquarters has been described as a cliff face in architectural form.

The building was highly regarded at the time of completion and continues to be revered both as a Brutalist landmark and among Gunn's finest works.

**CRITERION 'F': IMPORTANCE IN DEMONSTRATING A HIGH DEGREE OF CREATIVE OR TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT AT A PARTICULAR PERIOD.**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

**STEP 1:**

**F1)** The place/object contains physical evidence that clearly demonstrates creative or technical achievement for the time in which it was created.

**AND**

**F2)** The physical evidence demonstrates a high degree of integrity.

**IF F1 AND F2 ARE SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION F IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

**STEP 2:**

**SF1)** The nature and/or scale of the achievement is of a high degree or 'beyond the ordinary' for the period in which it was undertaken as demonstrated by:

- evidence from within the relevant creative or technological discipline that recognises the place/object as a breakthrough in terms of design, fabrication or construction techniques and/or as a successful solution to a technical problem that extended the limits of existing technology;

**AND/OR**

- critical acclaim of the place/object within the relevant creative or technological discipline as an outstanding example in Victoria;

**AND/OR**

- wide acknowledgement of exceptional merit in Victoria in media such as publications or print/digital media;

**AND/OR**

- recognition of the place/object as an outstanding example of the creative adaptation of available materials and technology of the period.

**IF SF1 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION F IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

Criterion F does not apply to the existing VHR entry.

*Assessment*

While the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building does contain physical evidence that demonstrates creative achievement for the time in which it was created (Brutalist expression), and the building has been highly awarded, it is considered that these values/attributes are better acknowledged under Criterion E.

**CRITERION 'G': STRONG OR SPECIAL ASSOCIATION WITH A PARTICULAR PRESENT-DAY COMMUNITY OR CULTURAL GROUP FOR SOCIAL, CULTURAL OR SPIRITUAL REASONS**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

**STEP 1:**

**G1)** The place/object demonstrates social value to a community or cultural group in the present day in the context of its cultural heritage significance. Evidence must be provided that all three facets of social value are met:

- (i) existence of a community or cultural group;
- (ii) (ii) existence of a strong attachment of a community or cultural group to the place or object;
- (iii) (iii) existence of a time depth to that attachment (refer to Step 1 Reference Tool).

**IF G1 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION G IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

**SG1)** Evidence that the social value resonates across the broader Victorian community as part of a story that contributes to Victoria's identity.

**IF SG1 IS SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION G IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

Criterion G does not apply to the existing VHR entry.

*Assessment*

It is considered that Criterion G applies to the Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Building, at least at the local level (possibly at the State level).

The building is a place of strong symbolic meaning and significance to the membership of the PPTEU for whom it has been their home and headquarters since the early 1970s. It derives cultural heritage significance for its enduring occupation by the Union.

It is possible that the building is also valued by the union and Labor movements more generally, both in its own right and as part of an urban landscape strongly associated with unionism.

**CRITERION 'H': SPECIAL ASSOCIATION WITH THE LIFE OR WORKS OF A PERSON, OR GROUP OF PERSONS, OF IMPORTANCE IN VICTORIA'S HISTORY**

*Heritage Council of Victoria, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines*

**STEP 1:**

**H1)** The place/object has a direct association with a person, or group of persons, who have made a strong or influential contribution in their field of endeavour.

AND

**H2)** There is evidence of the association between the place/object and the person(s).

AND

**H3)** The association relates:

- directly to achievements of the person(s); **AND**
- to an enduring and/or close interaction between the person(s) and the place/object.

**IF H1, H2 AND H3 ARE SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION H IS LIKELY TO APPLY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY AT THE STATE LEVEL)**

**STEP 2:**

**SH1)** The life or works of the person/persons are important to Victoria's history.

AND

**SH2)** The place/object allows the association between the person or group of persons and their importance in Victoria's history to be readily appreciated better than most other places or objects in Victoria.

**IF SH1 AND SH2 ARE SATISFIED, THEN CRITERION H IS LIKELY TO BE RELEVANT AT THE STATE LEVEL**

*Existing assessment (extract from Statement of Significance)*

The existing VHR entry does reference Graeme Gunn, with the inference that the building derives significance for its association with him, but that is not explicitly stated.

*Assessment*

While the building does derive significance as notable work by an eminent Victorian architect, for the purposes of this assessment it is considered that this association is adequately acknowledged under Criterion A.

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