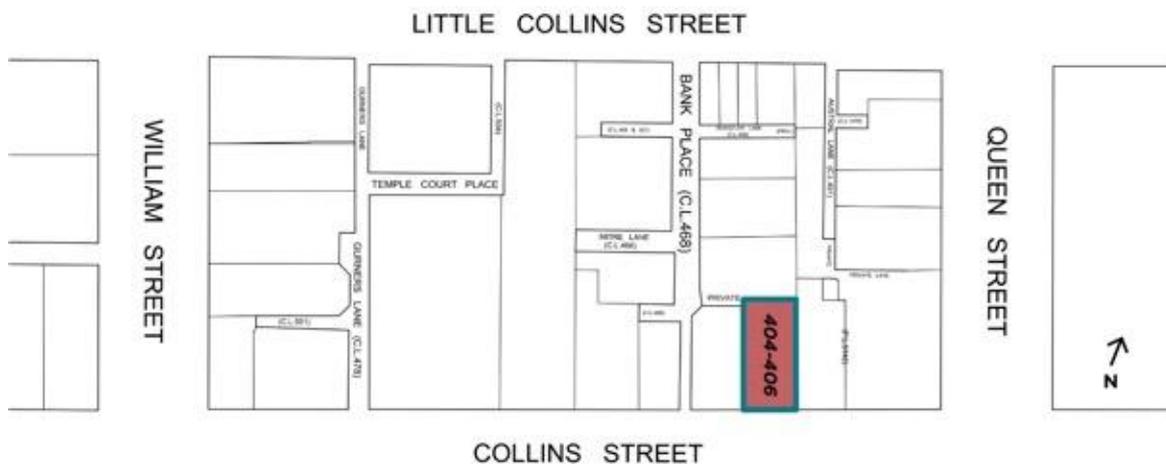
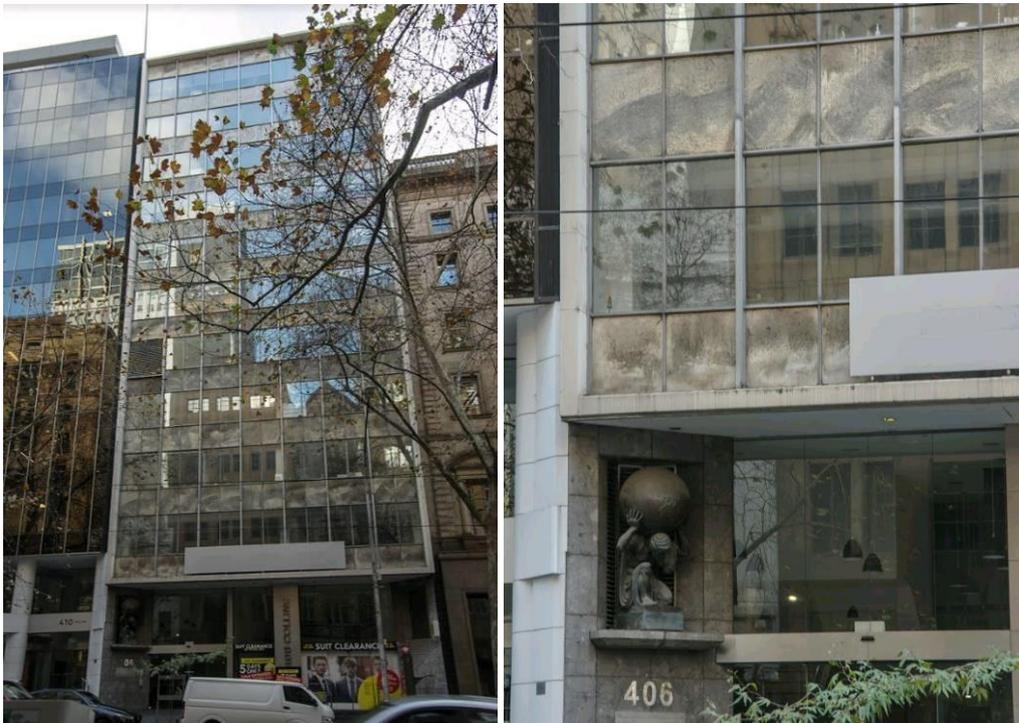


SITE NAME	Atlas Assurance Building [also known as Praemium House]
STREET ADDRESS	404-406 Collins Street, Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	102129



SURVEY DATE: May 2017		SURVEY BY: Context	
HERITAGE INVENTORY	N/A	EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY	Yes – interim controls HO1008
PLACE TYPE	Individual Heritage Place	PROPOSED CATEGORY	Significant
		FORMER GRADE	C
DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:	H Garnet Alsop & Partners	BUILDER:	E.A Watts
DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:	Postwar Period (1945-1965)	DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:	1958-61

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations.	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here
POSTWAR THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1 Shaping the urban landscape	1.8 Expressing an architectural style
3 Building a commercial city	3.2 Business and finance

LAND USE

THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Offices
1920s	Offices
1960s	Offices – services

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Extent of overlay: refer to map

SUMMARY

The former Atlas Assurance Building is an 11-storey steel framed reinforced concrete office building. It is an early example of curtain wall construction. Designed by H Garnet Alsop & Partners, it was refurbished in 1993 with the facade refurbished in 2001. It features a bronze statue of Atlas at the front of the building that was associated with the Mutual Assurance Society of Victoria.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The period from 1945 to 1975 was one of radical transformation for Melbourne; from the low-rise city that still reflected its colonial origins to a bustling international centre of commerce and culture. The surviving buildings from this period are evidence of the evolving economic and social conditions in Melbourne at the time and demonstrate the city's transition from its nineteenth century manufacturing origins to its current banking, office and service industry focus. These buildings reflect the increasing commercial and cultural role of Melbourne in the international context of globalisation and postwar optimism as well as a radically altered economic environment which saw an influx of foreign capital and ideas. Collectively, these buildings represent a transformative period in the life of the city; a period that is categorised by significant change, growth and evolution across all aspects of life – social, political, economic and cultural.

Expressing an architectural style in the postwar period

Multi-storey commercial buildings made a significant contribution to postwar Melbourne, particularly from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. With the resumption of building construction in the 1950s after the hiatus of World War II, the advent of curtain wall construction – enabling the application of a non-load bearing skin to the face of a building – radically altered the appearance of the modern city commercial building.

Constructed predominantly for the financial and business sectors, there was an eagerness amongst clients to establish a dominant city presence and to project a modern, progressive and prestigious approach to commercial building design. The resulting Post-War Modernist style of multi-storey buildings, influenced particularly by steel and glass office tower design in the United States, were in stark contrast to the pre-war city buildings in central Melbourne and presented architects of the day with a completely new design challenge.

Thirty major city buildings were completed in Melbourne in four years alone from 1955 to 1958 and 22 were office buildings within, or on the fringes of, the CBD (Saunders 1959:91). Largely influenced by the American skyscraper, the earliest office buildings of the 1950s utilised innovative curtain walling, formed from continuous metal-framing filled principally with glass. The curtain wall is described by Miles Lewis as 'essentially a continuous, non-bearing skin on the face of a building' and is one of the 'leitmotifs of modernism, both in Australia and overseas' (Lewis 2012:185). The curtain walled 'glass box' aesthetic was embraced by the local architects, and many buildings followed to the extent that high-rise office buildings with curtain walling became a defining characteristic of the new buildings in the latter half of the 1950s (NTAV 2014:5-6).

Amongst the first curtain walled buildings to be constructed in Melbourne was the 13-storey glass-fronted Gilbert Court at 100 Collins Street (J A La Gerche 1954-56), which was built to the height limit of 132 feet (40m), and – perhaps the most influential – the free-standing ICI House, 1 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1955-58). Located on the outskirts of the Hoddle Grid, ICI House was clad on all four facades with glass curtain walling and exceeded the well-established maximum building height within the Hoddle Grid. Large numbers of similarly designed city commercial buildings followed, often displaying bold horizontal contrast between alternating rows of glazing and coloured spandrels.

Business and finance in the postwar period

The postwar period was one of fluctuating fortunes in the business and finance sectors. In the main however, economic confidence and financial deregulation came together to create a period of growth that would radically change the appearance of central Melbourne.

Speculative investment in Melbourne increased after the Commonwealth government lifted restrictions on share dealings in 1947, which resulted in a dramatic increase in new company registrations (Marsden 2000:44-45). Subsequently, during the 1950s, a number of national and international companies sought to assert a physical

presence in the country, constructing corporate buildings in the city centre. In Melbourne, up to the mid-1960s, investment was predominantly driven by British and American companies, government bodies, large Australian corporations such as AMP and BHP, and property developers, including Lend Lease (formerly Civil and Civic) and L J Hooker Ltd. Later in the 1960s, it was also driven by private developers such as Grollo and Lustig & Moar (Marsden 2000:46-47).

The construction of large bank buildings was also prolific during the postwar period with the passing of the Banking Act 1947, which led to an increase in the number of bank branches established in Victoria. One of the most significant changes in banking in Australia at this time was the creation of the new Reserve Bank of Australia in 1959, which replaced the central bank known as the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (Heritage Alliance 2008:17). Bank buildings constructed in the central city during this period included the State Savings Bank of Victoria at 233-243 Queen Street (1967-68), the Bank of Adelaide Building at 265-269 Collins Street (1959-60) and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Building at 251-257 Collins Street (1971-73).

The period between 1961 and 1963 was one of business recession, while the years between 1967 and 1969 was a time of growth due to two mineral booms. From 1967 to 1971 the construction of new office space in the city centre more than doubled that of the previous five years (City of Melbourne Strategy Plan 1974 in Clinch 2012:66-67). The property boom ended during the economic crash of the early 1970s and the 1974 oil crisis when many British institutions that had founded the commercial property industry left Australia. Government bodies and banks subsequently took over much of the building construction in the city centre (Marsden 2000:48).

SITE HISTORY

The site on which the former Atlas Assurance building is located was formerly occupied by the National Mutual Assurance Society of Victoria. The company began in 1869 in Melbourne and expanded across Australia throughout the early 1900s, amalgamating with many smaller mutual societies ('National Mutual Life Association of Australasia' 2011).

This steel-framed and reinforced concrete building was erected in 1957-8 for the Atlas Assurance Co Ltd by builders EA Watts Pty. Ltd., initially as basement, ground, mezzanine and six upper levels, to the design of architects and engineers' H Garnett Alsop & Partners. The estimated cost was £310,000. Within two years of completion, another four levels were added to take it to just over the city's building height limit of 40 metres (132 feet) (Figure 1). The same architects and builder were commissioned to complete the additional storeys.

The Atlas Company was a successful insurance company founded in 1808, with international branches that followed its establishment in Britain. 404-406 Collins Street was the company's head

office for both New Zealand and Australia. The building's construction coincided with the erection of a number of large insurance and assurance company offices nearby in what was Melbourne's financial centre.



Figure 1. 404-406 Colins Street in 1961. (Source: Fowler 1961, SLV H92.20/7132 [copyright](#))

Howard Garnet Alsop, architect

In March 1926, 17-year old Howard Garnet Alsop became an articled pupil of his architect uncle. Between 1930 and 1932, Alsop studied at the University of Melbourne Architectural Atelier and was registered as an architect in December 1931. After working as a draftsman with the Melbourne Electricity Supply Company he gained a position in the office of Godfrey and Spowers in 1934. (Built Heritage 2017).

In April 1936, Alsop left Melbourne for an extended overseas tour of England (where he worked in the London office of Wallis, Gilbert and Partners), Germany, Scandinavia, Russia and the USA. After returning to Australia in July 1937, he opened an office in Melbourne. His first client was Ivan Holyman of ANA, who commissioned the young architect to design the new airline terminal and hangar complex at Essendon Aerodrome. Subsequently appointed as the company's official architect, Alsop continued to design buildings for ANA until the airline merged with Ansett in 1957 (Built Heritage 2017).

In 1946, Alsop renamed his practice H Garnet Alsop and Partners, architects and engineers. The firm thrived in the postwar era, with Alsop's practice expanding to include factories, multi-storey city offices, and health-related projects. (Built Heritage 2017).

In 1978, Alsop retired as senior partner of the firm bearing his name. The business was carried on by four remaining partners: long-time staff members Hugh Pettit and Ian Freeland, and Alsop's two architect sons, David and John. Alsop's brother Dennis and other son Rodney also remained involved, in their respective capacities of consulting engineer and quantity surveyor. In 1982, the office merged with another long-running practice of pre-war origin, Leighton Irwin Australia, to create a new entity, Leighton Irwin-Garnet Alsop Pty Ltd, abbreviated as the Irwin-Alsop Group.

Howard Garnet Alsop died on 3 October 1994, aged 85 years. His practice continued to operate as the Irwin-Alsop Group until 2008, when it merged with Whitefield McQueen to form Whitefield

McQueen Irwin Alsop, or WMIA. The practice was subsequently absorbed in 2012 by Group GSA, a large international and multi-disciplinary practice that continues to this day (Built Heritage 2017).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The former Atlas Assurance Building is an 11-storey steel framed reinforced concrete office building with a basement and mezzanine. An early example of curtain wall construction, it incorporates marble spandrel panels within the facade design (Figure 1). The façade curtain wall system is constructed of anodised aluminium framed with marble spandrels and 'Polyglass' (originally specified as 'Thermopane') double glazed polished plate window units.

Internally, the service core is arranged along the west wall with stairs at either end and a light court midway on the east wall. Suspended plaster ceilings are used throughout with air-conditioning as an advance on the natural ventilation. The floor slabs are turned up at the façade edge to provide fire-rated spandrels to sill height with the sills finished in reconstructed granite.

The ground level has a grand folding glass door set across the entry at the west end of the façade, leading to a glass lobby screen and terrazzo paving beyond. It features a bronze statue of Atlas at the front of the building, originally part of the Mutual Assurance Society of Victoria building that formerly occupied the site.

INTEGRITY

The ground level interior and façade were modified in the 1980s and the statue of Atlas relocated to a niche at the west end (although a panel on the wall states that the statue is in its original position). However, the upper-level façade remains generally as built. The building was refurbished internally in 1993 and the façade in 2001.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The former Atlas Assurance Building at 404-406 Collins Street is a fine and representative example of the Post-War Modernist style and clearly demonstrates the typical characteristics of 1950s multi-storey commercial building design.

There are a number of buildings in the Hoddle Grid within the City of Melbourne which were constructed in the same period and display similar characteristics to the former Atlas Assurance Building. These are detailed below.

State-significant places

A comparative example in the City of Melbourne which is located immediately adjacent to the Hoddle Grid is ICI House, 1-4 Nicholson Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon 1958). This place is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H0786).

Locally-significant places

Precinct Heritage Overlay

As only a piece-meal evaluation of postwar buildings within the Hoddle Grid in the City of Melbourne has previously occurred, few buildings from the early postwar period are currently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme. Those from the 1950s that are included in the Heritage Overlay are currently included as part of Heritage Precincts, but are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as Individual Heritage Places. These places are:



Former Gilbert Court, 100-104 Collins Street (John A La Gerche, 1954-55) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Significant place.



Former Hosie's Hotel, 1-5 Elizabeth Street & 288-290 Flinders Street (Mussen McKay & Potter, 1954-55), included in HO505 Flinders Gate Precinct as a Significant place.



Coates Building, 18-22 Collins Street (John A La Gerche, 1958-59) included in HO504 Collins East Precinct as a Significant place.



Former Bank of Adelaide Building, 265-269 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Mewton & Lobb, 1959-60) included in HO502 The Block Precinct as a Contributory place.



Former Allans Building, 276-278 Collins Street (Godfrey & Spowers, Hughes, Merton and Lobb with Charles N Hollinshed, 1956-57) included in HO502 The Block Precinct as a Significant place.

Other Examples

Despite the demolition of many 1950s multi-storey commercial buildings in the City of Melbourne, a number of fine and highly representative examples of this building type that are not currently included in the Heritage Overlay on a permanent basis have been retained with sufficient integrity to demonstrate this class of place. These buildings clearly illustrate the initial period of curtain wall construction in Melbourne and demonstrate similar characteristics to the subject building. The following examples are recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as individually significant heritage places as part of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review:



Lauren's House, 414-416 Lonsdale Street (Harold Bloom, 1956) (Interim HO1254).



Former Batman Automatic Telephone Exchange, 376 Flinders Lane (Commonwealth Department of Works, 1957).



Former London Assurance House, 468-470 Bourke Street (B Evans & Partners, 1960) (Interim HO1006).



Former AMP Building, 402-408 Lonsdale Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1956-59).



Former Ajax House, 103-105 Queen Street (HD Berry, 1956).



HC Sleigh Building, 166-172 Queen Street (Bates Smart & McCutcheon, 1953-55).



Coles & Garrard Building, 376-378 Bourke Street
(Meldrum & Noad, 1957).

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

Analysis

404-406 Collins Street, has been refurbished at ground level and the interior, a common occurrence with many postwar office buildings. It is however more intact than its neighbour at 410 Collins Street and 170 Queen Street where there has been a complete renewal of the curtain wall façade. 404-406 Collins Street is still legible as a commercial office of the 1950s, retaining its façade and scale. It is an intact representative example of a 1950s office building and very few of these places are yet to be included on the Heritage Overlay.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓

CRITERION A

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

CRITERION B

Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

CRITERION C

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).

✓

CRITERION D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

✓

CRITERION E

Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

CRITERION F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)

CRITERION G

Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

CRITERION H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an individual heritage place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

REFERENCES

Contextual History references contained within *City of Melbourne Hoddle Grid Heritage Review: Postwar Thematic Environmental History 1945-1975*

Fowler, Lyle 1961, 'Atlas Assurance building, 406 Collins Street', State Library of Victoria: Harold Paynting collection. H series, accessed online June 2019.

Goad, P 1999, *Melbourne Architecture*.

Goad, P & Willis, J(eds.) 2012, *An Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press.

Google Street View 2017, 404-406 Collins Street, Google Maps, accessed online 27 June 2017.

Lewis, Miles 2012 'Curtain Wall' in Goad, Philip & Willis, Julie (eds) 2012, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Marsden, Susan 2000, *Urban Heritage: the rise and postwar development of Australia's capital city centres*, Australian Council of National Trusts and Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

'National Mutual Life Association of Australasia (1869-)' 2011, via *Trove*, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.party-636066>, accessed online 12 June 2019.

National Trust Classification Report

National Trust of Australia Victoria (NTAV) 2014, *Melbourne's Marvellous Modernism*, National Trust (Victoria), Melbourne.

The following sources and data were used for this assessment (Graeme Butler, 2011). Note that the citation prepared in 2011 did not provide in text referencing.

Storey, Rohan 2008, 'Skyscrapers' in *eMelbourne*, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01383b.htm>, accessed 13 June 2017.

General sources

The following data was typically drawn from:

Historic Buildings Preservation Council reports on the Melbourne Central Business District from the 1970s;

Melbourne City Council on-line i-Heritage database;

Mahlstedt fire insurance map series held in the State Library of Victoria collection and Melbourne University Archives;

Daily newspaper reports such as 'The Argus';

Australian Architecture Index (AAI), prepared by Professor Miles Lewis and others;

Melbourne City Council building application drawings and files held at Melbourne City Council and the Victorian Public Records Office.

Twentieth Century Architecture Register of Royal Australian Institute of Architects

Graeme Butler, 1982-3, Twentieth Century Architecture Register of Royal Australian Institute of Architects: cites Building Permit Applications;

Building Permit Applications

9/6/1957, 31535 £310,000 ;

24/10/1960, 34487 added storeys to 406, £238,000. (not at VPRO)

National Trust of Australia (Vic) File B5345

Contains article in Architecture in Australia June 1959 David Saunders, 'Office Buildings in Melbourne' examining recent office construction types and costs.

'Building Ideas' 1965 guide

March 1965: included on the architectural guide for the Australian architectural convention- 'Royal Exchange Assurance 406 Collins Street H. Garnet Alsop and Partners, Six storeys, 1958; additional four floors, 1961.

The Argus

Tuesday 3 February 1953 City Personal

Tuesday 10 February 1948 City Personal

Monday 15 September 1902

Sands & McDougall Melbourne or Victorian Directories

PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985** C

**Central City Heritage
Study Review 1993** C

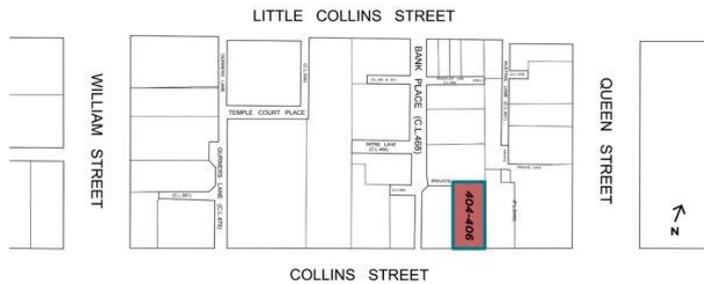
**Review of Heritage
overlay listings in the
CBD 2002** C

**Central City Heritage
Review 2011** C

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Atlas Assurance Building

PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The former Atlas Assurance building at 404-406 Collins Street, Melbourne, completed in 1958-1961 to a design by H Garnet Alsop.

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

- The building’s original external form, materials and detailing; and
- The building’s high level of integrity to its original design.

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

How it is significant?

The former Atlas Assurance building at 404-406 Collins Street is of historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Atlas Assurance building is historically significant for its association with postwar development, and with the expansion of large companies undertaking construction and naming rights of new city office buildings as a form of promotion and fund investment. A related object, the Federation-era statue of Atlas is historically significant as an artefact from the Mutual Assurance Society of Victoria that occupied the same site. (Criterion A)

The former Atlas Assurance building is significant as a relatively intact, curtain-walled office building from the postwar period and demonstrating the style embraced by local architects by the late 1950s. In

particular it employs a curtain-wall façade that makes the transition from the all-glass wall to the combination of solid spandrels of masonry, coloured glass or enameled metal sheeting of the 1960s. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, the former Atlas Assurance building presents a sealed aluminium-framed curtain wall just a few years after the first multi-storey glass box was built in Australia. The use of marble spandrels on the curtain wall and granite at the base of the building emulated in a modern manner the stone clad classical facades favoured previously by financial institutions. Attributes of the building that demonstrate aesthetic value include the façade curtain wall system with anodised aluminium frames with marble spandrels and 'Polyglass' double glazed polished plate windows, all of which were remarked upon in the architectural periodical *Cross-section*. (Criterion E)

Primary source

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

