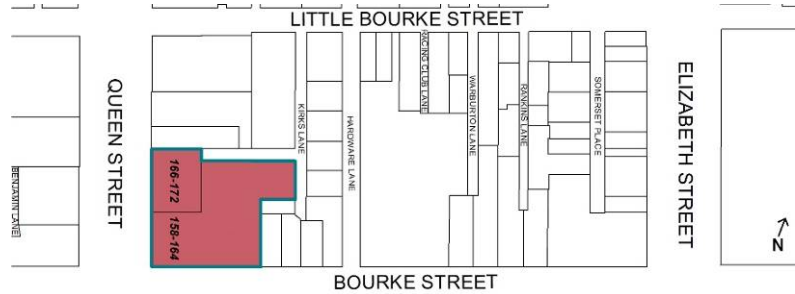


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: Former Sleigh Buildings (158-172 Queen Street, Melbourne), April 2022

Heritage Place: Former Sleigh Buildings (H C Sleigh Building & former Sleigh Corner)



PS ref no: HO1369





What is significant?

The former Sleigh Corner building at 158-164 Queen Street, and the former H C Sleigh Building at 166-172 Queen Street, Melbourne, both completed to a design by Bates Smart & McCutcheon.

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

- Original building form and scale (158-164 & 166-172)
- Original asymmetric solid painted render form and nonloadbearing curtain wall to its principal (Queen Street) façade, square windows to southern end wall (166-172)
- Original masonry wall with fenestration pattern and windows to its rear (off Kirks Lane) façade (166-172)
- Original concrete peripheral columns and recessed foyer and shopfronts along both street frontages at ground level (158-164)
- Original non-loadbearing curtain wall, horizontal fenestration pattern, and applied concrete panels, expressed concrete structure and non-loadbearing bagged brick lift shaft (158-164)
- Recessed office foyer and adjacent setback lift shaft and plaza (158-164)
- Tom Bass sculpture known as 'Transportation' (1963) in its original plaza setting (158-164).

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

How it is significant?

The former Sleigh Buildings, comprising the H C Sleigh Building at 166-172 Queen Street, and the former Sleigh Corner, at 158-164 Queen Street, are of local historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Sleigh Buildings are historically significant as a part of the postwar development and rapid growth of corporate architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. Located in the financial and commercial precinct of Queen Street, they reflect the expansion of large national and international companies opting for construction and naming rights of new city office buildings as a form of promotion and fund

investment. The buildings were built for Australian company H C Sleigh Ltd (estab. 1895), founder of the Golden Fleece brand of petrol and service stations. H C Sleigh owned and occupied the building at 166-172 Queen Street from 1955 to 1964, before moving to their new, purpose-built premises next door at 158-164 Queen Street. The building at 166-172 Queen Street is notable as the first postwar city office block to be constructed in Melbourne for a private company. It is further significant as a very early example of a curtain-walled office building, the design of which predates the earliest fully glazed example (Gilbert House, constructed in 1955), and as an early and well-executed design in the the Post-War Modernist style by noted architectural firm of Bates, Smart & McCutcheon. (Criterion A)

Viewed together, the former Sleigh Buildings highlight the shift away from the earlier use of uniform glass curtain wall systems in the 1950s to a greater three dimensional quality, achieved during the 1960s through the use of assertive textures and precast concrete cladding panels. The two buildings also illustrate the rapid development of the Post-War Modernist style over a decade, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, and the enthusiasm with which large corporations embraced the style to reflect their rapid growth and status. At almost twice the height of its eight-storey neighbour at 166-172 Queen Street, and incorporating a publicly accessible plaza, the 15-storey former Sleigh Corner building illustrates the mid-1960s changes in city planning associated with the lifting of the 40 metre (132 foot) height restrictions after 1958. (Criterion A)

The H C Sleigh Building at 166-172 Queen Street is representative of the earlier development of the Post-War Modernist style that prevailed prior to the 1960s abolition of the 40 metre (132 foot) height control that had been in place since 1916. The principal façade to Queen Street exhibits an asymmetrical combination of a solid modernist form, painted but originally blue tiles, with an offset projecting curtain wall which dominates the principal façade and extends from the first to the eighth floor. The building clearly expresses the key characteristics of its style and time of construction through retention of the simple strong modularity derived from its 1953-55 design. The former Sleigh Corner building, at 158-164 Queen Street, demonstrates later developments in the Post-War Modernist style. With its use of applied concrete panels over an expressed structural system, the former Sleigh Corner is a fine example of the Post-War Modernist style of the 1960s that moved away from the use of uniform glass curtain wall systems to more heavily modulated facades giving a three-dimensional quality to the buildings. (Criterion D)

The former Sleigh Corner building is aesthetically significant as a refined and substantial example of later development in curtain wall design. Constructed in 1964 it utilises a mix of materials to create a greater modularity and three-dimensional quality to the facades. Its aesthetic significance lies in the retention of the original building form, including original entry foyer and shopfront setback to both street frontages, the plaza setback and original sculpture on the rear wall of the publicly accessible plaza. The plaza form was once a common type for buildings of this era, created in response to the site plot ratio regime between 1964 and 1999, but which is becoming increasingly rare within the Hoddle Grid. The aesthetic significance is further enhanced by retention of the original Tom Bass sculpture 'Transportation', attached to the rear wall of the plaza (lift shaft). (Criterion E)

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020) (updated March 2022)