



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

The aesthetic character of *Gledden Building*, an Inter-War Art Deco high rise office building, is unique in Perth. The articulated structural elements extruding upwards without interruption to the parapet, and the tower buttresses terminating in stylised design motifs, emphasise the verticality of the building. *Gledden Building* demonstrates a consistent, cohesive and comprehensive range of Art Deco details. (Criterion 1.1)

The integration of art and architecture in *Gledden Building* demonstrates the contemporary appreciation of the civic value of public art. The Gledden artworks represent a unique example of Western Australian themes. In particular the depiction of aboriginals, their environment, myths and cultural beliefs in symbolic manner was, at the time, both innovative and challenging for the Perth community. (Criterion 1.2)

Gledden Building was designed to be a landmark, and maintains its strong presence in the vistas along Hay and William Streets. *Gledden Building* is the tallest building in the Hay Street retail precinct. The tower building mirrors Perth Town Hall, and together the landmark towers effectively define the extent of the Hay Street Mall. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The inclusion of basement restaurant, two level shopping arcade, office accommodation and roof top lookout in the redevelopment of this important central city site demonstrates Harold Boas' innovative and urbane response to the city's planning, economic and social agendas in the post-Depression period. (Criterion 2.2)

Gledden Building is associated by name with Robert Gledden, mining surveyor, property entrepreneur and philanthropist, who endowed the University of Western Australia with the Gledden Bequest

The place is also closely associated with the University of Western Australia (UWA) from the time of the Gledden Bequest in 1927. For many years the University of Western Australia Senate rooms and the Adult Education

Branch were located in *Gledden Building*. The University of Western Australia continues to own *Gledden Building*, and funds generated from the building contribute to the educational advancement of undergraduates in applied science.

Harold Boas, a partner in the architectural practice of Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown, was responsible for the design of *Gledden Building*. He had previously introduced Robert Gledden, his property client, to Sir Walter James, the Chancellor of UWA. James became Gledden's legal adviser and was instrumental in the establishment of the Gledden Bequest.

Amongst the artists associated with *Gledden Building* are John Oldham (architect), George Pitt Morison (Gallery Curator), James Linton (Art Teacher), and George Benson, Clem Kennedy, and William Bennett (architect) together with Max Ebert (Herbert McClintock, artist) who were responsible for painting the friezes throughout the building. (Criterion 2.3)

Gledden Building was the highest building in central Perth, and retained this distinction until the mid 1950s. The beacon on top of the tower served as an aerial landmark in the city. The roof top viewing platform further emphasised the prominence and outlook of the building. (Criterion 2.4)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

For many years *Gledden Building* was the tallest reinforced concrete structure in Perth. (Criterion 3.3).

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Gledden Building has social value for the philanthropic benefits it provides to the University of Western Australia. (Criterion 4.1)

Gledden Building has landmark status in William Street, and defines the western extent of the Hay Street Mall. The place is readily identified as part of the central city. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Gledden Building is the sole example of a Inter-War Art Deco high rise office building in Perth. The building is a unique landmark in the city, and demonstrates a diversity of modern images of the period.

Other extant buildings of the 1930s are low rise, up to four storeys in height, with the exception of *Lawson Apartments*, which is itself an individual example of its style and function. (Criterion 5.1)

The two storey retail arcade is a unique example of the period. Although some alterations has occurred, the arcade remains one of the most authentic of its period.

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Gledden Building is representative of a progressive commercial architectural design evident in other Australian capital cities, but it is the only example in Perth. It demonstrates contemporary influences from Europe and the eastern states, but expresses them in a manner relevant to the context of Perth. (Criterion 6.1)

Gledden Building represents an outstanding example of the integration of art and architecture, with particular emphasis on the public art commissioned by the University of Western Australia.

The building demonstrates the design priorities of natural light and ventilation, of convenient services both for the tenant, and the public. The architectural imagery of vertical tower combined with rooftop lookout over the city and environs represents a contemporary fascination with height and technology. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The condition of the place for the most part is very good. Environmental effects have had a minimal impact on the fabric.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The external fabric has undergone minimal intervention. The internal fabric has undergone varying degrees of intervention. The basement has been closed for a number of years, the stairs to the upper level of the arcade were removed, the arcade shopfronts have been altered, however the office floors above remain largely intact.

The integrity of the place is high, and capable of being sustained.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Over the last fifty years the ground floor of the arcade has undergone a number of alterations, but while the authenticity of the space is somewhat compromised, the design intent of the arcade and the in-situ artworks have been retained. The upper floors retain their authenticity. Overall, the authenticity of *Gledden Building* is reasonable.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The land comprising the Gledden site was originally granted to William Leeder, an innkeeper, in 1833¹, and was part of a lot extending along William Street from St Georges Terrace to Hay Street. Ownership changed a number of times, and the large lot was gradually subdivided.

In 1927, due to a bequest from Robert Gledden, the University of Western Australia (UWA) became the owners of the property. Shortly thereafter UWA purchased an adjoining site in Hay Street thereby providing a symmetry about both street fronts, and gaining a right of way on a portion of the south boundary.²

The commencement of construction of the P & O Building on the adjoining William Street lot prompted the idea of constructing a new building, rather than refurbishing the existing building on the Gledden site.³

However, the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929 caused Australia's overseas markets to disappear and triggered the Great Depression in Australia. Western Australia suffered heavily during the depression due to the State economy's reliance on the recently expanded primary industry. Unemployment and poverty were commonplace.

The slow recovery from the Depression began with an increase in wool prices, and another gold boom,⁴ The building industry gradually responded with an ability to finance private construction. Confidence in the building industry was further promoted by the entrepreneurial skills of business people such as Claude de Bernales and Nathaniel Harper. Building development in Perth was oriented towards the revitalisation of the commercial sector including hotels, cinemas, and shopping arcades, and health facilities in the public sector.⁵

The development of Perth in the 1920s and 1930s was overseen by various Town Planning bodies, on which Harold Boas was an active participant. Although a number of planning reports and studies were undertaken, the government failed to implement a town planning scheme, and it was not until 1937 that a set of building and zoning by-laws, was finally approved by the Perth City Building Surveyor.⁶

1 Gledden Building promotional brochure, 1937.

2 UWAA 3380 Files 70-75, UWAA 3404 and UWAA 228 File 9 Diagram 6874.

3 UWAA 3404

4 F Crowley, *Australia's Western Third* (1970), pp.266-267. The 1930s gold boom in WA was in response to the importance of gold in the world commodity market and resulted in the re-opening and working of many mines from the boom in the 1890s.

5 Gledden Building was featured in an article in the *Western Mail* on 19 January 1938; "The Modern Trend", which compared Perth's latest prominent buildings; the Mount Hospital, the CML Building, Emu Brewery, Infectious Diseases Hospital, Institute of Agriculture (UWA), King Edward Memorial Hospital, and Arbordale Flats. (see Conservation Plan, Photo 5, Appendix A in Volume 2.)

6 see Conservation Plan for more details

It was during this period that Harold Boas, recognising the potential of the Gledden site, suggested to UWA that it construct a high rise office building with a recognisable retail emphasis in the pedestrian heart of the city. The concept of high rise offices in Perth was introduced with the Colonial Mutual Life (CML) Insurance Building (1936), and its companion Lawson Apartments (1937).

In December 1935, Boas presented to UWA a persuasive argument for constructing a new building on this important site in the city. The sketch proposal suggested a high rise building which would be the tallest building in Perth except for the CML Building which was under construction at that time. Boas proposed a shopping basement and a restaurant on the top floor, with an observation tower. Escalators would connect the ground floor and the innovative first floor shopping arcade. Boas proposed that the whole scheme will be modern and up to date as was the situation in the eastern states.⁷

In June 1936, UWA requested that Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown prepare plans, and that the managing agent, Joseph Charles, appraise and comment on the design proposal. Charles responded with specific recommendations.⁸

In September 1936, Harold Boas presented the developed design of *Gledden Building* to the University Senate Committee.⁹ An impressive element of that presentation was John Oldham's water colour rendering of the proposed Gledden building.

The plans had been put to tender in October 1936, but only two tenders were received, and being considerably over budget, were both rejected. However as a consequence of the engineer's report, a review of the drawings was commissioned. New tenders were invite and in January 1937, eight tender responses were received, with the successful tender, the lowest, being submitted by A.T. Brine and Company, at a cost of 36,845 pounds, within the budget.¹⁰

Construction commenced on 25 March 1937 under the supervision of the Clerk of Works, Frank Glennon. During the course of construction, in August, Cutt ordered extra steel beams, and extended the formwork for the columns to increase the height of the building.

It was about that time, when the University Senate decided to incorporate decorative friezes in the Gledden Building as a feature. UWA launched a competition in September 1937, for artists to design a frieze characteristic of Western Australia, incorporating flora, fauna, bird and fish life. The frieze was to be in the ground floor retail arcade. The competition, while being broadly promoted, was also kept local with all nineteen entrants being

⁷ Correspondence; Boas to the Vice Chancellor, 11 December 1935. Initial proposal for Gledden Building, accompanied by floor plans and an elevation. UWAA Acc 230 file 1 Boas

⁸ Correspondence; Joseph Charles to Harold Boas 14 July 1936 UWAA 3392

⁹ Correspondence; Boas to the Vice Chancellor, 9 September 1936. The plans included a facade treatment in concrete, to represent the character of Donnybrook stone. The Operative Stonemasons Union tried unsuccessfully to have the building clad in Donnybrook stone. Correspondence; 14 October, meeting 16 October 1936.

¹⁰ UWAA 3407. For a full chronological list of architectural drawings indicating the development of the design refer to the Conservation Plan, pp. 23, 24, & 25.

resident in Western Australia. George Benson won the competition with Clem Kennedy winning second prize, and William G Bennett taking third place.¹¹

All three prize winning friezes were incorporated into the building, and each artist, in addition to the prize money, was engaged to execute their respective works.¹²

By May 1938, the building tenants were in residence, and the architect was required to give attention to matters not included in the overall construction. However, as early as December 1938, ground floor tenants were experiencing trade problems, and Joseph Charles, the managing agent, recommended the removal of the arcade stairs, which subsequently took place in 1939.¹³ Plans for the removal of the arcade stairs also show a proposed additional staircase to the basement, but there is no evidence to indicate that it was constructed.

After the completion of *Gledden Building*, the University Senate established committee rooms in Gledden Building and the University Adult Education branch operated from the building. The Vice Chancellor was personally responsible for the Institution of Engineers Australia (WA Division), establishing their chambers in the Gledden Building, which was also used by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.¹⁴

One year after *Gledden Building* was completed, the outbreak of World War Two disrupted city building development, and another high rise office building was not constructed in Perth until 1954.¹⁵

Gledden Building was not the first modern styled inter-war structure to be erected in Perth, but it was the first, and only commercial office building in the Inter-War Art Deco style. *Gledden Building* included concepts and elements that were new to the state, yet responsive to the context of Perth. This modern building was intended to represent a step forward in the future development of the capital of Western Australia.

The building underwent alterations and refurbishment in the 1980s and again in the 1990s, however neither works were of a structural nature. Essentially the plans indicate these interventions were to service and maintain the building, and to refurbish the retail tenancies.

ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE PLACE

¹¹ A full description of the artworks is in UWAA 230 file 4 Boas Papers.

¹² *West Australian*, 9 February 1938, p.22. For further details see the Conservation Plan pp.13, 34, & 35.

¹³ Correspondence; Charles to Vice Chancellor, 15 December 1938. As a consequence of that deputation, Charles recommended to UWA, that a rent reduction, or a concession period for those tenancies was appropriate. The previous building, and some of the same tenants, had a history of requesting rent reductions and the University in most cases complied with the requests. Proposed removal of the arcade staircase to the first floor, and a staircase to the basement proposed in that position (no evidence that it occurred). New stairs behind the lift from the ground floor to the first floor, and install a new stair behind the lift. Plans approved by Perth City Council, 3 February 1939

¹⁴ Tenants List November 1938, Room 28, Second Floor UWA archives, & UWAA 3402.

¹⁵ MLC Building, 171 St Georges Terrace by Melbourne architects Bates, Smart & McCutcheon

Robert John Gledden was born in County Durham, England in 1856, and came to Australia in 1890.¹⁶ After working as a licensed surveyor in Queensland, he came to Perth in 1892 and gained government employment as a mining surveyor. His first Western Australian survey was the Midland Railway Company's grant in the Swan District. In 1892 he became the first Mining Registrar in Coolgardie, and laid out its first town containing 184 lots. He is credited with the preliminary survey of Kalgoorlie (Hannans). Mt Gledden, (previously known as Mt Charlotte) was named in his honour (c.1913).¹⁷ Situated east of Kalgoorlie on the western end of the "Golden Mile", Mt Gledden is the site where Paddy Hannan first discovered gold in 1893.

Gledden amassed his wealth by astute property investments, retiring in 1900, at the age of forty four. He was a great admirer of Cecil Rhodes and his scholarship system, a factor contributing to Gledden bequeathing much of his fortune to The University of Western Australia, thus becoming one of the largest benefactors. Gledden's intention was to encourage learning, and thereby provided travelling fellowships to improve technical training. He provided for the sum of 60,000 pounds for The University of Western Australia, in addition to the property on the corner of Hay and William Streets in Perth.¹⁸

Gledden's will dictated that UWA use the net income derived from the property for promotion and encouragement of education in the applied sciences, particularly engineering, surveying and mining. Specifically there were to be two scholarships, the Maude Gledden and Robert Gledden scholarships, and one had to be a travelling scholarship.¹⁹

Harold Boas carried out professional work in the city for Robert Gledden, Boas was a partner with Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown, when he was personally commissioned by UWA to design the Gledden Building.²⁰

In 1929 Boas toured almost fifty major cities investigating town planning operations and travelled to the United States again in the early 1930s to research the Adelphi Hotel project. In 1936, prior to preparing the final Gledden plans, Boas and his employees travelled to the eastern states and acquainted themselves thoroughly with the most modern developments in arcade work. Harold Boas was an influential figure in the town planning movement in Perth, and was acutely aware of the future requirements for Perth. Further more Harold Boas had experience both as an exponent of architecture and the arts, and had a learned appreciation of the arts and the opportunities of art in public buildings.

Sir Walter James was introduced to Gledden by Harold Boas. Sir Walter James, lawyer, politician, Premier of WA and Chancellor of UWA subsequently became Gledden's legal adviser, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Gledden Bequest

¹⁶ *Uninews*, Vol.10, No.26, 14 October 1991.

¹⁷ Johnston, *Knights & Theodolites* (1962), p.193.

¹⁸ *Uninews*, Vol.10, No.26, 14 October 1991.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ see the Conservation Plan for more details on Harold Boas, pp.19-20.

John Oldham, George Benson, Herbert McClintock, William G. Bennett, Colonel Clivia Steele, Leonard Cutt, A.T. Brine and Sons, were some of the artists, engineers and builders associated with the construction of *Gledden Building*.²¹

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Gledden Building was designed as a direct response to the urban context of the site. From the outset, Boas intended to design an important building on the most important retail site in the city.²²

Gledden Building was designed to be a feature at night time; the facade lit by floodlights mounted on the canopy roof, with uplighting accentuating the verticality of the facade. John Oldham's rendering reinforced the image of a perpendicular building, reaching into the night sky.

The Gledden Building shows some influences of the vertical emphasis of the New York skyscrapers. The vertical emphasis was also evident in other contemporary American influences. The Chicago Tribune Building[1922-25] illustrates the uninterrupted vertical elements which extend into the buttresses of the tower.²³ The influences of contemporary European architecture were accessible by means of Boas' observations during his extensive travel tour, and Gert Salheim, the European chief designer in Boas' office.

Identifying Australian Architecture, lists the characteristics of the Inter-War Art Deco (c.1915-c.1940) style, many of which are evident in *Gledden Building*.²⁴ Other buildings which share these characteristics include Manchester Unity Building(1929), Melbourne, Grace Building (1930), Sydney and the T & G Building (1936), Hobart. All these buildings display a common approach in their emphasis on verticality and the corner site tower.

The Inter-War Art Deco references in *Gledden Building* include; emphatic vertical piers, a tower, accordion or pleated windows, polished granite or marble base (lift surround in the arcade), stylised low relief ornament, (piers in the basement) chromium plated trim (copper), stylised lettering, parallel line motif, coloured glazed terracotta facing, (original arcade floor was mosaic, and Benson has imitated mosaic in the Gledden Memorial panel above the lifts), symmetry, 3D quality in massing and details, extensive use of metal frame windows (opening onto the light well). The more decorative of the features such as stylised figures, lettering, base relief, chrome and vitrolite are not strictly applied to *Gledden Building*.

While responding to the retail context, Boas also capitalised on the proximity to the business sector of the city, in St Georges Terrace and provided office chambers and professional suites on the upper floors of the building. The innovative basement cafe, rooftop lookout and the arcade, were within that

²¹ see the Conservation Plan, p.20 ff. for more details.

²² Correspondence; Boas to the Vice Chancellor, 11 December 1935. Initial proposal for *Gledden Building*, accompanied by floor plans and an elevation. UWAA Acc 230 file 1 Boas

²³ *Gledden Building* has recessed windows in horizontal bands of groups of two and three and the corner of the building is faceted in a manner similar to the Tribune Building.

²⁴ Apperly, Irving, Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture*, 1989, pp.188-191.

vision. The concept of the prominence of the Gledden Building within the city was implied by the lookout on the roof providing vistas of the city and surrounding environs.

Gledden Building was constructed with a reinforced concrete structural system, unlike the steel framed structures of the CML Building and Lawson Apartments. Reinforced concrete structural systems had been used as early as 1927, in the New Zealand Insurance Building, by F.G.B. Hawkins, and again in the Atlas Building in 1930.²⁵

Gledden Building forms a landmark to the entry of the Hay Street retail mall and is echoed on the corresponding corner one block east by the Perth Town Hall. Together the landmark towers define the Hay Street retail precinct. *Gledden Building* is the tallest building within the Hay Street retail precinct, yet it maintains the harmony and rhythm of the streetscape.

Gledden Building is testimony to the modern material, concrete, as its smooth modelled facade attests. However the early design intentions were that it was to imitate Donnybrook stone, and closer inspection of the facade reveals inconspicuous sectional divisions of the vertical and window panel elements, such that the proportions resembled stone blocks. The uninterrupted vertical elements, structural and intermediate, extend from above the canopy on the ground floor, to form the parapet above the seventh floor.

The symmetry of the two facades is a balanced rhythm of solid and void with groups of recessed windows further emphasising the verticality. The Hay Street facade is narrower than the William Street facade, but the difference is almost imperceptible; the group of three windows facing Hay Street has only one wide window in the centre, while the group on the William Street facade consists of three wide windows. Each arcade entry is central within the structural supports, one bay from the respective boundaries. The street canopy sweeps around the towered corner signalling the pedestrian space which has a significantly different impact to the streetscape facade, due to the tenant refurbishment.

The vertical rhythm of the facade is emphasised by the recessed vertical fluted window spandrels. The groups of three wider windows over the arcade entry bays have narrow fluting seemingly reducing the impression of the wider window, and conversely the groups of two narrower windows have a wider vertical fluting. The corner window spandrels, featuring narrow flutes, form part of the vertical elements which, without interruption extend upward, are encompassed by the tower buttresses, and terminate in the stylised moulding of the tower.

The two storey tower is the most decorative element of the building. The vertical and horizontal fluting is balanced on each facade of the hexagonal tower. Small finials, in the uppermost window spandrels, are the final vertical indicator to the beacon, which crowns the tower.

The planning concepts within the building are based very much on the priorities of the comfort of people. The provision for natural ventilation and

²⁵ I Molyneux, *Looking Around Perth*, p55 , and P. Firkins, *Commerce and Industry in Western Australia, 1901-1930*, (1979), p.69.

natural lighting was not a new requirement, but Boas combined the light well element into his modern image with the circulation spaces featuring the light well and facilitating ingress of natural light into every room in the building.

Soon after the opening of the building problems emerged associated with the arcade staircase, and after discussions between the owners, the property agent and the tenants the staircase was removed.

At some stage the insitu basement artworks had been papered over, but they were rediscovered in 1984, when Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown undertook a refurbishment of Gledden Building. These refurbishment works were the most extensive that have occurred to the fabric.²⁶

Again in 1990, Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown carried out some refurbishment. At this stage a proposal to infill the first floor arcade opening were rejected by the National Trust and the light well ceiling was restored/replaced.²⁷

13.3 REFERENCES

"Conservation Plan", Laura Gray, Architectural Dissertation, Curtin University of Technology (1994)

National Trust Assessment Exposition

²⁶ The cost was \$363,000. Information supplied by Warren Jones, Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown; phone conversation 25 August 1994.

²⁷ Correspondence; National Trust to W Jones, OBEB, 30 May 1990. Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown files.