

Twentieth Century Heritage Survey, Stage Two (1928-1945)

FORMER WESTPAC BANK**C20 01**

Place Name and Address: Former Westpac Bank,
2-8 King William Street
Adelaide SA 5000

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUE:**Description:**

The former Westpac Bank (originally the Bank of NSW) was designed in the Inter-War stripped classical style, its main features being symmetrical massing which creates a fundamentally classical composition, but with minimal use of classical ornamentation. It is of steel frame and masonry construction and comprises nine floors, including the ground and mezzanine levels, and a basement. The main entrance is from King William Street and has an imposing gigantic doorway of bronze door panels framed by granite blocks. There is a secondary entrance from North Terrace. Windows are metal framed.

The building retains its integrity externally. Internally, changes have occurred throughout the period from the 1940s to the 1970s and there was a significant refurbishment in 1981 to ensure the building complied with fire regulations, but examples of finishes survive. The building was recently sold.

Statement of Heritage Value:

Built in 1939–1942, the former Westpac Bank building is significant for its modern expression of inter-war commercial multi-storey architecture and is the only large-scale example of the Inter-War stripped classical style of architecture in Adelaide. It was constructed as the Adelaide head office of the Bank of New South Wales and marked the rise of the banking sector in Adelaide as a part of the intense local rebuilding programme by financial institutions in South Australia during the 1930s–early 1940s.

Relevant Criteria (Under Section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*):

- (e) It demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment as South Australia's foremost example of an early Modern high-rise office building in the inner city
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RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the former Westpac Bank be provisionally entered in the South Australian Heritage Register.

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE:

- (e) **It demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics.**

This building was designed for the Bank of New South Wales by Jack McConnell, a partner in the firm Philip R Claridge, Hassell and McConnell, which at that time was working in association with Louis Laybourne Smith. McConnell studied architecture at the University of Melbourne from 1930–35 and his lecturers included noted Modernist, Leighton Irwin who designed the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in the Stripped Classical style in 1935. In 1937, aged 24, McConnell was working for the Melbourne firm of Edward F. Billson, when he accepted a job in the office of Philip Claridge in Adelaide, with the expressed purpose of assisting in the design of the then Bank of New South Wales. In 1939 McConnell joined Claridge and another architect, Colin Hassell, to form the partnership of Hassell, Claridge and McConnell, which became a leading architectural firm in South Australia. He was later to achieve wide acclaim for the influence of his work on younger architects and is thought to be the most notable architect associated with the Modern Movement in South Australia.

Philip Claridge had earlier been part of the firm Davies and Claridge with Edward Davies, until he started his own practice in 1917. He became President of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1932. The firm of PR Claridge & Associates was formed in 1938 and came to operate as a virtual State-wide practice, designing and supervising a great variety of buildings, from suburban residences to country hospitals, but the Bank of New South Wales building is regarded as the firm's masterwork (Page, p. 168). Claridge worked in partnership with Hassell and McConnell until 1949, when Hassell, McConnell and Partners became a separate firm.

Built after the economy had struggled out of the Depression, the Bank appeared to be a gigantic symbol of the strength of Australian finance and was a complete break from the classical style of architecture of earlier years. It was also an unusual multi-storey building for Adelaide in that era, as the designers resisted the Art Deco style that was strong in the 1930s (Page, p. 168). It has been viewed as 'the most advanced' in terms of modernism, of the large city buildings constructed at that time in Adelaide, with the Savings Bank of South Australia (now BankSA) head office and the CML building being more stylistically conservative (Brine, p.35). The design adopted by McConnell was not repeated and no comparable building in Adelaide adopted this style (the Torrens Training Depot is in the Stripped Classical style, but not on the same scale). Russell Ellis, a young architect working for the firm at the time, was sufficiently impressed by the building to complete a watercolour perspective of it. It is not known if Ellis was involved in the building's design, but he kept the watercolour in a frame in his office for many years. (It is currently located in the Louis Laybourne Smith Architecture Museum, University of South Australia).

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The Bank of New South Wales building replaced a two-storey building which the Bank had occupied for fifty years on this site. It was constructed as the Adelaide head office of the Bank of New South Wales. The building marked the rise of the banking sector in Adelaide and represents the intense rebuilding program carried out during the Inter-War period. Built by Hansen and Yuncken Pty Ltd, with engineering carried out by Hurren, Langman and James of Adelaide, it is of steel frame and masonry construction. The floors were constructed by encasing the steelwork in concrete and pouring concrete floor slabs which incorporated a hollow gypsum floor tile system. There are nine floors, comprising the ground, mezzanine and seven upper storeys, as well as a basement. Originally the Bank occupied the basement, the ground floor, part of the mezzanine floor and the seventh floor, and the remaining floors were available for commercial lease.

The building was designed in the Inter-War Stripped Classical style, the main features being its symmetrical massing, forming a fundamentally classical composition but with minimal use of classical ornamentation, resulting in an austere appearance. The facades are faced with South Australian Waikerie and Ramco limestone, and Victorian Dromana granite. The window frames and doors were originally of bronze, but the upper floor windows have been refitted with bronze anodised aluminium frames. The building occupies a prominent corner site in Adelaide at the intersection of King William Street and North Terrace.

REFERENCES:

- Apperly, Irving & Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, 1989.
Judith Brine, 'Hassell's Birthday' *Architect SA*, no. 2, pp 34–36, Adelaide, 1990.
Julie & Susan Collins, Significant South Australian 20th Century Architecture, RIAA Data Entry Form, 2007.
Michael Page, *Sculptors in Space*, 1986.
Michael Queale & Nicolette Di Lernia, *Adelaide's Architecture and Art*, 1996, p. 80.
Schwager Brooks and Partners, Westpac Building Conservation Plan, 1993.
Register of the National Estate Place File No. 3/03/001/0243

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SITE RECORD:

FORMER NAMES: Bank of New South Wales

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: A building of nine storeys, including the ground and mezzanine levels, and a basement, of steel frame and masonry construction.

DATE OF COMPLETION: 1942

REGISTER STATUS: **Description:** n/a

CURRENT USE: **Description:** Vacant
Dates: 2007

PREVIOUS USE(S): **Description:** Bank
Dates: 1942-2007

ARCHITECT: **Name:** Philip Claridge & Associates, in partnership with Louis Laybourne Smith
Dates: 1938-1939

BUILDER: **Name:** Hansen and Yuncken Pty Ltd
Dates: 1939-1942

SUBJECT INDEXING: **Group:** Finance
Category: Bank

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: **Description:** Adelaide City Council

LOCATION: **Unit No.:** -
Street No.: 2-8
Street Name: King William Street
Town/Suburb: Adelaide
Post Code: 5000
Region No.: 1
Region: Adelaide

LAND DESCRIPTION: **Title Type:** CT
Volume: 5728
Folio: 233
Lot No.: Lot 196
Section: PTA 17
Hundred: Adelaide

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SITE RECORD (Cont.):

AMG REFERENCE:

Zone: 54
Easting: 280732
Northing: 6133000
Map Sheet: 6628 Adelaide
Map Scale: 1:100,000

OWNER:

Name: Seasons of Adelaide Pty Ltd
Address: 348 St Kilda Road
Town/Suburb: Melbourne
Post Code: 3004

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Location Map



Aerial view of former Westpac Bank

(Google Earth)

FORMER WESTPAC BANK

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Former Westpac Bank, looking south

FORMER WESTPAC BANK

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Former Westpac Bank, looking south-east

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Former Westpac Bank, looking north-east

