

CONCRETE EXPRESSIONS

BRUTALISM AND THE GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS PRECINCT, ADELAIDE

Kevin O'Sullivan

Architecture Museum
School of Architecture and Design
University of South Australia

Architecture Museum Monograph Series 07

O'Sullivan, Kevin. Concrete Expressions:
Brutalism and the Government Buildings Precinct, Adelaide

First published in 2013 in Australia by the
School of Art, Architecture and Design,
University of South Australia,
Adelaide, South Australia

Series Editors: Christine Garnaut and Julie Collins

© Kevin O'Sullivan

ISBN 978-0-9871200-4-5

Monograph design: Jason Good and Leah Zahorujko
Design direction: Fred Littlejohn
School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia

Print: Graphic Print Group Adelaide, South Australia

Copies available from:
Dr Christine Garnaut
Director, Architecture Museum
School of Art, Architecture and Design
University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471
Adelaide, South Australia 5001

Cover illustration: 'P.B.D. in Tower of Strength', *Perspective: Public Buildings Department Journal*,
vol.3, no. 2, 1978, p. 19.

Unless otherwise credited all illustrations are from the Architecture Museum's own collections. All
reasonable efforts have been made to trace the copyright holders of all images reproduced in this book.
If we were unable to reach you please contact us at the above address.

Contents

2	Foreword
6	Introduction
4	Acknowledgements
8	Background to Brutalism
18	Brutalism in Australia
24	The Government Buildings Precinct
38	Buildings and Precinct Analysis
42	Architectural Influences
44	Conclusion
46	Endnotes
50	Further reading
54	About the Author
56	About the Architecture Museum



Foreword

The Architecture Museum in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia houses a unique research collection based largely on donations of items from South Australian based private practitioners who worked in the twentieth century. Diverse in composition, the material provides a rich and unparalleled resource for research into the state's social and cultural history through the lens of architecture and the built environment. A key goal of the Architecture Museum is to foster such research and to encourage scholarly publications as an outcome of researchers' investigations. The Museum relies on grants and external sponsorship to create research opportunities. Consequently it is delighted to have the generous support of the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) through the SA Built Heritage Research Fellowship at the Architecture Museum.

Kevin O'Sullivan, the DEWNR SA Built Heritage Research Fellow 2012/13, focussed his research on a cohesive group of four government buildings

constructed in Adelaide during the 1970s. Designed by different architects, the buildings all feature the overt expression of their concrete materiality and, as a group, form a distinctive architectural and urban design precinct in the central business district.

The four buildings are often referred to as 'Brutalist' in style. What is meant by Brutalism? *Concrete Expressions* explores that question and analyses whether or not the buildings are in fact Brutalist. It also considers their role as a governmental ensemble and analyses their contribution from an urban design perspective. In addition to its stylistic focus, the monograph raises considerations about the appreciation of Brutalist buildings which, like other styles of the second half of the twentieth century, are increasingly attracting community, professional and academic attention. The Architecture Museum is very pleased to be associated with the publication of *Concrete Expressions*.

Christine Garnaut
Director, Architecture Museum
School of Art, Architecture and Design
University of South Australia

Government Buildings Precinct
from St Francis Xavier's Cathedral.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.

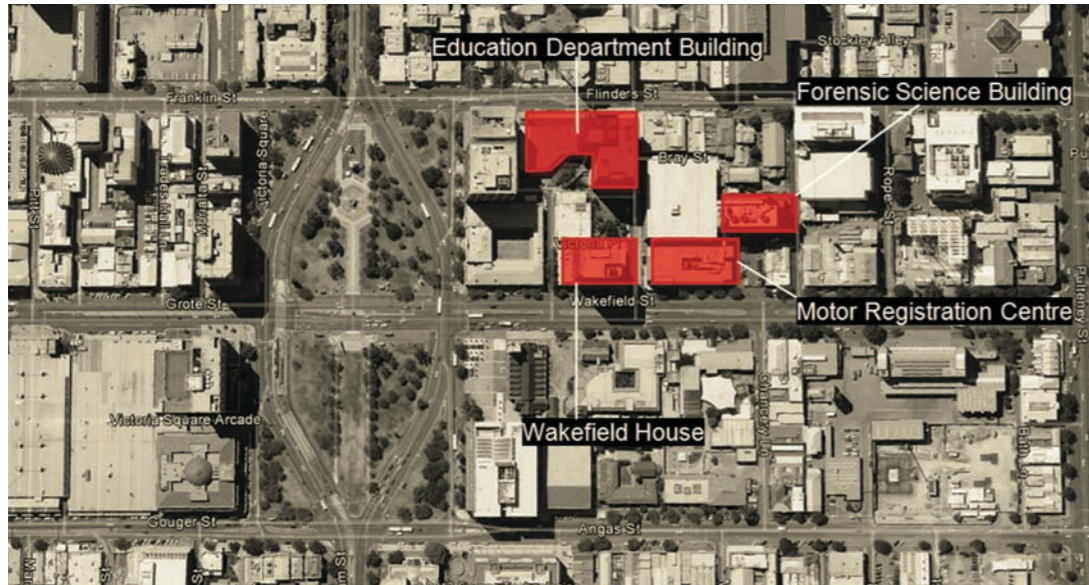


Motor Registration Centre
South western corner.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.

Acknowledgements

The research for *Concrete Expressions* has been greatly assisted by support and input from the following people and organisations:

- SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources
- Adrian Evans, JPE Design Studio and Public Buildings Department project architect for the Motor Registration Centre (now the Adelaide Police Station)
- The Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure who have generously provided relevant plans and perspective drawings
- The Architecture Museum at the University of South Australia for access to much valuable reference material including many out of print books, industry journals, background information, materials and for invaluable guidance.



<http://maps.google.com.au/>
 accessed April 2013
 Imagery © 2013 Aerometrex Pty
 Ltd, Digital Globe, Map data © 2013
 Google.

Introduction

The Government Buildings precinct is located east of Adelaide's central Victoria Square either side of Gawler Place in the central business district. The precinct consists of a distinctive group of four adjacent government office buildings, all constructed in the 1970s. They are the:

- Education Department building, 31 Flinders Street.
- Motor Registration Centre (now the Adelaide Police Station), 60 Wakefield Street.
- Forensic Science Institute (now Forensic Science) building, 21 Divett Place.
- Public Buildings Department building (now Wakefield House), 30 Wakefield Street.

The buildings convey their genesis through their architectural unity, grouping and location in relation to one another and to other government buildings in the vicinity. Collectively they represent well the progressive governmental, social and architectural confidence of their time.

Due to their monolithic, austere forms and broadly similar external concrete finishes, the four buildings are most often described by casual observers as being Brutalist in style. But are any or all of them truly Brutalist? This publication addresses that question. It introduces the Brutalist style (known also as Brutalism) in the international and Australian contexts; provides brief histories of each of the four buildings and introduces the socio-political and architectural milieu in which they were constructed. Additionally, it considers the key architectural elements of each building and analyses their individual and collective contributions to the precinct.



Chapel Notre-Dame-du-Haut
Ronchamp, France, Le Corbusier, 1955.
Photographer: Donald Langmead.
Langmead collection, Architecture Museum.

Background to Brutalism

THE BRUTALIST STYLE

The Brutalist style of architecture (or Brutalism) is synonymous with over-scaled, strong cubic forms, expressed structure and the dominant use of textured concrete that shows the marks of its construction and formwork. It has been described as a 'rational and robust' style.¹ Although still imprecisely defined, Brutalism emerged in the 1950s and in effect was both a response to the destruction that occurred during World War Two² and a reaction against the perceived homogeneity of the International Style with its often relentless grid of flat planes and panes of glass.³ An additional influence was a growing desire amongst architects, urban designers and planners to restore human scale in cities and honesty of materials in the construction of buildings; in other words they wished to combine social and architectural considerations. Architects

who adopted the Brutalist style sought to express robustly the integrated structural, functional and social programmes of a building and its site. They also acknowledged the archaic, almost primitive forms of medieval fortifications, castles and walled towns characterised by large-scaled unified architecture all of similar texture and grain.

Brutalist architecture's genesis can be attributed to both the celebrated Swiss French architect Le Corbusier (1890-1965) and to the so-called New Brutalist architects, notably Britain's Alison (1928-1993) and Peter (1928-2003) Smithson. Le Corbusier's significant late works of the 1950s included his Maisons Jaoul (Neuilly, outside Paris, 1951-54) which combined structure and form with function and the renowned social and architectural endeavour that was the Unité d'Habitation (Marseilles, France, 1952). He also designed the

austere concrete La Tourette Monastery (outside Lyon, France, 1950), the sculpturally iconic chapel Notre-Dame-du-Haut (Ronchamp, France, 1955) and powerful works for Chandigarh, the new capital for the Punjab region of India, including the city plan, the Supreme Court and the Parliament Building (1957-64).⁴

It was the Smithsons who ‘developed the intellectual framework’ for Brutalism in the 1950s.⁵ *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* by British American architecture critic Reyner Banham, published in 1966, re-focussed attention on the work of the Smithsons and their social, urban and architectural ideas.⁶ Banham concluded that the ‘New Brutalist’

(now more simply called the Brutalist style), was not so much a movement as a visual sensibility combined with a desire for good social planning and an honest expression of materiality, construction and refined detailing. It was ‘uncompromising, pioneering, forward-looking and expressed modernity’.⁷ Other exponents of the style included architects Kenzo Tange and Kunio Mayekawa of Japan, and Paul Rudolph and, to a lesser extent, Louis Kahn, both from the US.



The Secretariat, Chandigarh, India
Le Corbusier, 1957-64
from M.S. Randhawa, *Chandigarh*
Government Press booklet, no date
Mervyn Smith collection, Architecture Museum.

BRUTALIST ARCHITECTS

Ironically the 'honest' and crudely expressive concrete 'béton brut' finish on Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, much emulated in later Brutalist buildings, was most likely the result of post-war building conditions and the need for a uniform finish using several unskilled teams of workers.⁸ Le Corbusier would have preferred to work in steel. However he claimed the resultant appearance as a 'natural material' and compared it to stone.⁹ Later his Maisons Jaoul became:

*one of the canonical works of the so-called 'New Brutalists' in Britain and elsewhere - a younger generation sensing the devaluation of the heroic vision of the earlier modern movement into something smooth and ersatz, and seeking a visual language to give body to their own rough awakening to the social realities of the post-war years.*¹⁰

Alison and Peter Smithson were avant-garde British architects, members of 'Team X',¹¹ who indulged in the sensibility of the 'New Brutalism'.¹² The Smithsons came to notice for their structurally defined and refined Modern Hunstanton Secondary School (Norfolk, 1949-54). One of their most well regarded commercial projects, the refined *Economist* buildings (London, 1959-65), were set harmoniously around a small irregular plaza with Mediterranean pretensions.¹³ The Smithsons became well known as proponents of the New Brutalism especially with their championing of the idea of 'streets in the sky' or elevated pathways to separate pedestrians and vehicles in the manner of their Robin Hood Gardens public housing project (Poplar, London, 1972).¹⁴ 'New Brutalism' promised real depth, warmth, human connection and 'character' through the expressed integration of form and function and finely textured concrete treatments. It also offered relief from the uniformity



01

Yale Art Gallery wing
Yale University, Connecticut
Louis Kahn, 1953, from R. Banham
The New Brutalism; Ethic or Aesthetic?
London: Architectural Press, 1966, p.53.

02

Hunstanton Secondary School, London
Alison and Peter Smithson, 1949-54, from R. Banham
The New Brutalism; Ethic or Aesthetic?
London: Architectural Press, 1966, p.33.



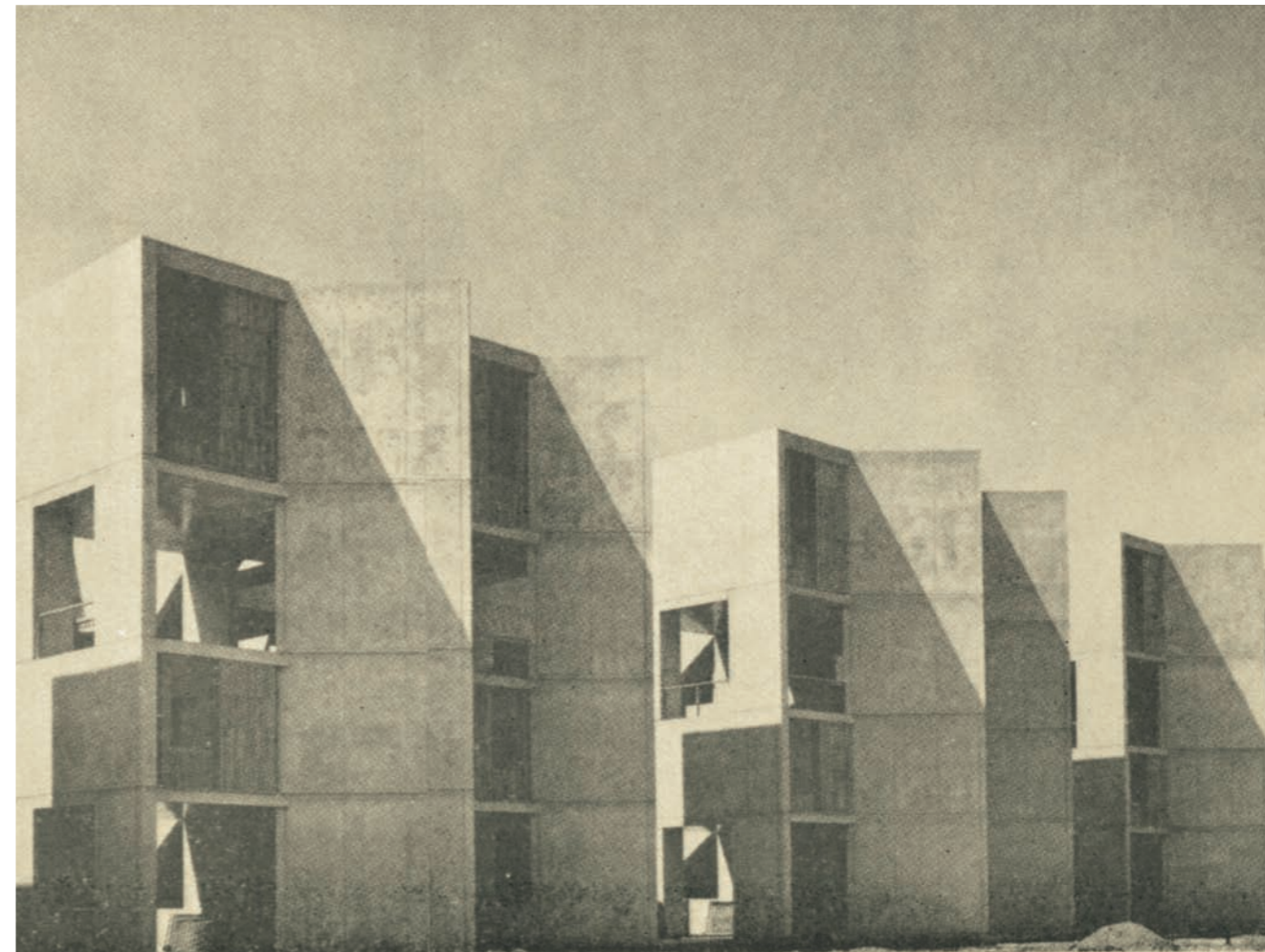
02

of the International Style and the sterile white flat forms of earlier modernists and was a counterpoint to the Scandinavian-influenced New Empiricists and the New Humanists active in Britain at the time.¹⁵

American Brutalist exponent Paul Rudolph designed the Art and Architecture building at Yale University (New Haven, Connecticut, 1963) where he was Chairman of the Department of Architecture from 1958 to 1965.¹⁶ The detailing of the building's external concrete ribbing was power hammered to give an organically 'rough-hewn' character. In his works from the 1950s, fellow American architect Louis Kahn synthesised the heavy materials of raw expressed concrete to show the structure of a building and provide the elusive human scale to the arrangement and details of the whole. Kahn is best known for the Salk Institute at La Jolla, California (designed between 1959 and 1965)¹⁷ which has

influenced architects and urban designers ever since. For instance, the triangular pattern coffered concrete ceiling he designed for the Yale Art Gallery (New Haven, 1953)¹⁸ is almost identical to the ceiling in the original parts of the Brutalist-inspired National Gallery of Australia (1968-82) in Canberra, Australia, completed over a decade later.

Salk Institute, California
Louis Kahn, 1959-65, from 'Academic Ratrace'
Architectural Review, March 1966, p168.



THE BRUTALIST LEGACY

The New Brutalist¹⁹ style began in the mid-1950s, flourished in the 1960s and by the late 1970s was a mature part of the modern architecture palette across the developed world. As Curtis has noted:

*The 'New Brutalists' ... learned from [Le Corbusier] the direct use of materials, to which they gave their own moral meaning. Architects as diverse as Kenzo Tange in Japan, Paul Rudolph in the United States and Balkrishna Doshi in India drew lessons from the monumental and rugged concrete expression and from the archaic echoes. And just as the seminal works of the 1920s were frequently devalued and turned into clichés, so the late works [of Corbusier] were often imitated for their surface effects without due attention to underlying principles.*²⁰

The style has been tarnished by some public housing developments, for instance, the crime-ridden Robin Hood Gardens housing estate in the East End of London. Recent re-assessments of such projects are turning away from blaming the architecture *per se* for any faults. Some of the more successful Brutalist examples, such as the National Theatre (Sir Denys Lasdun, 1976) on London's Southbank, Brisbane's Queensland Cultural Centre (1970s-1985), and Canberra's Cameron Offices (1976), National Gallery of Australia (1962-80) and the High Court of Australia (1980) are all well regarded architectural landmarks.



National Theatre, Southbank
London, Sir Denys Lasdun, 1982.
Photographer: Donald Langmead.
Langmead collection, Architecture Museum.



Brutalism in Australia: context and application

Although the Brutalist style emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the UK and US, it did not truly arrive in Australia until the mid 1960s. By then, the long postulated utopian social visions of architects and designers like Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer, Pier Luigi Nervi, Frank Lloyd Wright and the whole Modernist movement were being tested internationally. World War Two was long over and the post-war rebuilding of the fabric of society was continuing apace, particularly in northern Europe and in the UK. Fuelled by wide publication, the Brutalist style was applied into the 1980s but peaked in popularity overseas and in Australia in the late 1970s. Indeed, in architectural terms, Brutalism is almost synonymous with the 1970s.

The late 1970s were also a time of great social change and economic upheaval around the globe. The social revolutions of the 1960s concerning the rights of various marginalised groups including women, black Americans, Aboriginal Australians and young people in general had become part of

life certainly in the developed western world. The Oil Shock of 1973 and the Energy Crisis of 1975 affected detrimentally not only the economies but also the certainties of life in the western world. Crucially, the mid 1970s was the height, and then quickly the end, of the Vietnam War. In Australia the Whitlam Labor Government was elected in 1972 on a sweeping mandate of social policy change but was just as quickly pushed from office in 1975 amid accusations of economic mishandling. This caused a constitutional crisis resolved by the 'dismissal' of the Whitlam government in favour of the conservative Liberal-Country Party coalition under Malcolm Fraser. On the architectural front, Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, with its monolithic granite base and parabolic concrete shells, was opened following much controversy in 1973.²¹

One of the first 'béton brut' expressed concrete Brutalist buildings built in Australia was the 1961 Hale School Memorial Hall in Perth (Marshall Clifton in association with Tony Brand).²² The Brutalist

Colonel Light Centre, Adelaide
Hassell & Partners, 1978.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.

style went on to be most popular with institutional, commercial, educational and government building programmes from the late 1960s through to the late 1970s. Notable local exponents of Brutalism included Robin Boyd (Menzies College (student housing), Melbourne, 1968), Daryl Jackson (Harold Holt Memorial Pool, Melbourne, 1967, with Kevin Borland),²³ and Enrico Taglietti (Dickson Library, 1964, and Australian War Memorial Repository, 1978, both in Canberra).²⁴

In Brisbane, Robin Gibson and Partners developed the Queensland Cultural Centre (designed in the late 1970s and completed in 1985) in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Works.²⁵ The vast scheme included the Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland Museum and Queensland Performing Arts Centre. Unusually for such a massive undertaking, Gibson not only designed all the buildings but also the majority of the interiors. These expansive buildings tier up and across the South Bank of the Brisbane River directly across from the central business district and have been complemented by the equally large-scale

Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (Architectus, 2000) and extensions to the Queensland State Library (Donovan Hill, 2002).

Many Brutalist buildings were built in Canberra as that city grew exponentially after 1960. Well known examples include the former Cameron Offices (John Andrews International, 1976) now mostly demolished, the High Court of Australia (1980) and the adjacent National Gallery of Australia (1968-82) (substantially altered in 2011) both by Edwards, Madigan, Torzillo and Briggs.

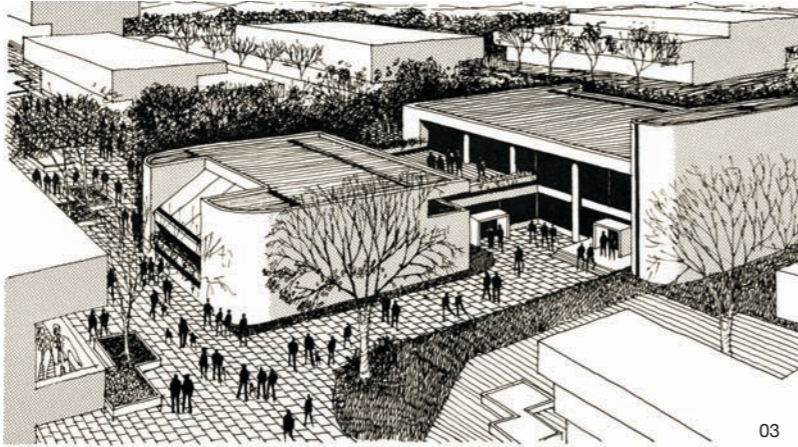
In South Australia, several Brutalist-influenced buildings were designed by Adelaide architects Cheesman, Doley, Neighbour and Raffin. These included the multi-storey Highways Department building at Walkerville (1964), (currently being redeveloped as a hotel and apartments), the more refined Social Sciences Building at Flinders University (1969), the Noarlunga Local Government Centre²⁶ and the Regency Park Community College²⁷ (both 1976).



High Court of Australia, Canberra
Edwards, Madigan, Torzillo and Briggs, 1980.
Photographer: Donald Langmead.
Langmead collection, Architecture Museum.



01
Sydney Opera House, Sydney
Jørn Utzon, 1958-73.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2008.



02
Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), Brisbane
Robin Gibson and Queensland Department of Works
1973-88.
Photographer Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012.

03
Local Government Offices, Noarlunga Regional Centre
Noarlunga, Cheesman, Doley, Neighbour and Raffan, 1975.
Cheesman collection, Architecture Museum.



04
Highways Department, Walkerville
Cheesman, Doley, Brabham and Neighbour
1959-62 and 1967-68.
Photographer: Donald Langmead.
Langmead collection, Architecture Museum.



05
State Bank of South Australia building, Adelaide,
Jackman, Gooden, Scott and Swan, 1982.
Photographer: Philip Earle Scott.
Scott collection, Architecture Museum.



06
Regency Park Community College, Regency Park
Cheesman, Doley, Neighbour and Raffan, 1976.
Photographer: Donald Langmead.
RAIA collection, Architecture Museum.



07
Australian National Gallery, Canberra
Edwards, Madigan, Torzillo and Briggs, 1982.
Photographer: Donald Langmead.
Langmead collection, Architecture Museum.



The Government Buildings Precinct

The 1970s precinct of buildings for the Education Department, Motor Registration Centre, Forensic Science Institute and Public Buildings Department was designed at a time of great change in society, in popular attitudes towards government, and in the attitudes of the public and architects and planners to civic space. The four buildings contributed to an ultimately unrealised South Australian Government plan to clear and occupy two whole city blocks in the geographical centre of the city.²⁸ The site was to be bounded by Divett Place to the east, Victoria Square to the west, Flinders Street to the north

and Wakefield Street to the south and filled with government office buildings interspersed with open public plazas. The Torrens Building (completed 1881), the State Administration Building (1964) and the Reserve Bank of Australia (1963) already lined the north-eastern side of Victoria Square and formed the western boundary of the proposed precinct.

A number of historic buildings were demolished to make way for the four new ones. These included previous premises for the Education Department, the First Unitarian church, a picture theatre, dry cleaning business as well several other small buildings.



01
Former Education Building
Flinders Street
1973, demolished.
Courtesy of
State Library of South Australia

02
First Unitarian Church, Wakefield
Street 1922, demolished.
Courtesy of
State Library of South Australia.



Education Department Building

The Education Department building was completed in 1979 and replaced a nineteenth century building which no longer met the burgeoning and modern needs of the Department. Designed by University of Adelaide educated architect Dimitri Kazanski²⁹ of the Adelaide commercial architecture firm Woodhead Hall McDonald Shaw (now Woodhead), the building is constructed of reinforced concrete columns with low 'capitals' and simple concrete slabs without perimeter beams. Its two distinct parts were constructed simultaneously; a nineteen storey rectangular tower rising from the corner of Gawler Place and Flinders Street and a lower three level section to the west of the tower set back from, and parallel to, Flinders Street.

Both building parts feature generous open public areas at ground level, particularly at the busy Flinders Street and Gawler Place corner. The diagonally set back entrance to the tower creates a generous open and public area sheltered by the tower above. The ground level offices to the tower are also set back creating a useful public colonnade either side of the open entrance area.

On Flinders Street the set back from the footpath creates a more open area which is partially landscaped with raised garden beds. This arrangement provides practical seating 'ledges' around an open area to the Flinders Street facade. Incorporated public spaces like this and the courtyard area between the Education Department building and Public Buildings Department building are characteristic of many so called Brutalist schemes.

The Education Department building was fashioned in the prosaically heavy modern commercial style of the day, albeit with Brutalist stylistic influences. The heavily emphasised top chamfered spandrels to each upper level of the tower and most other horizontal panels were asbestos cement with an aggregate finish. The effect of daylight upon them gives a pronounced horizontal 'banding' to the facade.

Education Department Building
corner Gawler Place and Flinders Street
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012

Both externally and internally, the lift and stair core and the exposed parts of the supporting columns to the tower block feature a vertically ribbed and ‘bush hammered’³⁰ concrete finish. The finish was achieved for all nineteen storeys manually by two workers in a suspended steel cage using 2 kilogram hammers. The workers alternately chipped at the ribbed in situ cast tan coloured concrete panels by hand at the rate of a storey per four days.³¹

The main feature of the building is the colour and the texture of the concrete which is referred to as ‘Brighton Tan’ (named for the local manufacturer Adelaide Brighton Cement and achieved by the inclusion of a light sand-coloured additive). The colour was used to have visual sympathy with neighbouring buildings in the government buildings precinct and was reflective of the general colouring of the nearby St Francis Xavier’s Cathedral.

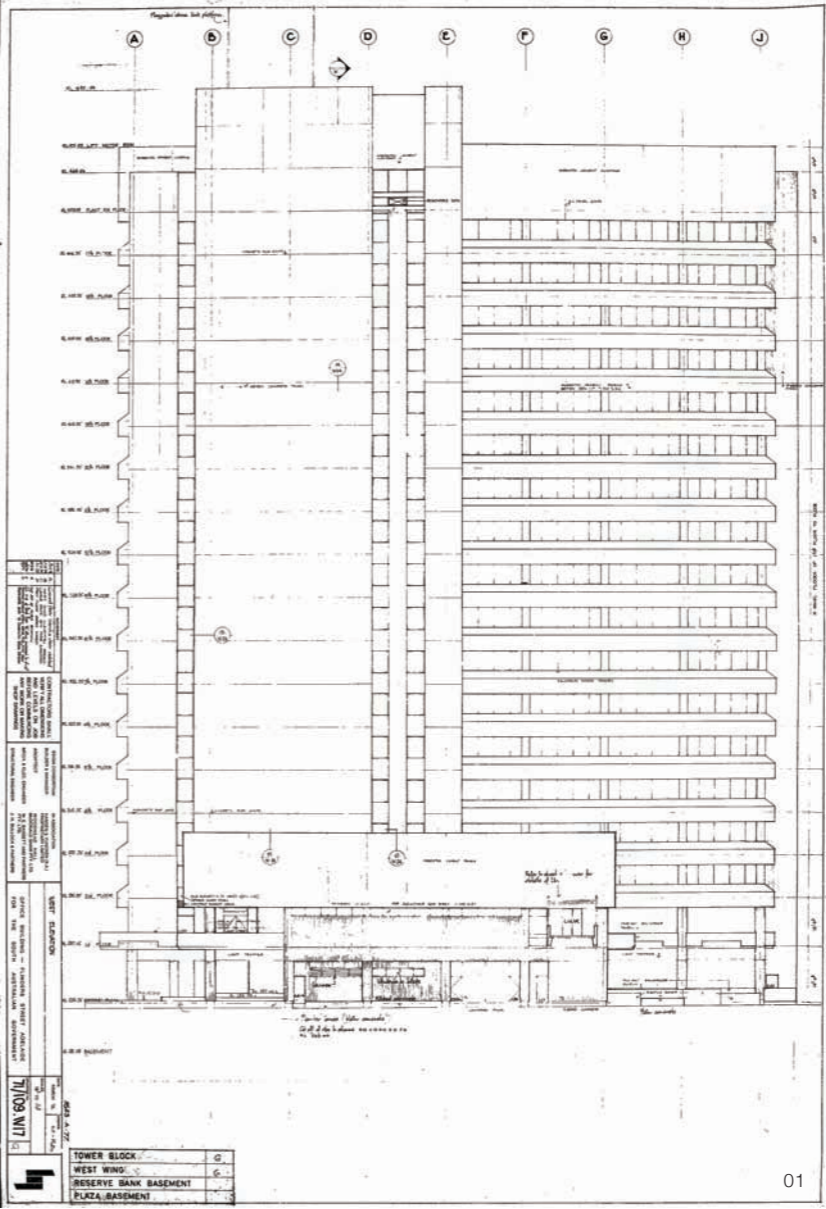
Internally, the building’s lift lobby areas at each level retain the exposed ‘bush hammered’ ribbed concrete effect, whereas the services and interior furnishings and fittings have undergone major refurbishment in recent years. Kym Hughes, now of Woodhead, recalls that the then fashionable ‘knotty pine’ internal wood panels were installed specifically for the office of the South Australian Premier Don Dunstan located in the three storey section of the building.³² Interestingly, in the basement of that section is a pistol firing range for the Reserve Bank of Australia.³³

01
West elevation of Education Department building
Woodhead Hall McDonald Shaw, 1976.
Courtesy of SA Department of Planning, Transport and
Infrastructure

02
Detail of ‘bush-hammered’ concrete on
Education Department building.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2012.

03
Education Department building
Gawler Place facade.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2012.

04
Education Department building.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2012.





Motor Registration Centre Building

The five storey former Motor Registration Centre building is located on the corner of Gawler Place and Wakefield Street and was completed in 1977.³⁴ It was commissioned by the Public Buildings Department (PBD) for the state government Motor Registration Centre. The building served its original function for much of its life before being refurbished recently as the Adelaide Police Station. Today, a new mid-level pedestrian 'bridge' links it to the Forensic Science building on Divett Place.

Project Architect for the building was Adrian Evans, now a Director of the Adelaide-based JPE Design Studio, who had just joined the PBD. Evans completed his Bachelor of Architecture at the University of Adelaide in 1969.³⁵ Immediately prior to commencing with the PBD he made a private visit to Japan and Finland. Evans employed some of his first-hand knowledge of the work of Finnish architect Alvar Aalto on the Motor Registration Centre project. He 'designed everything' on, in and around the building from door fittings, to signage, carpets, internal planter boxes, seating, light fittings and external landscaping.³⁶ The building exhibits

the strong influences of both the eclectic, humanist Aalto, particularly in regard to the original interiors and expressed materiality, and the Japanese architect Kunio Mayekawa³⁷ in a distinctly Brutalist style.

Externally, the building comprises six levels including a basement car park, the public ground level and three levels of office accommodation. Construction is of reinforced concrete slabs supported by a grid of reinforced concrete columns with capitals and incorporated perimeter beams. The overall form of the building is measured and unpretentious, being both graduated and modelled in form with defined horizontal ribbon window striations and a balance of other recessed and protruding elements. The strongly externally expressed corner stairwell serves to sure-footedly anchor the building to the landmark street corner.

Externally the remains a finely balanced arrangement of strong materials and expressive textures enhanced by interesting resolved detailing. A select palate of textured and sometimes deliberately imperfect in situ poured concrete facade elements impart a fine grain, tactile quality to the building. These details, including metal external corners set into the expressive concrete facades of the building, remain largely intact.

South elevation, Motor Registration Centre, Wakefield Street, Adelaide.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012.

In true Brutalist style, the exterior emphasises the internal arrangement and function of spaces. The expressed stairs particularly exhibit internal vertical circulation, and the protruding Corbusian ‘ribbon’ windows of the upper four floors delineate the regular, floor-by-floor, office functions within. The ground level is made approachable by the addition of a broad cantilevered awning over the equally wide footpath to the Wakefield Street front entrance. Brick paving at the entrance (now removed), and concrete planter box elements and decorative textured buttresses placed around the two public facades on Wakefield Street and Gawler Place ameliorate the building’s vertical intersection with the ground.

Sculptural elongated ‘Z’ external concrete panels trace the stair flight within and are punctuated with vertical ‘slit’ bronze aluminium framed windows to the landings. The overt horizontality of the building is emphasised even further by a deeply recessed band below and above each ‘strata’ of windows giving a coarser grained, horizontally ribbed effect to the facade. The uppermost recessed band acts as a cornice. The staircase is further decorated with the addition of a feature handrail originally painted bright yellow. This yellow colour was also employed in the ‘Aalto-esque’ internal public stairwell decorative poles.

The interior arrangement has been completely altered in recent years, particularly on the ground level. Additionally, the notable Aalto-influenced internal treatments have all been removed.³⁸ These details included several nylon rope bound columns with thinner and coloured (yellow) columns seemingly supporting the central internal public stairwell to the first floor. Evans designed an internal central public hub with welcoming in-built timber slatted bench seats around an internal ‘greenery’ garden. He also custom-designed all the public and office furniture and even incorporated a specialised office vacuum tube document transport system. Originally a public staircase connected the ground to the first floor level, and additional stairs were located in the north-east and south-west corners of the building; both have since been altered.

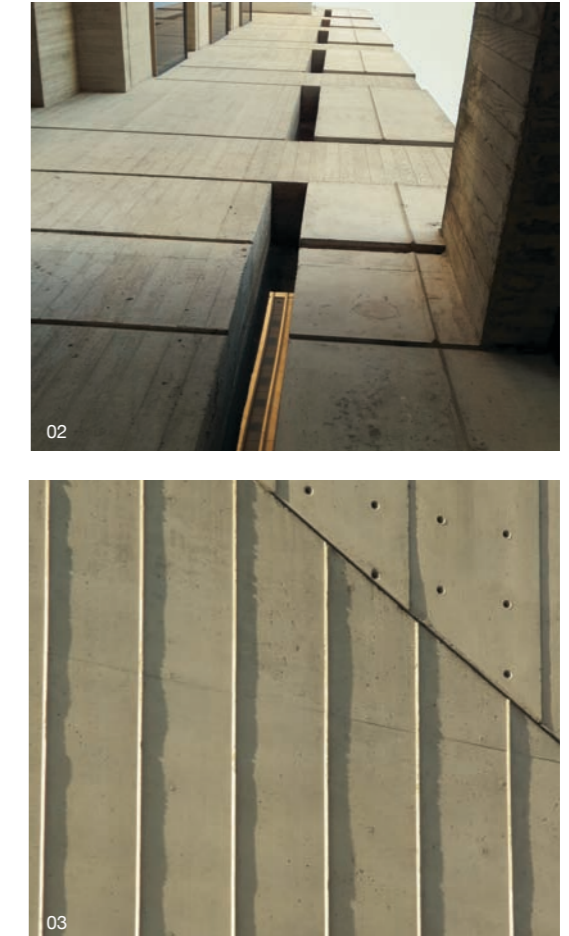
Original external treatments including inset painted metal corner panels, Brutalist concrete raised flower-beds divided by equally Brutalist mini buttresses and original steel tube and painted slatted timber seats survive on the western elevation. By contrast, much has been altered on the Wakefield Street (southern) elevation to accommodate the needs of the Adelaide Police Station, although evidence of the general external scheme remains strong.

01
South elevation, Motor Registration Centre
Window detail, Wakefield Street, Adelaide.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2012.

02
Motor Registration Centre
Stairwell windows.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2012.



03
Motor Registration Centre
Exterior detail of stairwell.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2012.





Forensic Science Building

Completed by 1978, the seven storey purpose-built Forensic Science building is located on the western side of Divett Place. The PBD commissioned the building and in-house architect Kevin Hocking was the Project Architect. Hocking graduated with a Fellowship of the South Australian School of Mines and Industries and a University of Adelaide Diploma in Applied Science in Architectural Engineering in 1953.³⁹

The relatively 'thin' rectangular Forensic Science building runs west away from the ground floor public entrance to Divett Place. The upper floors are set back from the ground and first floor and the long north-facing facade thus created is provided with extensive precast concrete sunhoods. A full height concrete fire stair 'column' rises from near the north-east corner and emphasises internal circulation.

In the Forensic Science building, Hocking designed the most logical and frankly expressive Brutalist style building in the 1970s government precinct. Hocking 'stressed that that the structure was a laboratory building and not an office development'.⁴⁰ It features expressed concrete beams and an all concrete finish. The exposed concrete is in the same 'Brighton Tan' colour as the other buildings in the group but the texture of the concrete varies across this building depending on location. Hocking also subtly employed timber board, plywood panel, smooth and acid etched finishes.

Forensic Science remains the main occupant of the building which has been refurbished in recent years and is now linked by a mid-level pedestrian bridge to the Adelaide Police Station (former Motor Registration Centre building). Architecturally the Forensic Science building has similarities to the Trellick Tower apartments by Ernő Goldfinger (1966-72) in London, and to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (1947). With its ocean liner appearance, it stands in stark relief to the nearby 1860s bluestone Baptist Church on Flinders Street and to the Wakefield Hotel situated on the corner of Wakefield Street and Divett Place.

Perspective drawing of Forensic Science Institute, Public Buildings Department, 1972. Courtesy of SA Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure.



01

Public Buildings Department Building

The Public Buildings Department (PBD) building (now Wakefield House) was the last of the precinct buildings to be completed. Finished in 1979, it was reportedly designed originally for a site adjacent to St Francis Xavier's Cathedral 200 metres to the south-west. However, after the state government and the Catholic church agreed to a land swap, the building was designed for its eventual site on the north-west corner of Wakefield Street and Gawler Place.⁴¹

Brian Polomka (1922-2006) of Berry, Polomka, Riches and Gilbert, was the building's architect. Polomka was an active member of the Royal

Australian Institute of Architects and an advocate for the preservation of Adelaide's historic buildings. He was engaged also in civic life as a Council member, Alderman and, later, Mayor of Norwood, in Adelaide's eastern suburbs.⁴² Berry, Polomka, Riches and Gilbert worked in association with Woods Bagot on the PBD project.⁴³

Totalling nineteen storeys (plus plant level) the building consists of a sixteen storey square tower rising above a larger three level podium base.⁴⁴ It is finished externally in 'Brighton Tan' concrete. A series of raised sixteen storey high concrete ribs emphasise the structure's verticality. The tower has four chamfered corners and the facade has a high solid to glazing ratio compared with many 'glass towers', even of the time. The PBD building is the least Brutalist in style of the four buildings in the government precinct with only the heavy form and the external concrete finish connecting it with its three neighbours.



02

01
Public Buildings Department building
South elevation, Wakefield Street, Adelaide.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012.

02
Furniture and Equipment Layout for Public Buildings
Department building, Public Buildings Department, 1979.
Courtesy of SA Department of Planning, Transport and
Infrastructure.



Buildings and Precinct Analysis

The government buildings' precinct is distinctive and appears harmonious because of the similar colouring, rate of ageing, and physical proximity of the four buildings within its boundaries and because the buildings share common design and material attributes. The most striking feature of the group is their almost uniform colour that gives a subtle visual clue to their similar origins and ongoing ownership and use. This was a deliberate strategy to enable the new buildings to be sympathetic with the surrounding historic buildings.⁴⁵

The buildings' continuous government ownership and use as offices has contributed to their survival and the endurance of the precinct. Three buildings fulfil exactly the same purposes for which they were designed. The Motor Registration Centre building is still a government agency, albeit now with substantially different security access and accommodation needs as the Adelaide Police

Station. The connection between the buildings is functional only with respect to the Gawler Place courtyard between the Education Department building and Wakefield House and to the external linking pedestrian bridge between the Forensic Science building and the Adelaide Police Station.

The physical integrity of the buildings is exceptional, notwithstanding some generally sympathetic alterations over time. The essential Brutalist qualities of overtly expressed structure, function, circulation and materials are certainly present in most parts of each building. The Motor Registration Centre has carefully expressive and assembled concrete panels and a variety of finishes which impart a handmade feel to the modest and well-mannered four level building. By contrast, the Forensic Science building has an altogether heavier emphasised structural quality showing its posts and beams like a Brutalist flag.

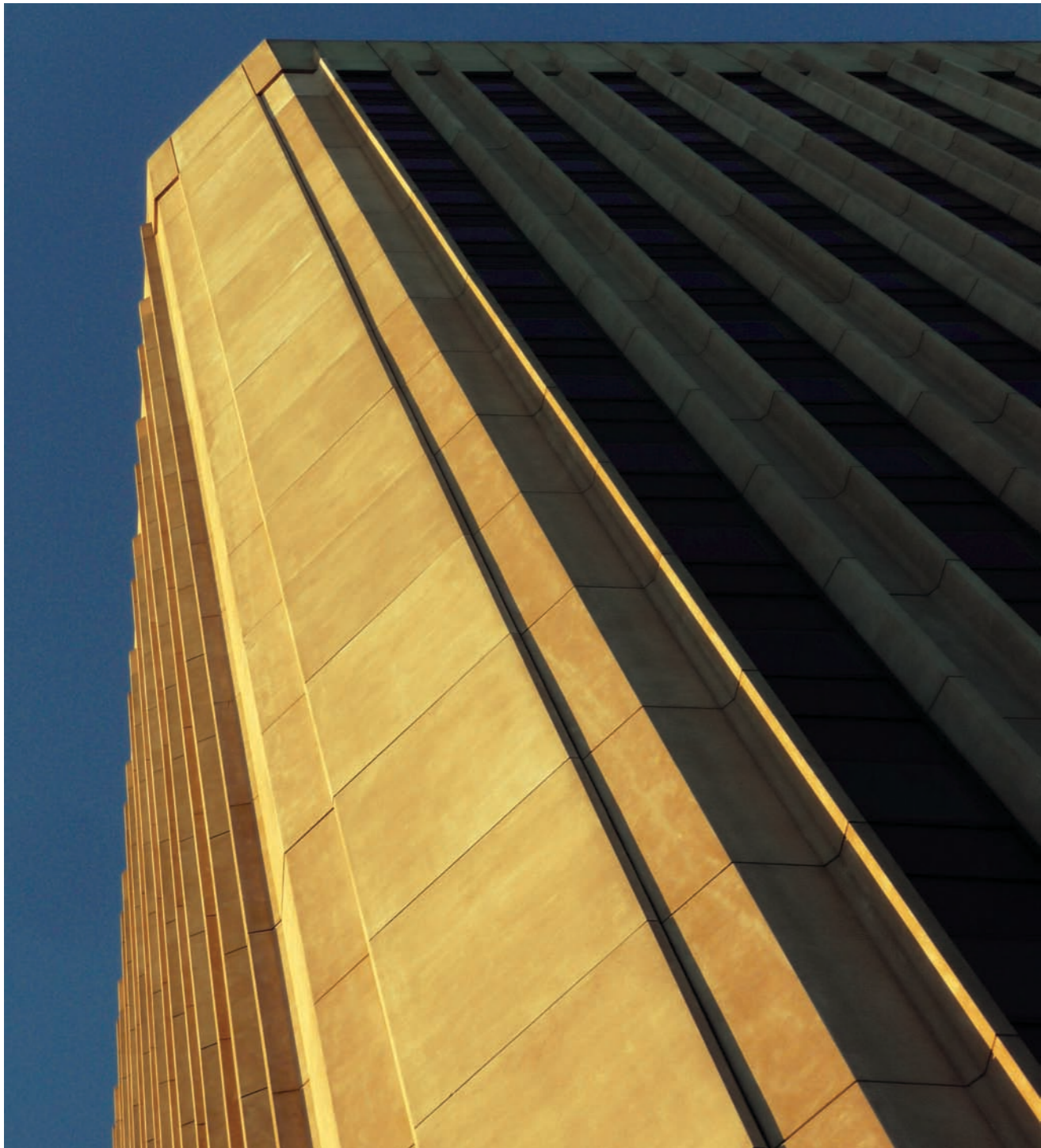
Bridge link between the Forensic Science building and the current Adelaide Police Station.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012.

The Education Department tower displays unambiguously signature Brutalist ribbed concrete finishes neatly counter-balanced by horizontal window bands and an open entry and side loggias. Less Brutalist than commercial, the Public Buildings Department building has a restrained verticality to the finely ribbed mid-rise tower anchored by a low, horizontally planar podium. The two taller buildings are the less distinctive architecturally; however they are still quite essentially of their time due to their highly solid concrete exterior appearance. The two shorter buildings are both more interesting architecturally. The Forensic Science building is the most crudely, honestly Brutalist in form while the former Motor Registration Centre is a more refined and resolved architecturally Brutalist building, even with the distinctive Aalto-inspired interiors removed.

The relative scale of the buildings and their proximity around the physical hub of Gawler Place provide the cohesive factor to qualify them as a precinct as opposed to a disparate group of similar buildings. In an urban design sense the buildings do not dominate the pedestrian even though they are tall and Gawler Place is relatively narrow. Their height to separation ratios are such that a balance is achieved between the 'excitement' of compression and the accessibility made possible by their relatively permeable arrangement. This cohesiveness is assisted by the presence in the middle of the group of the not dissimilar State Centre Car Park, which although not commissioned by the state government, works with the group in terms of its moderate scale, textured steel grid facade 'grain' to the street frontage and the integration of use with the surrounding office buildings.



Wakefield Street, looking south-west towards the government buildings precinct.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012.



Architectural Influences

The influence of other architects and particularly of the New Brutalists cannot be overstated in relation to the four 1970s' government buildings. However the buildings are not truly in the Brutalist style. Rather they are influenced by the style and also by other architectural and urban design movements of the 1970s and earlier. The taller two, the Education Department and the Public Buildings Department buildings, are more severely commercial 'stacked offices' in design. Nonetheless, they mirror some aesthetic themes of the adjacent buildings. The unique features of the Motor Registration Centre building are explained partially by it being so heavily influenced and modelled on the work of Alvar Aalto. The Forensic Science building is the most truly Brutalist of the four as it follows confidently the demonstrative or expressive structural and circulation forms associated with the style.

Public Buildings Department building
Corner of Wakefield Street and Gawler Place, tower detail.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.



Conclusion

The Brutalist style is associated with a time of considerable social and political change and represents a break away from the accepted normality of the International Style and other streams of modernism. However, Brutalism is not universally appreciated and Brutalist buildings are therefore subject to demolition for new development, with many of the best examples in need of refurbishment for modern requirements.

Adelaide's group of four 1970s' government buildings may be relatively unique in Australia in that they are largely in their original use after nearly forty years and are legibly a group of similar buildings which contribute well to the urban milieu of Adelaide's central business district. When

compared with buildings in the Brutalist style from other Australian cities, individually, the Adelaide government buildings are not 'architectural icons' except perhaps for some elements of the former Motor Registration Centre. However, the precinct is a rare, unified and unique exposition of the Brutalist-inspired style of architectural design in a condensed urban setting. The buildings are closely grouped, unified in colour, broadly similar in their external finishes and their fabric is in outstanding condition. Although perhaps under-appreciated stylistically, their individual and collective representative value for future generations as architectural and urban design exemplars warrants further investigation and preservation.

Education Department Building
Flinders Street elevation.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.



Endnotes

- ¹ Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture since 1960*, Canberra, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1990, Taylor, p.79.
- ² William J. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, New York, Phaidon Press, 2010, pp.443; 'The British situation in the decade after the war offered every opportunity for experiment, owing to the blitz and to the emergence of a socialist policy public on housing.'
- ³ Curtis, p. 425; discussing the La Tourette Monastery by Le Corbusier; 'Apart from the obvious features – like rough concrete, stepping overhangs and slab-like piers – it was this conceptual richness which endeared La Tourette to followers seeking a way out of the limitations of the inherited 'International Style'".
- ⁴ Taylor, p.78.
- ⁵ Geoffrey London, 'Brutalism' in Philip Goad and Julie Willis (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p.110.
- ⁶ Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism; Ethic or Aesthetic?*, Architectural Press, London, 1966.
- ⁷ John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern architects and urban transformation*, 1954-1972, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 161.
- ⁸ Curtis, p.442.
- ⁹ Curtis, p.442.
- ¹⁰ Curtis, p. 425.
- ¹¹ 'Team X' or 'Team 10' comprised the Smithsons, Aldo Van Eyck, Jacob Bekema, Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods, John Voelvkcr and William and Jill Howell and arose in response to the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)* and 'dissatisfaction with the modified Functionalism of the old guard'. Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p. 271.
- ¹² Curtis, p.443. See also Gold, passim.
- ¹³ Curtis, p.531.
- ¹⁴ Curtis, p.533.
- ¹⁵ James Stevens Curl, *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.104.
- ¹⁶ Curl, p.574.
- ¹⁷ Frampton, p.245.
- ¹⁸ Frampton, p.242.
- ¹⁹ Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', *Architecture Review*, December 1955, pp.354-362.
- ²⁰ Curtis, p.434.
- ²¹ Peter Myers, 'Sydney Opera House' in Philip Goad and Julie Willis (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, pp.671-4.

Regency Park Community College
detail of board marked concrete.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.

²² 'Hale School Memorial Hall', *Architecture in Australia*, June 1963, pp.72-9.

²³ Peter Raisbeck and Anna Ely, 'Drowning by Numbers: The commercial transformation of Harold Holt Pool' in *(Un)loved Modern*, Australia ICOMOS conference, Sydney, 2009, online at <http://www.aicomos.com/2009-conference/papers/unloved-modern/> accessed 10 April 2013; Hannah Lewi, 'Making Spaces for Recreation', in Hannah Lewi and David Nichols (eds.), *Community: Building Modern Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, pp.134-5.

²⁴ London in Goad and Willis, p.110.

²⁵ Michael Keniger, 'Robin Gibson', in Goad and Willis, pp. 271-2.

²⁶ Antanas Lapsys was the design architect. 'Noarlunga City Council's New Civic Complex', *Building and Architecture*, April 1977, pp.16-7.

²⁷ Architect Guy Maron was the planning and design director. 'Regency Park College takes shape', *Building and Architecture*, April 1977, pp.4-5.

²⁸ 'Precinct SA', *Constructional Review*, February 1978, vol. 51, no. 1, p.28.

²⁹ Architects of South Australia Master Database. Developed and held by Architecture Museum, UniSA.

³⁰ A near identical ribbed and hammered concrete finish is featured on the facade to the Yale Art and Architecture building designed by Paul Rudolph and completed in 1963. See Curl, p.574.

³¹ 'Precinct SA', p. 31.

³² Pers. com. Kym Hughes to author, 29 August 2012.

³³ Architectural drawing of Education Department building, Woodhead Hall McDonald Shaw, 1976. Courtesy of SA Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure.

³⁴ Sue Loughry, *Motor Registration Centre*, unpublished student report, Adelaide, South Australian Institute of Technology, [1981].

³⁵ Architects of South Australia Master Database. Developed and held by Architecture Museum, UniSA.

³⁶ Pers. com. Adrian Evans to author, 8 August 2012.

³⁷ Pers. com. Adrian Evans to author, 8 August 2012.

³⁸ Pers. com. Adrian Evans to author, 8 August 2012. Evans also identifies Aalto as an influence on his design for the Juvenile Court, Wright Street, Adelaide.

³⁹ Architects of South Australia Master Database. Developed and held by Architecture Museum, UniSA.

⁴⁰ 'New Forensic Science ready by end of year', *Building and Architecture*, June 1977, p.8.

⁴¹ Pers. com. Peter Philips to author, July 2012.

⁴² Alison McDougall, 'Polomka, Brian,' *Architects of South Australia Database*, University of South Australia, 2008, online at www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au accessed 4 April 2013.

⁴³ Woods Bagot largely documented the building for construction. Pers. com. Peter Phillips to author, July 2012.

⁴⁴ 'P.B.D. in Tower of Strength', *Perspective*, vol.3. no.2, 1978, p.18.

⁴⁵ Pers. com. Adrian Evans to author, 8 August 2012.



Education Department Building
South facade concrete detail.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.



Further Reading

Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Sydney, Harper Collins, 2002.

Reyner Banham, *Age of the Masters: A personal view of Modern Architecture*, London, The Architectural Press Ltd., 1975.

Cheesman, Doley, Neighbour and Raffin Pty. Ltd. 1975 edition, Adelaide, Cheesman, Doley, Neighbour and Raffin, 1975. Cheesman collection, Architecture Museum.

James Stevens Curl, *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

William J Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, New York, Phaidon Press, 2010.

Philip Goad and Julie Willis (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern architects and urban transformation, 1954-1972*, London, Routledge, 2007.

Hassell and Partners Pty. Ltd.: Architects, North Adelaide, Hassell and Partners, 1980.

Hansen Yuncken, 90+, Hansen Yuncken, Adelaide, 2008.

Donald Leslie Johnson and Donald Langmead, *Makers of 20th Century Modern Architecture: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1997.

Peter Leuthauser and Gabrielle Gossel, *Architecture in the Twentieth Century*, Cologne, Benedikt Taschen, 1991.

Miles Lewis, *200 Years of Concrete in Australia*, Sydney, Concrete Institute of Australia, 1988.

Motor Registration Centre,
exterior detail of stairwell.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2012.

Geoffrey London, 'The Canon of New Brutalism – an alternative reading through the work of Alison and Peter Smithson', in Julie Willis, Philip Goad and Andrew Hutson (eds.) *FIRM(ness) commodity DE-light?: questioning the canons*, fifteenth annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne 1998, pp.189-202.

Michael Page, *Sculptors in Space: South Australian Architects 1836-1986*, Adelaide, Royal Australian Institute of Architects (SA Chapter), 1986.

Louis Redstone, *Art in Architecture*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1968.

M.S. Randhawa, *Chandigarh*, Government Press booklet, no date, Mervyn Smith collection, Architecture Museum.

James Steele, David Jenkins and Dennis Sharp, *Twentieth Century Classics*, London, Phaidon Press Ltd., 1993.

Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture since 1960*, Canberra, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1990.

JOURNALS

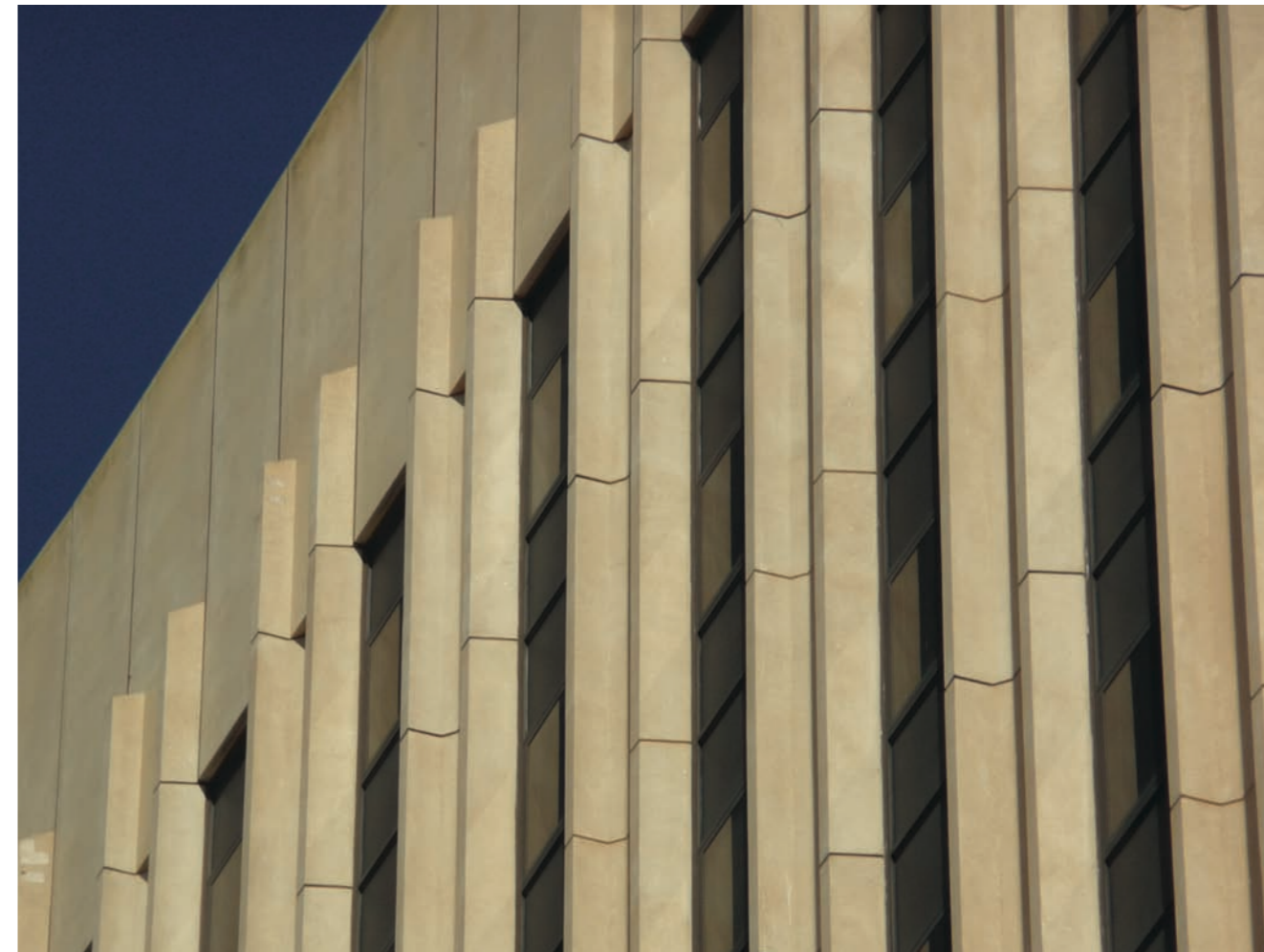
'Focal Point for NSW Masons', *Constructional Review*, August-September 1973, p.i.

'New Motor Registration Centre', *Building and Architecture*, June 1977, p.14.

'New Forensic Science ready by end of year', *Building and Architecture*, June 1977, p.8.

'P.B.D. in Tower of Strength', *Perspective: Public Buildings Department Journal*, vol.3, no. 2, 1978, pp.18-19.

'Precinct SA', *Constructional Review*, February 1978, pp.28-37.



Public Buildings Department building
East facade of tower.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.



About the Author

Kevin O’Sullivan was a mature age student with a passion for both modern and heritage architecture when he completed a Bachelor of Architecture degree with Honours at UniSA in 2003. He revised his Honours thesis titled ‘Late Modern Heritage: The 1963 South Australian School of Art building, Stanley Street, North Adelaide’ for publication as ‘Dinosaur or Delight? Late modern architectural heritage and the 1963 South Australian School of Art Building’ (*Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*), no. 34, 2006.

Kevin was mentored by and worked for Adelaide heritage architect and consultant Bruce Harry and later with Woodhead architects as their National Heritage Manager. Currently he conducts

his own heritage consultancy, is engaged as a heritage architect with the Adelaide City Council and is contracted with the Heritage Unit of the Department of the Environment, Water and Natural Resources. He has advised on heritage projects in South Australia and across Australia, particularly Commonwealth Heritage listed places including several historic lighthouses and many large defence sites. He has advised on many significant twentieth century heritage listed sites in Canberra such as the ‘Stripped Classical’ Royal Australian Mint and the Portal Buildings on ANZAC Parade.

Kevin is Treasurer and an Executive Committee member of Australia ICOMOS. His professional research interest is in twentieth century architecture.

Education Department Building,
Gawler Place colonnade detail.
Photographer: Kevin O’Sullivan, 2013



About the Architecture Museum

The Architecture Museum is a facility for the acquisition, preservation and management of architectural and related records produced by private practitioners based in South Australia. It holds more than 200,000 items including approximately 20,000 drawings and a 2,000 volume library. The Museum promotes scholarly enquiry into South Australia's built environment history; secures funding for research projects based on its collections; publishes research outcomes from Museum centred projects; and arranges public exhibitions of its holdings. It developed the Architects of South Australia online database www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au which provides information about the professional lives and contributions of a selection of the state's architects from 1836 to the present day.

Education Department Building
North facade concrete texture detail.
Photographer: Kevin O'Sullivan, 2013.

The Architecture Museum is open to the public and is housed in a purpose-designed space in the University of South Australia's Karna Building, Fenn Place, Adelaide. Contact details and further information are available at: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/Business-community/Arts-and-culture/Architecture-Museum/>

OTHER TITLES IN THE SERIES

Louise Bird (2007)

Russell S Ellis: Pioneer Modernist Architect

Adam Dutkiewicz (2008)

Brian Claridge: Architect of Light and Space

Carol Cosgrove (2009)

*Moving to the Modern: Art Deco in
South Australian Architecture*

Melanie Cooper-Dobbin (2010)

Harold T. Griggs: The People's Architect

Alison McDougall (2011)

*Designing for Communities:
Russell & Yelland Architects*

Bridget Jolly (2012)

Unley Park: An Architectural Portrait