

## **Rethinking Modern Architecture: HASSELL's Contribution to the Transformation of Adelaide's Twentieth Century Urban Landscape**

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### **Abstract**

There has been considerable academic, professional and community interest in South Australia's nineteenth century built heritage, but less in that of the state's twentieth century. Now that the twenty-first century is in its second decade, it is timely to attempt to gain a clearer historical perspective on the twentieth century and its buildings. The architectural practice HASSELL, which originated in South Australia in 1917, has established itself nationally and internationally and has received national peer recognition, as well as recognition in the published literature for its industrial architecture, its education, airport, court, sporting, commercial and performing arts buildings, and the well-known Adelaide Festival Centre. However, architectural historians have generally overlooked the practice's broader role in the development of modern architecture until recently, with the acknowledgement of its post-war industrial work.<sup>1</sup>

This paper explores HASSELL's contribution to the development of modern architecture in South Australia within the context of growth and development in the twentieth century. It examines the need for such studies in light of heritage considerations and presents an overview of the firm's involvement in transforming the urban landscape in the city and suburbs of Adelaide. Examples are given of HASSELL's mid-twentieth century industrial, educational and commercial buildings.

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**Figure 1:** Adelaide's urban landscape with the Festival Centre in the middle distance. (Photograph: Paul Wallace)

## **Introduction**

As in the other states, in South Australia heritage surveys have identified places for inclusion on the South Australian Heritage Register. But recently there has been an upsurge of growth in Adelaide and some of the twentieth century buildings that had not yet been considered, or had been rejected for heritage listing for various reasons, are being demolished. In this year of South Australia's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its colonisation, two prominent twentieth century buildings, Harris Scarfe department store (1922–23) in Grenfell Street and the former Glenelg Ozone Cinema (1937) in Jetty Road, Glenelg, have been demolished. This follows last year's demolition of Union Hall (1958) located on the University of Adelaide's city campus and HASSELL's Channel 10 (later Channel 7) TV studios at Gilberton. Protest groups were formed to attempt to save both the Glenelg cinema and Union Hall, but neither was heritage listed despite attempts to do so; no protest groups were organised for Harris Scarfe or Channel 7, although the plight of Harris Scarfe received considerable media attention. Given these developments, and the threat to other mid-twentieth century buildings, it is timely to consider the buildings of the last century located in

and around our urban centre. Who designed and built them and what were they trying to achieve?

In this paper I will examine the architectural practice HASSELL, starting with its origins in the early twentieth century; I will then give an overview of the period prior to World War Two when two of its major principals, Colin Hassell and Jack McConnell became partners and modern architecture was introduced in South Australia. Finally, I will consider HASSELL's contribution through a study of some industrial, commercial and education examples from the period following World War Two to the 1970s. I will conclude with a summary of some themes that emerge from the study.

### **Documenting and preserving twentieth century heritage buildings**

Ironically, it was the post World War Two building boom that led to the destruction of many of Australia's nineteenth century heritage buildings.<sup>2</sup> Community concern about this situation led to the establishment of the Australian Heritage Commission in 1976. This was followed by heritage legislation enacted in each of the states, which allowed for heritage listing of places using criteria to determine significance as defined in the Australia ICOMOS (International Council for Monuments and Sites) Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (the Burra Charter, 1979). The Burra Charter defined 'cultural significance' as meaning aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations.<sup>3</sup> However, it has been noted that only a small number of twentieth century places have been heritage listed compared to those of the nineteenth century; even fewer places built after World War Two appear on these lists.<sup>4</sup>

Intensive efforts have been made to bring significant twentieth century heritage places to notice by organisations such as the National Trust with its Committee on Twentieth Century Buildings, the Australian Institute of Architects through its Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture and Australia ICOMOS with its (Un)Loved Modern Conference held at the Sydney Masonic Centre in July 2009. In 1999 an Australian Branch of DOCOMOMO (International committee for documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the modern movement) was established.<sup>5</sup> In spite of these endeavours, many twentieth century places continue to be demolished.

In considering Australia's built heritage, it is important to relate the histories of a range of places, including those of the twentieth century, and to do so within their context.<sup>6</sup> This information then provides a critical understanding of the past, within which a building's history can be documented and assessed.<sup>7</sup> It was in the twentieth century that technological and design developments resulted in what came to be known as 'modernist' architecture. However, there are difficulties in heritage listing and preserving many of these twentieth century places. It has been said that the 'ordinary' buildings in our cities such as factories, office buildings, shopping centres, blocks of flats or residences are 'too common for their own good',<sup>8</sup> and such places are unlikely to be retained when they cease to have value in the market place.<sup>9</sup> While we would not expect to keep all of Australia's twentieth century buildings, as Stropin and Marsden argue, 'we should aim to protect significant examples to serve as physical records of one of the most profound revolutions in our built environment since European settlement'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Modernism in South Australia**

Although the subject of modernism has received considerable attention in the international literature, it remains an emerging area of research for scholars of Australian architectural history. With specific reference to South Australia, Michael Page has discussed the subject in *Sculptors in Space*<sup>11</sup> as part of his coverage of the state's architecture from 1936–86. There are other very brief references to the topic in architectural histories such as JM Freeland's *Architecture in Australia: A History*<sup>12</sup> and Donald Johnson's *Australian Architecture 1901–51: Sources of Modernism* (1980).<sup>13</sup> It is also briefly covered in overview histories for the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage's Twentieth Century Heritage Surveys, both Stage One (1928–45) and Stage Two (1946–59).<sup>14</sup> In this paper I will consider the relationship of HASSELL's work to the development of modernism in South Australia.

### **The architectural practice and modernism**

Until recently, Australian architectural historians tended to avoid examining the work of the architectural practice in the twentieth century, focusing instead on detailed studies of prominent individual architects.<sup>15</sup> One exception was Conrad Hamann's

*Cities of Hope* (1993), in which he explored the partnership of Maggie Edmond and Peter Corrigan in the period 1962–92.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, Philip Goad and others have documented the history of the prominent Melbourne architectural practices Stephenson and Turner,<sup>17</sup> and Bates Smart.<sup>18</sup> Another study is *Architecture By Team Devine Erby Mazlin: the multidisciplinary architectural practice, 1975–1995*, in which the authors examine the work and working methods of a Sydney-based practice.<sup>19</sup> Although there are three large South Australian practices still in operation that commenced in Adelaide in the early twentieth century: Woods Bagot, Woodhead and HASSELL, the only history of these that has been published is an overview of the work of HASSELL: *Poetic Pragmatism*.<sup>20</sup>

In his chapter in *Fibro House: Opera House*, Goad refers to two government buildings which had recently been demolished: the High Court in Darwin (1959) and the State Office block in Sydney (1960–67).<sup>21</sup> These buildings, which expressed the functional, social agendas of the time, were not understood, he argues, due to lack of research and hence, publication. While Goad's examples are of buildings designed by government architects, the same may be said of many of the public buildings designed by architectural practices, particularly in the mid to late twentieth century. Together with the earlier local examples given of demolition of twentieth century buildings, this emphasises the need to examine and record architectural developments in this period.

### **Background: The modern movement in architecture**

What do we think of when we think of modernist architecture? Some might say a high-rise building in the city; some might say a building that has replaced a very good example of Victorian architecture, for the worse! For others, it might be a boring house or public building, with no decoration or interesting features. Anti-modernist sentiment led to a backlash against modernist architecture throughout the world from the mid-1960s.<sup>22</sup> However, modernist architecture at the outset attempted to incorporate principles that improved on the practices of the past.

Developments in modern architecture were initially strong in the United States, where Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright are well-known for their modernist buildings,<sup>23</sup> but the modernist cause was taken up even more passionately in the early twentieth century by European architects such as Le Corbusier in France, Erich

Mendelsohn in Germany and Willem Dudok in Holland.<sup>24</sup> A powerful influence on architects in all parts of the world, including Australia, was to come from Walter Gropius, who formed the Bauhaus in Germany in 1919 and was its Director until 1928.<sup>25</sup>

While there was considerable disparity among those involved in developing the theories of modernism, a core of common ideas is apparent.<sup>26</sup> Modern architects rejected the historical styles of the nineteenth century and believed that an unadorned building contained its own innate aesthetic appeal. They generally adhered to ideas that had been developed by Sullivan and Wright, namely that architecture should be confined to the basic elements, should be suited to its function and climate, and should have an association with its site.<sup>27</sup>

In *The New Architecture and The Bauhaus* (1935), Walter Gropius explained that the new approach meant that

[n]ew synthetic substances – steel, concrete and glass – are actively superseding the traditional raw materials of construction. Their rigidity and molecular density have made it possible to erect wide-spanned and all but transparent structures, for which the skill of previous ages was manifestly inadequate. This enormous saving in structural volume was an architectural revolution in itself.<sup>28</sup>

Instead of forming a solid mass, walls could become mere screens between the columns of the framework and could therefore be made of a lighter material; glass could assume a greater structural importance. Hence continuous metal-framed horizontal casement windows became more prevalent. Flat roofs were seen to have a number of advantages, such as eliminating the use of ‘poky attics’ with ‘sloping ceilings’; making subsequent additions easier; and allowing the creation of a sun-loggia, open-air gymnasium or children’s playground on the roof.<sup>29</sup>

The ‘new architecture’ became known as the International Style from the time Hitchcock and Johnson released their book, *The International Style* in 1932.<sup>30</sup> However, Gropius rejected any reference to a ‘Bauhaus style’ and ‘imitators who prostituted our fundamental precepts into modish trivialities’,<sup>31</sup> pointing out that ‘[t]he object of the Bauhaus was not to propagate any “style”, system or dogma, but simply

to exert a revitalizing influence on design'.<sup>32</sup> The Bauhaus did not base its teaching on any preconceived ideas of form, but 'sought the vital spark of life behind life's ever-changing forms'.<sup>33</sup>

### **HASSELL's early years**

Philip Claridge was a prominent architect and a leader in his profession, who understood that to operate a successful business, expansion was necessary. PR Claridge & Associates opened an office in Renmark, South Australia, in 1930, showing some optimism as it was during the Depression; this was probably the first architectural office outside Adelaide. Claridge's practice came to operate across the state, designing and supervising many buildings in a variety of styles.<sup>34</sup> In the 1930s buildings by Claridge & Associates were generally Art Deco; for example, the refacing of the Sands and McDougall building in King William Street, Adelaide; Renmark Hotel; and the Soldier's Memorial Hall in Port Lincoln.<sup>35</sup> These buildings were designed in association with other architects or architectural firms, a business practice that Claridge also appreciated.

Claridge was a good businessman, skilled at liaison,<sup>36</sup> and his connections played a large part in gaining work. For example, he was a member of the South Australian Cricket Association and his practice was involved in work at the Adelaide Oval. He also designed a house for the acclaimed cricketer Donald Bradman in Kensington Park, Adelaide, in 1935;<sup>37</sup> it was not modernist but can be described as Neo-Georgian, an accepted style at the time.

From the mid-1930s, Claridge took on a number of associates who showed an interest in modernist design. Russell Ellis, who was later to become one of the state's pioneer modernists, joined the practice as an associate in 1935.<sup>38</sup> Colin Hassell became an associate in 1937 on his return from a trip to England and Europe, where he had seen the latest developments in modernism.<sup>39</sup> The influence of international advances in architecture were to intensify in South Australia when, in 1937, Claridge's practice was commissioned to design the new South Australian headquarters for the Bank of New South Wales in Adelaide. Claridge travelled to Melbourne and engaged another young architect, Jack McConnell, as an associate.



**Figure 2:** Former Bank of New South Wales (1942), corner King William Street and North Terrace, Adelaide. (Photograph: Paul Wallace)

Designed in the period after the Great Depression and prior to World War Two, the Bank of New South Wales marked the rise of the banking sector at this time. It was a very important project for the firm as its largest commission to date and, although it was similar in design to the 1935 Bank of New South Wales building in Melbourne (now demolished),<sup>40</sup> it was later recognised as the state's first prominent public building that could be termed modernist.<sup>41</sup> The Savings Bank of South Australia (now BankSA), by the practice McMichael & Harris, was also built in this period (1938–43) but was Art Deco in design.<sup>42</sup> As well as McConnell, Hassell and Ellis, those who worked on the Bank of New South Wales included leading architect Louis Laybourne Smith of the firm Woods, Bagot, Laybourne Smith and Irwin, who was engaged as a consultant to Claridge's practice to oversee the construction. In 1938 Hassell and McConnell were admitted as partners, and the practice became Claridge, Hassell & McConnell.<sup>43</sup>



In 1937, aged 24, Jack McConnell was working for the Melbourne firm of Edward F Billson and had built up a reputation as a young architect when he accepted Claridge's offer of a job in Adelaide to assist in the design of the Bank of New South Wales. McConnell was later to achieve wide acclaim for the influence of his work on younger architects and gained a reputation as the most notable architect associated with the so-called 'modern movement' in South Australia.<sup>44</sup>

McConnell was not the only architect interested in or practising modernism in Adelaide in the late 1930s. Jack Cheesman of the firm Gavin Lawson & Cheesman was among the leaders in introducing modernism at this time. However, McConnell had studied architecture at the University of Melbourne and attended the Atelier (or studio) attached to the University, where, under the direction of noted modernist Leighton Irwin, the leading students were destined to become important design architects of the new generation.<sup>45</sup> McConnell later worked for Irwin and had also worked for the innovative architect, Harold Desbrowe Annear in Melbourne, and acknowledges the influence of both.<sup>46</sup> In addition, he was encouraged by the Victorian modernist architect, Norman Seabrook.<sup>47</sup> Although remarking later that on his arrival in Adelaide he had been shocked that it was so far behind the times, especially in architecture,<sup>48</sup> he chose to stay and subsequently built two houses, one at Springfield (1939) and the other in North Adelaide (1969).<sup>49</sup>

McConnell and the young South Australian modernists agreed with Gropius's view of modern architecture. They believed it was not a style but an approach, based on solid principles. McConnell's criticism of the more conventional members of the profession led to him being twice refused membership of the South Australian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA),<sup>50</sup> but he finally became an Associate in 1939.<sup>51</sup> In that capacity, together with other young architects, including Jack Cheesman and Colin Hassell, he established the Young Adelaide Architects' Club. The Club published regular articles in a local Saturday newspaper, *The News*, on modernist architectural design, thus reaching a broad section of the community. It challenged the prevailing attitude to Adelaide's architecture, which McConnell said was 'not very good, particularly in domestic structures. Tradition is too strong, and imagination is lacking. We want the public to demand progressive work, instead of this idea of combining 1938 interiors with Tudor exteriors'.<sup>52</sup>

### **Modernist influences**

The Bank building stood out as an example of modern architecture, but McConnell's next design, for Deepacres Apartments (1939–42), in Melbourne Street, North Adelaide, was a much clearer expression of modernist design. Multiple residential buildings were still relatively new to Adelaide in this period and his client gave him a free hand in the design, which has been described as exemplary in its forthright and uncompromising approach to modern design principles.<sup>53</sup> Both these buildings were in prominent positions: the Bank on the corner of King William Street and North Terrace, and Deepacres on the tram route into the city; and they were both solid expressions of the new European-inspired architectural approach. Respected South Australian architect Newell Platten did not work for Hassell & McConnell but observed that these buildings, along with McConnell's house at Springfield, as well as the modernist houses of Russell Ellis at Springfield, who was influenced by McConnell,<sup>54</sup> were inspiring to young architects in those days. Previously they had seen only pictures, whereas these were real buildings.<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 3:** Deepacres Apartments (1942), Melbourne Street, North Adelaide. (Photograph: Paul Wallace)

Hassell & McConnell developed a reputation as a place where graduates could learn about modernist design. Many architects who were associated with McConnell during their early careers have paid tribute to his formative influence, in particular his modernist approach.<sup>56</sup>

John Morphet, who in 1979 succeeded Colin Hassell as Managing Director and later Chairman of HASSELL, describes McConnell's influence:

McConnell had done a lot for modern architecture in South Australia. They were a crusty old mob of architects in South Australia at that time. McConnell came from Melbourne to work on the Bank of New South Wales and then did Deepacres Flats in North Adelaide, which became almost iconic as one of the earliest examples of modernism in South Australia.<sup>57</sup>

Albert Gillissen, a senior lecturer in architecture at the University of Adelaide from 1963 to 1986, later commented that McConnell's profound influence on architecture came out of the principles that he had developed. He quoted McConnell's own words from an early interview: 'Learn from others but think for yourself; simplicity is the keynote of beauty; composition distinguishes architecture from building, as it does music from sound'.<sup>58</sup>

However, when McConnell was asked a question about modernist architecture in the 1990s, he replied in his direct manner:

I don't believe in 'modernist' architecture. I believe in modern architecture because it is based on common sense and careful analysis of functional requirements.<sup>59</sup>

Although he did not elaborate, this was a clear statement of his rejection of any allusion to an association of style with modern architecture, which reflected Gropius's views.

Colin Hassell, who had joined the firm as an associate prior to McConnell, in the same year, 1937, was also to become a dominant character in the firm, but in a different way from McConnell. Hassell was the son of English migrants, and his father had established the Hassell Press in Adelaide.<sup>60</sup> He was therefore connected to

Adelaide's establishment, a privileged group whose wealth and connections meant that they were able to exert a considerable amount of power. He attended Prince Alfred College, the same school as Philip Claridge, and this connection was to become important to the firm in terms of later networks.

Hassell had the traditional local training at the South Australian School of Mines, and worked for Claridge after graduating in 1934 and for part of 1935. However, he was unusual in that, like Jack Cheesman before him, he won a two-year overseas trip on an Orient Line scholarship, studying and working in London architectural offices.<sup>61</sup> While there, he visited Europe, where he took an interest in the teachings of the Bauhaus; he was particularly impressed by the modernist work of Dudok at Hilversum in Holland.<sup>62</sup>



**Figure 4:** Former BALM Paints factory (1940), 67 Lipson Street, Port Adelaide. (Photograph: Paul Wallace)

On his return to Adelaide, Hassell designed a factory at 67 Lipson Street, Port Adelaide, for BALM Paints (1938–40) in which he demonstrated how he had been influenced by the functional modern European approach of the Bauhaus.<sup>63</sup> This was the practice's first factory, and was to lead to other important commissions interstate. Although an additional floor was added later, it remains a rare example of pre-World

War Two modernist factory architecture in South Australia and one of only a few in Australia.

With McConnell and Hassell as partners, the practice Claridge, Hassell & McConnell became prominent for its modernist approach in South Australia. The partnership with Claridge continued until 1949, when Hassell & McConnell formed a separate practice.

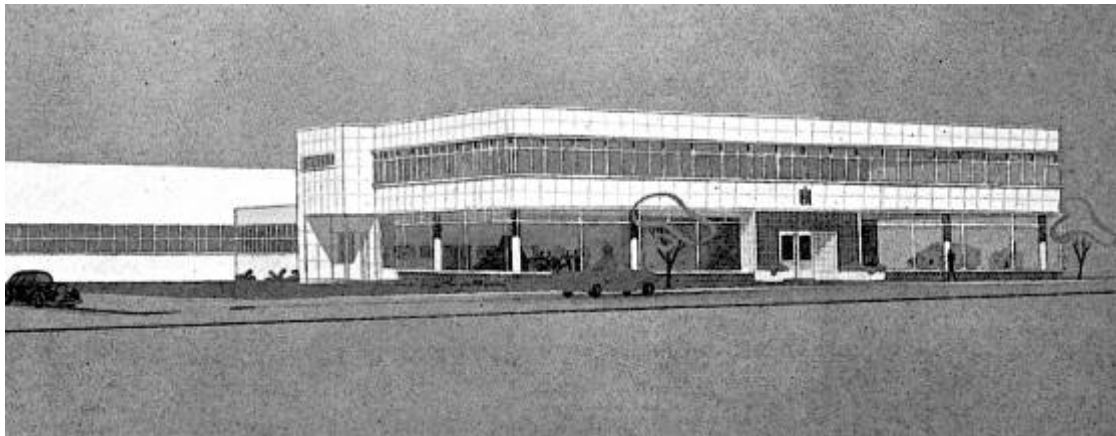
### **Industrial expansion and modernist architecture in the post-war period**

A period of austerity followed World War Two. Building materials were in short supply, largely due to the controls introduced by state governments as the reconstruction program proceeded.<sup>64</sup> In South Australia, however, the post-war period of recovery included a great expansion in the development of manufacturing as a result of the move from a rural to an industrial economy. The Playford Government had adopted an industrialisation policy prior to the War, but industrial development was to increase markedly in the period after it.<sup>65</sup> The main areas of production were steel and motor vehicles and their allied industries. While other states competed for a share of investment in the new industries, the Victorian government under Henry Bolte was most successful in its implementation of a similar program to that of South Australia from 1955–72.<sup>66</sup>

In Europe factory design had played a pivotal role in the development of modernism in the early twentieth century. Those factories that were to have a major influence were Albert Kahn's designs for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, USA (1907–1917),<sup>67</sup> and Walter Gropius's Fagus Factory in Alfeld, Germany (1911 with Adolf Meyer).<sup>68</sup> Post-war factory expansion was also to provide opportunities for the development of Australian modernism. While it did not have the same national coverage or rate of activity as the architectural practice Stephenson & Turner,<sup>69</sup> Hassell & McConnell, along with a number of other large architectural practices, was to play an important role in the design of modernist industrial architecture.

The International Harvester Company of Australia Pty Ltd was formed in 1912 when it purchased the Australian assets of the American International Harvester Company, which had its Australian head office in Melbourne and branches in all Australian capital cities.<sup>70</sup> Its first large factory was built in 1939 in Geelong, Victoria, where it manufactured farm equipment. Shortly after the end of World War Two, Claridge,

Hassell & McConnell was asked to design the new premises for the International Harvester Company in Adelaide. The commission came about as a result of McConnell's contact with Walter Killough from the International Harvester Company at the Amateur Sportsman's Club.<sup>71</sup> Both Hassell and McConnell used their networks to gain work and, as Club members, business was regularly combined with pleasure. Further opportunities opened up for the practice when Killough became Australia's Managing Director in 1947.



**Figure 5:** International Harvester factory (1948), corner of East Terrace and Goodenough Street, Mile End, Adelaide. (Source: International Harvester Company of Australia Pty Ltd souvenir brochure, Harold Griggs Collection, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, S167/1380)

Adelaide's International Harvester Company building, located on the corner of East Terrace and Goodenough Street, Southwark (now Mile End) was completed in 1948, and marks the beginning of factory expansion in the post-war period. Modernist features include a grid of circular concrete columns used as the load-bearing structure; external glass walls which form an enclosure rather than supporting the roof; and the use of curved glass at the corners. While it had the hallmarks of a modernist building, it has been described as 'not yet a true example of the International Modern Movement'<sup>72</sup> due to its symmetrical plan and the solid monumental entry, which are features of Art Deco design. However, like the Bank of New South Wales, this is an example of constraints imposed by the client. While McConnell did *not* think this building was important in terms of modernism, he later explained:

Of all the projects, that at Southwark was the least important but it was important to Hassell and McConnell in South Australia, where it has been much admired. Personally I have never thought it one of my

best efforts. In the first place it had to comply with US prototype branch offices (the restriction did not apply elsewhere) and secondly, it was designed for air conditioning, which did not eventuate.<sup>73</sup>

As a result, McConnell felt he did not give enough attention to sun protection. He was to give this aspect much greater consideration in his later designs.

The commission provided McConnell with his first opportunity to travel overseas and led to other projects, which *were* to be important in terms of modernism. Decisions to design factory buildings for the company in Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland from 1948–50 were taken at meetings between Killough and McConnell at International Harvester Company's Head Office in Chicago. The location of the meeting was significant for the practice and for McConnell; it was his first overseas trip and provided him with opportunities to visit the Company's industrial buildings in the USA and gain an understanding of how to approach the task.<sup>74</sup>

### **The first interstate expansion**

Claridge, Hassell & McConnell's first interstate office was established in Melbourne in 1948, in a conference room in the International Harvester Company's showroom at South Yarra.<sup>75</sup> Henry Hayward, who had come from Melbourne and joined the practice in Adelaide after the War, was to take charge of the Melbourne office, which soon had a staff of three. While there were other smaller jobs, the first major commission was the International Harvester Company's Dandenong plant in 1949. Ken Cory, who was later to become a partner along with Hayward, joined Hassell & McConnell in 1951, and the two were based in Melbourne, while McConnell travelled back and forth between the Adelaide and Melbourne offices.<sup>76</sup>

Later Hassell & McConnell received further factory commissions in the area, based on their work for the International Harvester Company, as well as from other contacts. For example, factories designed for BALM (later Dulux) Paints after World War Two at Port Adelaide, Dandenong Valley, Melbourne and Brisbane, resulted from Colin Hassell's work on the 1938–40 factory at Port Adelaide.<sup>77</sup> The practice became Hassell, McConnell & Partners in 1957 when Dick Roberts in Adelaide, and Hayward and Cory in Melbourne, were admitted as partners.

## Developments in Adelaide

In Adelaide, by 1956, McConnell was able to take the initiative in his design for the WD and HO Wills factory on the opposite side of the street to the International Harvester Company building, and thought this a better effort in modernist terms.<sup>78</sup> His view is supported by a later critical evaluation.<sup>79</sup> The Wills factory was also the first major project that John Morphett worked on for Hassell & McConnell. Morphett reveals the extent of his involvement in his statement: ‘McConnell did the sketch plans; I did the rest’.<sup>80</sup>



**Figure 6:** WD and HO Wills Building (1956), corner of East Terrace and Goodenough Street, Mile End, Adelaide. (Source: Jack H McConnell Collection, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, S270/1/1)

Morphett worked with Hassell & McConnell as a student from 1953–55, then joined the practice after graduating. He was involved in a landmark exhibition of modernist buildings in Adelaide’s Botanic Park in 1956 by a group of young architects who were members of the Contemporary Architects Association.<sup>81</sup> But for Morphett the most significant outcome of the exhibition was his meeting with visiting guest architect, Pietro Belluschi, who was head of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Architecture in the USA. Belluschi encouraged



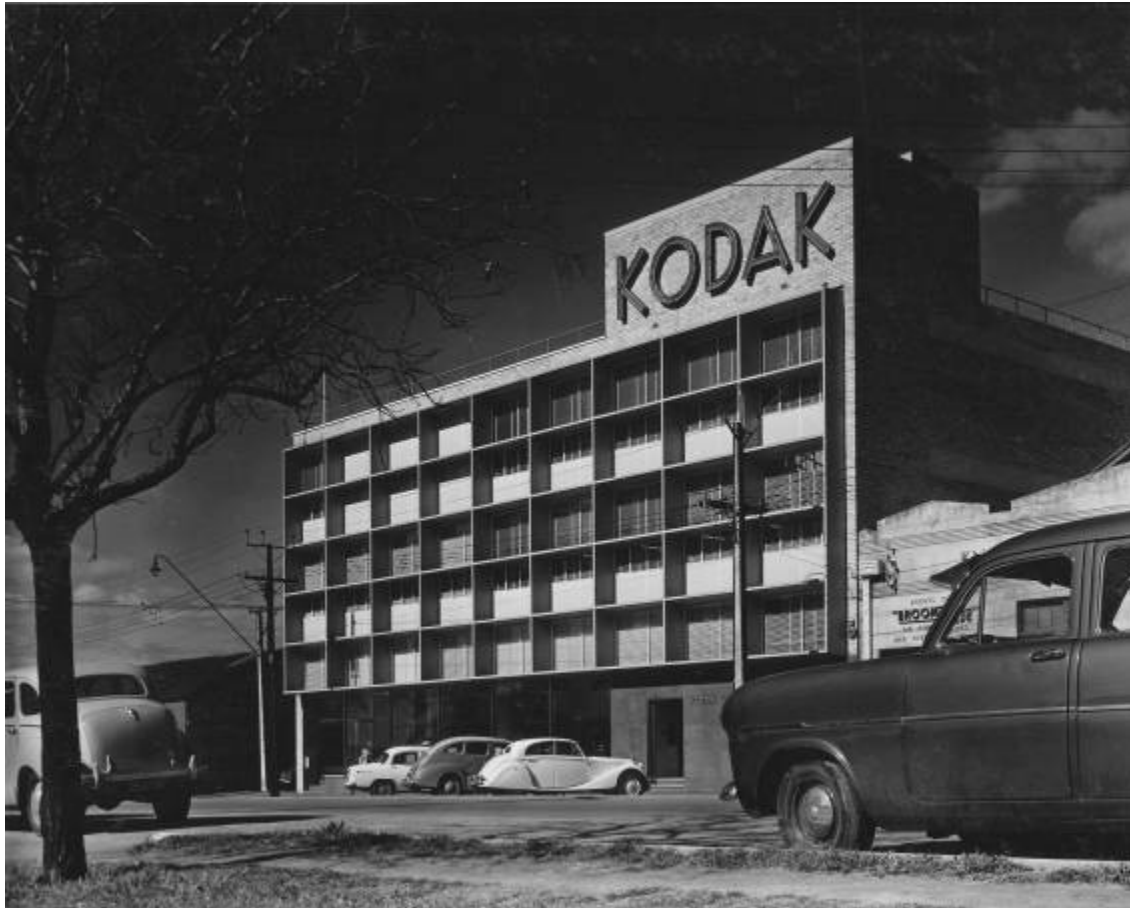
Morphett to undertake graduate studies in the USA, and Morphett subsequently gained entry to MIT, where student architects worked in small teams and were encouraged to collaborate with other disciplines. On completion of a Master's degree in 1957 he obtained employment with The Architect's Collaborative (TAC), formed by Walter Gropius in the USA in 1945.<sup>82</sup>

Gropius had emigrated to the USA in 1937 and in 1938 established the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University,<sup>83</sup> which he headed until his retirement in the mid-1950s. Although Gropius was 74 years old when Morphett joined TAC, and had retired from his position at Harvard, his approach was much the same as when he was Director of the Bauhaus. The process involved frequent presentations of work in progress and peer review by all on the team, but the final decision always rested with the presenter.<sup>84</sup> Morphett was greatly impressed by this approach, which also allowed younger architects to contribute ideas.

On his return in 1962, Morphett rejoined Hassell, McConnell & Partners, working on many of its major projects with both Jack McConnell and Colin Hassell, as well as others. But his experience in the USA, and in particular working with Gropius, had a strong influence on him and he was to become a major catalyst for changes in the firm.

### **Commercial buildings**

After the post-war austerity period ended in about 1953, there was a building boom, fuelled by a rise in population and a consequent demand for housing, factory-produced goods and schools.<sup>85</sup> The capital cities grew rapidly and by the early 1960s Adelaide's population was approaching one million. This growth was accompanied by a rise in real average weekly incomes by more than half over the period 1945–65.<sup>86</sup> The resulting prosperity led to the appearance of more commercial structures and the following buildings by Hassell, McConnell & Partners are a sample of these.



**Figure 7:** Kodak offices (c. 1955), North Terrace, Adelaide city. (Source: Jack H McConnell Collection, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, S270/1/1)

The former Kodak office building on North Terrace, Adelaide (1955) (now the Comfort Hotel) is one of several buildings in which a grid design and sun-shading determine the aesthetic of the façade. The grid and sun-shading techniques, based on McConnell's 12 foot (3.6 metre) cubed planning module, were to feature in much of the practice's future work. Another floor has been added to the former Kodak building and, although this has spoiled the design aesthetic, it is in keeping with modernist principles of flat roofs allowing for additional floors, as mentioned earlier in this paper.

The former ANZ Bank, Flinders Street, Adelaide (1956) (now a graphic design studio), also uses a grid design and shows the sun-shading aesthetic applied to the facade. McConnell used the sun-shading device in a more restrained manner here than in the WD & HO Wills building at Mile End, which followed a little later. This was probably as a result of the Wills building needing a greater degree of sun control due to its aspect. Hassell, McConnell & Partners designed several other small bank

buildings in this period as new branches were formed; for example, the Savings Bank at Ridleyton (1955).



**Figure 8:** ANZ Bank (c. 1955), Flinders Street, Adelaide City. (Source: Jack H McConnell Collection, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, S270/1/1)

In 1960 the grid was again used in a different way when the firm was commissioned to design a new commercial building for Charles Birks, later to become a David Jones department store. Comprising ten floors and a basement, and with a total floor space of almost ten acres (four hectares), this was the largest single building project in Adelaide at the time. It was fitted with the latest technology, including air conditioning, artificial lighting and fire protection, as well as eight lifts and twelve escalators. Italian marble of varying colours was used to express the structural frame, with rhythm and modulations introduced to integrate the façade in a unified composition.<sup>87</sup> A sculpture on the Rundle Street (now Rundle Mall) façade provided a focal point. On completion, the building was considered the most modern department store in Australia.<sup>88</sup>

Following David Jones' decision to build a new store in Adelaide with a much larger footprint on a nearby site, an unsuccessful attempt was made to have the original David Jones Department Store included on the Heritage Register.<sup>89</sup> Described as the best example of a modernist department store in Australia, the original building failed to gain approval for listing due to the building owners' opposition.<sup>90</sup> However, this building, with additional floors, remains.

### **Education buildings**

In the 1950s and 1960s, post-war tertiary education became a national priority and greater educational funding was provided for universities.<sup>91</sup> As well as developing existing campuses, new ones were built, and in this period Hassell, McConnell & Partners obtained one of their most notable commissions, the new Flinders University. This was a greenfields development located in the Bedford Park foothills in Adelaide's southern suburbs, with panoramic views over the coastal plains and the sea. It presented an architectural challenge as the buildings had to be ranged up and across the ridged hillside, and linked by roads, steps and footpaths, with all to be part of an integrated whole.<sup>92</sup>



**Figure 9:** South ridge, Flinders University (1968), Bedford Park, Adelaide. (Source: Jack H McConnell Collection, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, S270/1/5)

Hassell, McConnell & Partners worked in conjunction with university planner, Gordon Stephenson and staff architect, Geoffrey Harrison. Stephenson and Harrison's site plan adopted the Radburn superblock concept, encircling the entire campus with a road. The central space formed a pedestrian precinct that incorporated the academic buildings in two 'parcels' on north and south ridges.<sup>93</sup> Jack McConnell planned the north and south ridge building precincts, which were linked by a dam and a small lake in the valley between. Many of Hassell, McConnell & Partners' architects worked on the project, and while Harrison found that 'most of the partners were strong characters in different ways,' he describes McConnell as 'very much the leading partner in a team'.<sup>94</sup> In 1968 the north and south ridge buildings received the RAIA (SA Chapter) Award of Merit. The judges assessment stated: 'The various courtyards, and the arrangement of walkways at different levels, add a degree of excitement to the complex ... Simple detailing and the use of plain, durable materials throughout are most impressive and will undoubtedly minimize maintenance, which is an ever-increasing problem in institutional buildings'.<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 10:** Library, Flinders University, Bedford Park, Adelaide, 2010. (Photograph: Paul Wallace)

This design was different from the classical structures of earlier Australian university architecture and in keeping with the practice's approach. The themes of simple

detailing; plain, durable materials; minimal maintenance; strong rhythm; efficiency; and attention to the setting, are common to the practice's architecture from the late 1930s.

### **New directions in the 1970s**

In 1970 a major rift occurred when Jack McConnell was asked to leave the partnership, and it became Hassell and Partners.<sup>96</sup> The timing was ironic as it was the same year that McConnell received the prestigious RAIA Gold Medal. In spite of McConnell's key role in the practice, Morphett's comment that 'we were sick and tired of the autocratic mode'<sup>97</sup> gives some indication of the strength of feeling that forced the break up. McConnell's departure affected the Melbourne office, although Hayward and Cory were able to continue there, and it was later to expand. The Adelaide office continued without too much disruption as the new Adelaide Festival Centre, a performing arts complex, was a major project and the firm gained other commissions. However, Dick Roberts also left the practice after a 20-year association and became Chairman of the Board of the South Australian Housing Trust (1970–75).<sup>98</sup>

In the 1970s the post-war economic boom was beginning to decline due to the inflationary effects of the oil embargo imposed on the West by the Arab states.<sup>99</sup> In this uncertain economic environment, the practice adopted a collaborative approach, extending its operations to include disciplines outside architecture; first planning and landscape architecture, and later, interior design and urban design. The new approach was a result of Walter Gropius's influence on John Morphett. However, its implementation required the support and business leadership of Colin Hassell, who took the commercial view that it would be of value to have a multidisciplinary practice, which had skills that complemented the core business of architecture.<sup>100</sup> The changes assisted the practice to expand nationally and internationally, but it continued to produce work that reflected the basic principles of the early American and European modernists.

### **Conclusion**

A number of themes have emerged in considering the work of the architectural practice HASSELL in the twentieth century. These include its role in introducing the

functional modernist approach; the principles used in this approach to produce innovative architecture; the practice's influence on younger architects; and the connections that helped it to develop. Like other architectural practices, HASSELL experienced setbacks over the century, particularly in periods of economic downturn. However, it was assisted initially by its Melbourne and later Canberra offices, and from the 1970s it opened offices in Sydney, Perth and Brisbane; in 1987 it opened an office in Auckland, New Zealand, which later closed. More recently it has expanded into South East Asia, Hong Kong and China, reopened its Perth office, which had closed, and opened offices in Darwin and the latest in London, United Kingdom (2011). The extension into disciplines other than architecture, together with the geographic spread of interstate and international offices, has allowed HASSELL to continue its operations in a competitive and economically stringent environment.

The examples of HASSELL's buildings that I have discussed are evidence of the innovative, functional architecture that are part of its contribution to Adelaide's twentieth century urban landscape. They are mainly non-residential buildings that represent the economic, political and social period in which they were built, ranging from the industrial to the commercial and educational, and, from the time of the Festival Centre, cultural sectors. The Festival Centre, the former BALM Paints factory, Deepacres Apartments, and the Bragg Laboratories at the University of Adelaide are a small representative sample of HASSELL's buildings that are included on the South Australian Heritage Register, and so are likely to be retained. Whether any of HASSELL's other buildings will survive the continual drive for development that has been sweeping away many of Adelaide's twentieth century places remains to be seen.

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### **About the Author**

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