

City of Adelaide Heritage Survey (2008)

NAME: Offices, 47-49 Waymouth Street
Former Woodards House

ZONE/POLICY AREA: CBA - PA16

APPROVED / CURRENT USE: Offices and South Australian College of English

FORMER USE: Offices

DATE(S) OF CONSTRUCTION: 1928-1929

LOCATION: 47-49 Waymouth Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Adelaide City Council

LAND DESCRIPTION: CT-5323/691

HERITAGE STATUS: Local Heritage Place

OTHER ASSESSMENTS
Donovan, Marsden & Stark, 1982;
McDougall & Vines, 1993



Offices, 47-49 Waymouth Street (Former Woodards House)—View to southeast

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DESCRIPTION:

This five-storey office building was constructed in the Inter-War Commercial Palazzo style in 1928-1929. Built of load-bearing reinforced concrete, the ground floor has a rusticated plinth and the upper floors feature string courses and panelled pilasters. The ground floor features paired windows in arched frames with barley sugar columns, panels and rondels on each side of the double metal-framed sliding glass doors, also within an arched frame, with a fanlight. Metal panels are interspersed above and below the windows between the pilasters on the upper floors, to disguise the internal floor slabs that would otherwise be visible from the exterior. These panels are decorated with circular motifs. Only one of the two lamps that flanked the front entry at either side of the door still remains, and there is a metal lamp bracket on the opposite side where the lamp was located. Above this are two circular metal plaques on both sides of the front entry doors with the Norwich Union emblem. Inside the building, the foyer is largely original and has a coffered ceiling and marble dado. The floors are terrazzo and the original single lift still operates.

Significant components include: the original form of the five-storey building, including the facade elements of the Waymouth Street and Bentham Street facades; the rusticated plinth, string courses and panelled pilasters; the ground floor windows and the front entrance glass doors, and the keystones above these and the front windows; all windows on the upper floors and the metal panels between them; the parapet at the front of the building; the lamp fixed on the wall beside the front entry doors and the metal lamp bracket on the opposite side; the circular metal plaques on both sides of the front entry doors with the Norwich Union emblem; the interior entry foyer with its coffered ceiling, marble dado and terrazzo floors.

The assessment includes the whole of the original structure, particularly the treatment of the northern and southern elevations.

The assessment does not include treatment of southern and eastern elevations, nor interior detailing.

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE:

Woodards House, built in 1928-1929, is a fine example of a building constructed in the Inter-War Commercial Palazzo style. It shows the public style of F Kenneth Milne, a prominent South Australian architect, who regarded this building as one of his most important works. Constructed as the South Australian head office of the Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society, the building reflects the commercial expansion and consolidation of the capital city centre during the Inter-War period. The additional floor constructed in 1953 adds to the interest of the building by showing the effects of the Depression. It illustrates several key themes in the city's history: *3.1.8 New Technology and City Development; 3.3.3 Other Financial Institutions; 3.7.3 Office Workers; 4.3 Development of the Building Industry, Architecture and Construction; 4.3.2 Twentieth Century Architects; 4.5.4 Inter War Commercial Styles (1920s to 1942); 4.6 Heritage and Building Conservation; 4.7.1 Adaptive re-use.*

RELEVANT CRITERIA (Under Section 23(4) of the *Development Act 1993*):

This building is recommended for Local Heritage listing because it meets the following criteria:

- (a) it displays historical, economical or social themes that are of importance to the local area, being an example of a late 1920s commercial building constructed close to the city centre as the head office of the Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society, showing confidence in their business as the Depression was beginning; and
 - (d) it displays aesthetic merit, design characteristics or construction techniques of significance to the local area, as it displays Milne's use of the Inter-War Commercial Palazzo style; and
 - (e) it is associated with a notable local personality, prominent Adelaide architect, F Kenneth Milne; and
 - (f) it is a notable landmark in the area, being prominently situated on the corner of Waymouth and Bentham Streets.
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ELEMENTS OF HERITAGE VALUE:

Inclusions

- External form and scale including exterior walls, façade elements, plaster work and roof;
- Fabric and detailing of the street façades.

Exclusions

- Interior detailing
- New services

NOTE: The Description of Place and Elements of Heritage Value listed in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan for this property are as follows:

Offices (Woodards House); external form in particular the fabric and detailing of Waymouth and Bentham Street facades.

This is the legally recognised listing and should be used for the purposes of development applicant assessment.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

In late 1926, the Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society Ltd purchased from the Trustee of the late JA Johnson a block of land on the south-east corner of Waymouth and Bentham Streets. It was the intention of the Society to build up-to-date offices on the site. This process began in April 1928 when F Fricker, Queenstown, was appointed contractor for the work that was expected to cost £47,000. Architects for the project were F Kenneth Milne & Evans.

Woodards House is a fine example of a building constructed in the Inter-War Commercial Palazzo style. This was an international style adopted by Australian architects, constituting a reinterpretation of the Italian Renaissance palazzo façade. It was usually large in scale, with a strong relationship to the street alignment. Features of this style exhibited in Woodards House include a rusticated plinth,

arched windows and doors and barley sugar columns at ground floor level, and metal-framed windows and panels, string courses and pilasters on the upper floors.



B.5477, 1919 (SLSA)



B.12983, April 1954 (SLSA)

F Kenneth Milne first set up practice in Adelaide in 1909. By the 1920s he was one of South Australia's leading architects. The firm was known as Milne and Evans at this time and another architect, Russell, also assisted in the design.

The Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society Limited was founded in Norwich, England in 1797 by Thomas Bignold and set up another section, the Norwich Union Life Insurance Society, in 1808. Both then became the Norwich Union Society. The Company's presence in South Australia began in 1874 when J Gilbert Boothly opened an agency in Adelaide. In 1898, the Norwich Union Insurance Society took over the South Australian Insurance Co. founded in 1862 and operated its business from that company's former offices located on the northern corner of Pirie and King William Streets. When more office space was needed, the Company moved to the National Mutual Building, followed by the Citizen Building, before constructing its own offices. A head office was not established in Melbourne until 1957. In 1988 the Australian group of Norwich companies commenced operations and assumed legal responsibility for business in Australia.

F Kenneth Milne regarded Woodards House as one of his most important works. He also designed the Hampshire Hotel and the scoreboard at Adelaide Oval (South Australian Heritage Register); in the 1928–1945 period, he designed Goldsbrough House and the SA Brewing Company Offices (both of which are on the South Australian Heritage Register). Milne also designed numerous houses, including Sunnyside at North Adelaide (South Australian Heritage Register). Milne was a life member of the South Australian Institute of Architects and its president between 1937 and 1939. He was also active in campaigning for the establishment of a Chair of Architecture at the University of Adelaide.

Woodards House was originally intended to be eight storeys in height, but as a result of the Depression, only four were constructed. An additional floor was added in 1953, with the design by the same architectural firm, which had evolved into F Kenneth Milne, Dawkins Boehm & Ellis. The well-established firm of William Essery & Son Ltd constructed the additional floor. This new floor adds interest to the building as it shows how the Depression affected construction in the city, with another floor being added at a more prosperous time.

In 1976, the building was sold to the Catholic Church Endowment Society. It has continued to be used as offices and is currently tenanted by the SA College of English on three levels, and some small government and private agencies on the ground floor. A number of offices remain vacant, including the whole of the third level, and these have recently been advertised for lease. Although the cornice between the fourth and fifth floors was removed when the site to the east was developed, the overall integrity of the building is high. The building has been well maintained and is generally in good condition. Many of the original fittings have been retained.

REFERENCES:

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- BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION: Engineering Machinery Manufacturing*, Adelaide: Vol. II, No. 71, 7.3.1928, p. 13; Vol. II, No. 78, 25.4.1928, p. 9.
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- Page, Michael, *Sculptors in Space: South Australian Architects 1836–1986*, RAIA (SA Chapter), 1986.
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- Woodburn, S, 'F. Kenneth Milne, Portrait of an Architect', Exhibition Catalogue, Flinders University Architecture Archives, 1984.