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Adaptive Reuse: The Case of Geelong's Westfield, where Architectural, Urban and Heritage Practices Intersect

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Abstract

Westfield lies in the heart of Victoria's second city, Geelong. The transformation of an entire city block into a shopping complex stemmed from necessity, as the city entered the early phase of deindustrialisation. It involved the redevelopment of an entire urban block with multiple heritage buildings. The project was conceived 50 years ago when the city's defining wool industry experienced a significant decline following the 1970s global energy crisis and economic slump. This downturn left numerous industrial buildings in central Geelong redundant. This situation challenged the very identity of Geelong, as well as its raison d'être. While the transformation of the site raises issues to do with urban visioning, the adaptive reuse of multiple significant heritage buildings highlights the intersections and tensions between architectural design and heritage practices.

There is great potential in adaptive reuse to mobilise a critical understanding of the environment/city/economy based on engagement with earlier layers of historical development. This paper critically reviews the history of Westfield Geelong by considering the 1970s vision "City by the Bay," detailing the history of Brougham Street to understand the significance of the site and scrutinising the heritage strategy of facadism adopted in the realisation of Westfield.

Understanding how this development has redefined Geelong as a city is critical to now strategically rethinking a city facing rampant development. This paper argues that the criticality of heritage and adaptive reuse must be recognised, such that the architecture and its narratives can reveal the legacy embedded in the city's historic structures, be understood within the context of Geelong's fast-paced self-reinvention through architectural and urban transformations, and be a positive progressive force in the city's evolving identity.

Introduction

Many studies of adaptive reuse have brought to light how architects have salvaged and repurposed old buildings.¹ While multi-faceted benefits are considered and critiqued, little is said about the different scales of impacts, or how various practices of adaptive reuse can affect the sense of place. Further, little discussion and analysis recognises the tension between architectural, urban and heritage practice.² This is particularly evident in the case of facadism, as architects, urban planners and heritage practitioners seek to work progressively toward a more holistic and sustainable future using this instrument of adaptive reuse.³

The subject of this paper is a large CBD site in Victoria's regional city, Geelong, which involved the redevelopment of an entire urban block (or allotment) with multiple heritage buildings. The project was conceived 50 years ago when the city's defining wool industry experienced a significant decline after the global energy crisis triggered a global economic slump. This downturn left numerous industrial buildings in central Geelong empty and obsolete. This situation challenged the very identity of Geelong, as well as its *raison d'être*.

Westfield lies in the heart of Geelong's CBD (Figure 1).⁴ The opening of the shopping centre, in 1988, boasted that as a "true regional shopping centre [it] will provide the focal point for both shoppers and retailers."⁵ Originally comprising a total 36,505 square metres (now 52,000 square metres), it introduced to the city a new sense of purpose as well as a contemporary urban experience. The transformation of an entire city block into a shopping complex stemmed from necessity, as the city entered the early phase of deindustrialisation. While the transformation of the site raises issues to do with urban visioning, the adaptive reuse of multiple significant heritage buildings highlights the intersections and tensions between architectural design and heritage practices.



Figure 1. Upper: site location in Geelong, Victoria (in red). Lower: from the intersection of Brougham and Moorabool Streets, looking southeast (Drawing and photograph by the authors, 2022).

This paper critically reviews the history of Westfield Geelong. It considers the vision “City by the Bay,” proposed by the City of Greater Geelong in the late 1970s/early 1980s; details the history of Brougham Street to understand the significance of the site; and scrutinises the realisation of Westfield to draw attention to how architectural practice dealt with heritage structures in the evolution of a new urban design concept. In the context of continued population growth and shifts to regional cities,⁶ it is timely to undertake a critical appraisal of the radical transformation of Geelong’s heritage buildings. Understanding how this reading of heritage has redefined Geelong as a city is essential to strategically rethinking a city facing rampant development.⁷ This paper argues that the criticality of adaptive reuse must be recognised, such that the architecture and its narratives can reveal the legacy embedded in the city’s historic structures and be understood within the context of Geelong’s fast-paced self-reinvention through architectural and urban transformations.

Westfield, Geelong: Setting the Scene

The turbulent decade of the 1970s had a profound impact on the design, building and construction industries around the world as they were faced with a shortage of materials, energy and labour.⁸ The accompanying economic slump also shut down Geelong’s wool industry. The magnificent wool stores at the city’s heart became vacant and their redundancy threw into question the city’s future viability. In both North America and Europe old buildings

had become resources. Heritage conservation campaigns surrounding the European Architectural Heritage Year (1975) and the American Bicentennial (1976) increased awareness for built environment professionals and the public around the possibilities of reusing obsolete buildings. “New uses for old buildings” became a common catchphrase globally. Projects in the global north (Europe and North America) such as San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square and the Cannery, Boston’s Mercantile Wharf and London’s Covent Market, were held up as exemplary, for not only reclaiming old buildings but also for revitalising their local areas with a thriving economy.⁹ These possibilities turned adaptive reuse into a creative phenomenon. The growing awareness and appreciation for old buildings also triggered a shift in architectural practice and thinking in Australia.

By the late 1970s, the building industry (including architectural practice) began to transform, as participation by historians, planners, landscape designers and engineers in architectural production grew. Urban conservation became a heated topic of discussion, as the heritage movement grew nationally.¹⁰ The concept was defined, consolidated and guidelines for practice adopted as the Australia ICOMOS Guidelines for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance, known as the Burra Charter, in 1979.¹¹ The Burra Charter defined adaptation as “modifying a place to suit new functions without destroying its cultural significance.” This definition imposed constraints on the work undertaken on old buildings, prescribing greater attention to a building’s intrinsic and significant traits. In a sense, it showed how architectural and heritage practice in Australia understood and navigated ‘heritage’ values for an existing building. Working sensitively with old buildings presented an opportunity for a much-needed dialogue. The notion of ‘place’ emerged, as the Charter defined and outlined principles of conservation to also retain appropriate settings.¹²

Geelong, Victoria’s second city, began its process of deindustrialisation in the 1970s. Sitting on the shores of Corio Bay, the city flourished during the nineteenth century and again during the Second World War. Home to multiple industries, the city was known as the “wool capital” of Victoria from the mid-nineteenth century, built on high quality merino sheep, the product of the pastoral industry of the Western District.¹³ Geelong’s woolstores and exchanges were strategically located for practical storage, logistics and export trade along the north shoreline, which functioned as industrial wharfs. The woolstores occupied a substantial area of the city’s urban blocks or allotments. The decline of the wool industry rendered these structures redundant. With their presence in prime city positions, however, they were recognised as building resources of great value. As Geelong needed to shift from its industrial past, the reuse of these structures become pivotal to (re-)defining the city’s identity. The reclaimed architecture served as the foundation for future visioning and repurposing.

The city block designated Allotment No. 9, the oldest city block towards the foreshore of Corio Bay, is bounded by Brougham Street on the north, Yarra Street to the east and Moorabool Street to the west (Figure 2). Our case study sits in this block: Westfield, occupying the entire urban block. Allotment No. 9 calls attention to the significant transformation of Geelong, as it sought to define itself in its 1981 vision “The City by the Bay.” This highlights one of the most transformative architectural interventions taken in the city, as it shifted its focus from industrial to commercial use.

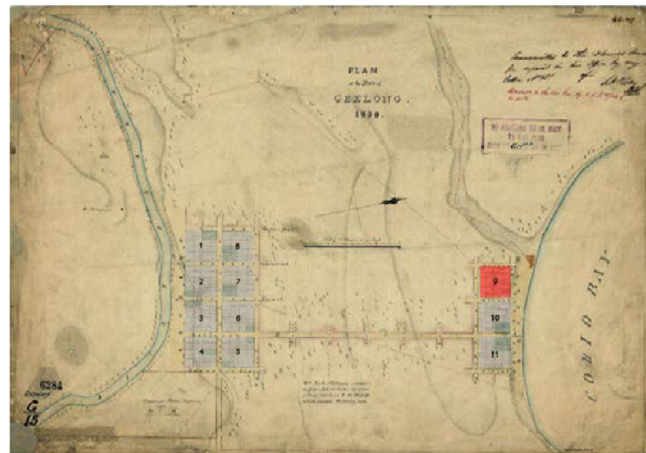


Figure 2. Site location (in red) overlaid on Geelong’s 1838 map with allotment numbers. Derived from H.W. Smythe, Plan of the Town of Geelong, 1838 (VFRS 8168/P5, item Sydney G15: Geelong, Public Record Office Victoria).

Brougham Street, Geelong

Brougham Street has been identified as significant for its historic buildings (Table A), and for its connections to the foreshore (Figure 3). Indeed, the place with Strachan’s Building has been identified as Geelong Woolstores Historic Area.¹⁴ The Historic Area Statement of Significance (1980) states that:

The Geelong Woolstores Historic Area is one of remarkable coherence and integrity. Standing at the corner of Gheringhap and Brougham Streets, the row of woolstores stretches away to the east in a unified scene, unequalled in terms of intactness and coherence elsewhere in Victoria.



Figure 3. Geelong 1938, with Brougham Street clearly visible with its line of woolstores (Photograph by Charles Daniel Pratt, State Library of Victoria, Picture Collection, reference number H91.160/633).

The statement goes on to say that:

The Area represents an important aspect of the process of settling the land in Victoria. The consequences of industry created a new economy, a new landscape and a new way of life. In terms of the lives of all of us as inhabitants of an industrial nation, it is the most relevant period of our past, not only because it is the most recent, but because the specific changes wrought during the last century provide the foundation of our present society ...

This provides a clear context for the “City by the Bay” vision for Geelong. It acknowledges that:

Significant woolstore groups certainly exist elsewhere in Australia, for example at Pyrmont and Ultimo in New South Wales, but those structures do not match the group qualities of the Geelong woolstores and were not specifically erected for the storage, handling and marketing of wool.



Today the Geelong Club and only the facades of Strachan, Murray, Shannon woolstore complex, the Blakiston building and Power Station A remain along this stretch of Brougham Street (Figure 4, right to left). The National Wool Museum, in the former C J Dennys & Co woolstore, on the adjacent Brougham and Moorabool Street corner, was established in 1988 as part of the Australian Bicentennial celebrations – its adaptive reuse in situ is in marked



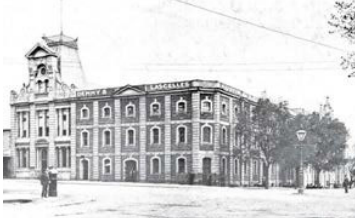

contrast to the neighbouring facadism. Next door, the Bow Truss Building (the Dennys Lascelles woolstore, built between 1910 and 1912 as an extension to the National Wool Museum building), taking up much of the block bordered by Brougham, Clare and Corio Streets and Gore Place, was demolished in May 1990, the State Government overriding the State's Heritage body!



Figure 4. Allotment No. 9 north elevation, Brougham Street
(Drawing by the authors, 2022.)

TABLE A Historic buildings along Brougham Street.

Building	History and significance.
<p>A. Former Strachan, Murray, Shannon woolstore complex (H0596)</p>  <p>National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Victorian Heritage Database (Heritage Council Victoria, 1980), https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/68365</p>	<p>The Strachan, Murray, Shannon and Company woolstores stand at the corner of Moorabool and Brougham Streets, Geelong, on the site upon which pioneer merchant James Ford Strachan constructed his first bonded store in 1840. The building was the first stone masonry structure erected towards the foreshore. Continuous expansion, from 1896, 1898, 1900, 1906 and 1925, alongside the growth of Geelong's wool industry, evolved the structure into a major woolstore complex over 61 years. Each addition was noted for being "sympathetic to the initial design," that is "a straightforward and popular composition for the late nineteenth century – simple brick facades interrupted by openings, relieved at intervals by projecting partitions and capped with a strong horizontal cornice and parapet itself interspersed with small pediments."¹⁵</p> <p>The four storey brick complex is stylistically unified from the 1889 section onwards to present an impressive austere Classical Revival structure of great streetscape and precinctural impact. The interior spaces are traditionally designed and the construction system is typical of the period.¹⁶</p>
<p>B. Power Station A – State Electricity Company Building, 82-86 Brougham Street</p>  <p><i>News of the Week</i> (Geelong), 7 December 1911, accessed from GRS 2121, Geelong Heritage Centre Collection.</p>	<p>The building has a heritage overlay but is not included in Heritage Register.¹⁷ 82-86 Brougham Street is an attached double storey brick parapet building with a high degree of integrity. The brick and render façade features unusual details displaying a Mannerist influence. The north façade is divided into vertical rectangular bays by double-height pilasters that extend through the full height of the entablature. The openings in the ground and first floor are pairs of double-hung sash windows. On the ground floor the windows have triple lights above and cream brick arches. Notable details on the façade include the central bay with recessed pediments and narrow Corinthian pilasters, patterned tilework, moulded string courses and keystones. Some openings on the ground floor have been bricked in. The side entrance is marked by a stepped parapet, corbelled walls and similar windows of a different scale. The original signage decorates the entrance. The east façade is also divided into rectangular bays but has large arches with keystones, darker brick pilasters and string courses.¹⁸</p>

<p>C. Blakiston Building</p>  <p>Geelong Heritage Centre Online Collection, 1970.</p>	<p>The Blakiston Building is a handsome building that sits in between Power Station A and the Geelong Club. It served as a family transport and warehousing company from 1889 to 1989. Behind its stable was a tram shed. With trams operated in Geelong from 1912 to 1957 by SEC, the space behind the façade accommodated facilities for servicing trams.¹⁹ The Blakiston Building signifies the remaining traces of Geelong's transportations and establishments.</p>
<p>OTHERS</p>	
<p>D. Geelong Club (built 1888-89)</p>  <p>National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Victorian Heritage Database (Heritage Council Victoria, 1980), https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/68193</p>	<p>The Geelong Club is of social, architectural and historic significance to the State of Victoria It was formed in the 1850s. The present building was designed by Charles Douglas Figgis, and constructed in 1888-89 by Messrs J C Taylor and Sons. It is a two-storey brick building in transitional Queen Anne style, with a steeply pitched hipped roof of slate with terracotta cresting. It has an elaborate and ponderous two storey balcony with entrance loggia and striking broken pediment. The Geelong Club is important for its associations with many prominent Victorian citizens, particularly the key figures of the wool industry in Geelong and the Western District in the nineteenth century. It represents the way of life of wealthy pastoralists and prominent citizens of country Victoria in the nineteenth century, providing an exclusive place to meet with men of similar backgrounds, dine, read the latest newspapers and journals, and play billiards and cards in a relaxed atmosphere.²⁰</p>
<p>E. The National Wool Museum</p>  <p>Dennys, Lascelles, Austin & Co., <i>50 Years Selling Wool in Geelong 1857-1907</i> (Geelong: 1907).</p>	<p>The National Wool Museum is formerly Dennys Lascelles Wool Store, which possesses both architectural and historical significance for the State of Victoria. While its bluestone structure with cement rendered ornaments and a saw roof covered in slate was distinctive from the exterior, its interior was remarked as remarkable and innovative for its size and design. The south-facing windows of the saw roof provide adequate lighting and ventilation. Historically, the building reinforces Geelong as the centre of the Victorian wool industry.²¹</p>
<p>F. The Bow Truss Building</p>  <p><i>News of the Week</i>, November 1911.</p>	<p>The Bow Truss Building built between 1910 and 1912 was considered revolutionary because of its "coat hanger" style roof which enabled the floor area on the top story to be open without the need for columns. Its complex structure was claimed as the largest flat-roof space in the world (almost an acre) that could flood natural roof lighting into its showrooms. The external cladding, which was reinforced concrete, was both structural and decorative with a simple Art Nouveau style. Though acknowledged and classified for its unique features in 1980, the building was demolished after its classification in 1990.²²</p>

Westfield Geelong demonstrates how the architecture and urban planning of a large urban block have been reconceptualised: from a thriving industrial hub to a contemporary commercial and retail use, that is from a site of production to one of consumption. It enables the researchers to consider, explain and articulate how one of the city's most historically significant urban blocks has evolved through time, highlighting how the "City by the Bay" vision

was partially realised over decades. It also demonstrates multiple scales of complexities as the work undertaken redefined the architecture and the city's fabric. Today only traces of the past persist.

The City by the Bay

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Geelong City Council and the Geelong Regional Commission proposed a vision to revive the city from its industrial decline. "The City by the Bay" vision ambitiously aimed to revitalise Geelong into a shopping and tourist destination.²³ One of the key components of "City by the Bay" was Bayside City Plaza, which became Westfield.

Bayside City Plaza, occupying Allotment No. 9, sat in a strategic position for the entire vision: it connected the foreshore of Corio Bay with Market Square, the city's economic heart, with its clusters of local stores. At this time, the concept of festival markets from America inspired Australian planning, which in turn shaped Geelong's ambition to reclaim this obsolete industrial precinct. Bayside City Plaza was to provide a pedestrian urban experience with the "hustle-and-bustle of shopping, landscaped public walks and 'people places'".²⁴ With the intention to create a pedestrian-centric area came the plan to develop a traffic-free zone in the CBD so that people could seamlessly navigate from the foreshore through the old woolstores to a revitalised city heart. A strategy to deal with the multiple existing buildings was needed. The redevelopment approach proposed to engage "a comprehensive recycling and redevelopment scheme" whereby the key woolstores between Malop and Brougham Streets would be transformed.

The proposal has particular regard to the scale of the City of Geelong and the heritage value of streetscapes in this area of the city ... particular attention has been paid to buildings of historical significance, notably in the retention and enhancement of the nineteenth century buildings in Brougham Street, which form a superb backdrop to the foreshore and identity for the precinct.²⁵

These considerations more than hinted at a serious engagement with the existing built fabric and the heritage values.

In 1985, architects BPA Australia Pty Ltd and Perth-based developers Perron Group of Companies were commissioned to realise the project.²⁶ With sections already operating prior to Christmas 1987, Westfield was officially opened in April 1988. The fanfare claimed it to be the most modern shopping centre development in Victoria, housing "Target, Coles-New

World, Myer and Treasureway stores, a food court, a wide range of specialty shops and a 1100-vehicle carpark”.²⁷

This large commercial hub did revitalise Geelong as a city, but the shopping centre development raises other questions for the city. Economic needs usurped social, cultural and environmental perspectives. The flagged recycling of buildings, architectural interventions and relationships with the heritage buildings and urban fabric were nowhere to be seen. Westfield appears to comfortably occupy the whole allotment with even the streets subsumed. The transformation of allotment No. 9 shows the city’s heritage quietly diminishing under the deceptively preserved streetscape on Brougham Street. It is from this point that the impacts of adaptive reuse must be considered, for it is here that the urban planning vision sits at odds with architectural and heritage practice.

Westfield

Brougham Street defines the block’s northern boundary. Here the adaptive reuse program of Westfield is revealed in its entirety. The facades of the former Strachan, Murray, Shannon woolstore complex, the Blakiston Building and the Power Station A (Table A) are the only architectural elements left standing, while the Geelong Club sits in splendid isolation. Each building signified a different chapter in Geelong’s industrial and social history, from wool production to transportation and energy use.²⁸ The adaptive reuse component included contemporary modifications to the façades by making new openings or closing the existing. The parapets too were altered with new additions. These modifications were justified as finding compromises between preserving the old structures and accommodating the new use as a shopping mall.





Figure 5. Upper: mall interior; and lower: parking behind the historic facades (Photographs by the authors, 2022).

While “The City by the Bay” vision made clear its intentions to develop new architecture by recycling the woolstore complex, the new amenities of department stores, supermarket, specialty shops and car parking pragmatically replaced the redundant woolstore precinct with minimal consideration for retaining the original structures (Figure 5). In “Junkspace” Rem Koolhaas explains how the contemporary architecture of shopping malls and business centres devalues architectural contexts. Huge and full of absence, Junkspace follows no rules; it has no inherent order and no connections between its parts.²⁹ By gutting the old parts and erecting new structures behind the facades, the project effectively paid lip-service to the concept of adaptive reuse of heritage buildings.

The schematic designs show extensive efforts to modernise the interiors for a commercial experience, with modern light fittings and store frontage. This strategy offered practical and controlled solutions, ensuring easy adherence to building regulations, OH&S and fire protection. Many practitioners view recycling existing obsolete structures as a challenge due to their potential uncertainty in structural integrity.³⁰ Pragmatic building conversion and rehabilitation drove Westfield to gut and construct new buildings behind the historic façades.

Through the developer’s lens, this design approach does respond to the objectives (i) to (iv) articulated two decades later in heritage overlay HO1638: Woolstores Industrial Heritage Area (2000):

- (i) To maintain the views to and from the Woolstores Industrial Heritage Area.
- (ii) To retain the streetscape qualities of the area which is dominated by three and four storey Victorian warehouses with varying street setbacks and minimal separation between buildings.
- (iii) To retain the special character of the area which includes a number of key nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial and industrial buildings.

- (iv) To retain the cohesion and integrity of this architecturally significant area.
- (v) To encourage the use of traditional construction materials in the area.
- (vi) To encourage the contemporary interpretation of traditional building design within the area.³¹

The retention of the buildings' skins preserved the general proportions, scale and character of the streetscape of Brougham Street; a trace of the city's historic area remained; the new project drew some value from the obsolete but did not develop new architecture by recycling the woolstore complex. Ironically the much-lauded pedestrian spine had to be supported by thousands of carpark spaces built behind the facades. (It is worth noting here that "The City by the Bay" project also foresaw car parking on the Dennys Lascelles 'bowstring' site.³²)

The transformation of Allotment No. 9 has significantly affected the heritage values of place. The development raises major questions around the protection of heritage buildings, their role as urban fabric, as architecture, as historic and social documents, as purveyors of industrial narratives and exemplars of building technology. What eventuated was a combination of demolition and facadism. Facadism exemplifies an extreme compromise and an insensitiveness to heritage buildings and their typological character. The relationship between interior and exterior has been dismissed. The past forms of the buildings are ignored and replaced. The retained façades become the elements that serve the purpose of preserving a certain sense of place. Westfield adopts the materiality of the red bricks and the language of a by-gone era for its own expression. The heritage buildings have become purely decorative ornaments. As "the facade is the outward expression of the anatomy and organisation of the building," facadism "creates a tension between what is perceived and what is real." Robert Bargery argues that context is critical, that while buildings may contribute to townscape and/or streetscape, "Some facades do indeed have a public role that is more important than their private role as an envelope to the building behind."³³ Such rationality draws a line between urban, architecture and heritage practices.

Heritage perspectives encompass more than building preservation. Here the relationships to the entire historic environment, to place and setting, to social, industrial and cultural context are critical. The report on the design for Westfield Geelong elaborated on its processes for modernising architecture by demolishing the existing and constructing new buildings in response to building regulations.³⁴ In doing so they discarded the architectural qualities offered by each individual heritage building and dismissed the integrity of the whole site. The project failed to recognise the flexibility for use-conversion opportunities inherent in the woolstore complex, powerstation and tram depot. Instead the distinctive industrial character

of the precinct was obliterated by ‘bland’ commercial aesthetics (Figure 5). Adrian Regan makes clear that the plan was “to reinvent the city and its image, using the city’s waterfront and built heritage as a drawcard.”³⁵ The vision espoused in “City by the Bay” was modelled on then-fashionable international trends in inner-city redevelopment, Festival Markets and downtown shopping malls. This vision was meant to turn around the perception of Geelong as “a relatively uninteresting industrial centre” and mark its beginnings as a post-industrial city.³⁶

This ambition to quash the existing recognised historical character by other uses³⁷ effectively erased any cultural value, meaning and memory beyond the street view. While the “City by the Bay” plan ‘recognised’ the heritage of the area, it is not clear that the value of the heritage was understood, nor what that actually meant in relation to the vision.³⁸ Bargery reminds us that history is inscribed in the built form, in architecture, in the 3D building, as well as in its uses, with social history etched into the fabric. Context, architectural unity and sustainability should be key considerations in any redevelopment.³⁹

At Westfield there is no meaningful relationship between the new development and the adaptive reuse design. From the outset demolition and façade preservation had been on the agenda. As the project progressed the balance tipped in favour of more new construction to increase facilities. Commitment to heritage flagged. Even though height limits were kept to demonstrate respect for architectural character and incorporation of aspects from industrial architecture such as the woolstores’ saw-roofs, shown on the section, indicate intentions to assimilate the existing, the vision fell short (Figure 6). Unrealised in form and developed into carparks, the heritage buildings became street décor, with memories only retrievable through archival means.

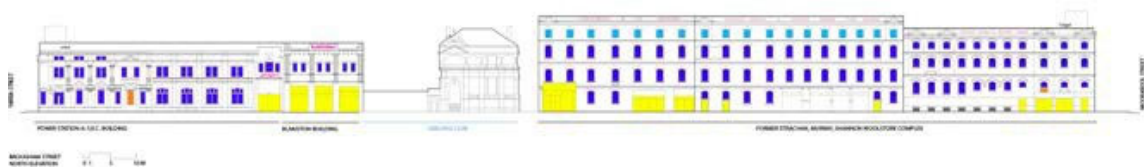


Figure 6. Study of the design realised. Windows retained are blocked (blue) or infilled with bricks (orange). Only the woolstore complex’s top row of windows (cyan) maintain views to the street. Openings (yellow) were made as entrances/exits for carparks (Drawing by the authors, 2022).

Beyond the treatment of historic buildings, the redevelopment of Allotment No. 9 raises further issues in relation to urban planning, the city grid and the street layouts on a micro-scale. Here too what was needed was meaningful translation and coexistence with the old. While facadism

on Brougham Street maintains parts of the historic elevation, the streets behind it have disappeared. Corio and Blakiston Streets were enclosed to accommodate the intended pedestrian spine to allow people to navigate up to Malop Street and Market Square. These enclosed streets can be read in two ways. On the one hand, the enclosure maximises the commercial space and embraces the retail core, which in turn prioritises “junkspace”⁴⁰ over any contemporary architectural atmosphere. On the other hand, the interior holds a suggestion of the city layout’s memory, as the arcade follows the trace of the old streets; and the entrances via Corio and Malop Streets and the walkways hint at the presence of the city’s old grid in the shopping mall’s floor plan (Figure 7).

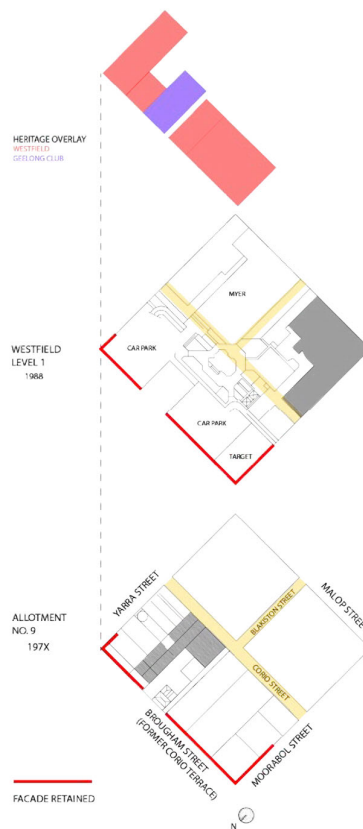


Figure 7. Heritage overlay, façade preservation and traces of streets
(Drawing by the authors, 2022).

Clearly the dialogue between urban planners, architects and heritage practitioners needs to be strengthened and far more creative if we are to be able to re-imagine our historic places going forward.

Re-setting Heritage

While “City by the Bay” acknowledged that “The attractions planned must relate to Geelong, its history, its climate, its needs, foreshore topography and the existing buildings in the area.

Buildings worthy of preservation are to be retained, fully restored and integrated into the new concept”,⁴¹ the realisation of the Westfield development represents a lost opportunity for Geelong.

In his assessment of the “City by the Bay” vision, Regan discusses Robert Ingpen’s depiction of the new Geelong, arguing that “Ingpen’s treatment of heritage shows how important the woolstores area’s historic streetscape was [to the] effort to create a new place for Geelong in the global urban hierarchy.”⁴² Regan also raises an issue of criticism of such grandiose schemes to redevelop waterfronts to “create nostalgically themed products for tourists and shoppers out of spaces that were previously sites of work; turning history into a veneer which adds a unique selling point to commercial ventures.”⁴³

While Regan charts the early failure of the “City by the Bay” plan, John Rollo and Yolanda Esteban provide a more holistic perspective in their piece, “The Promise of Vision-making a City: A Perpetual Journey.”⁴⁴ Rollo and Esteban document 22 visions in 42 years, design-based, community-focused and /or economic-driven.⁴⁵ They argue that, “The urban analysis of Geelong: ‘City by the Bay’ (GRPA 1975) was very thorough and the identification of the weaknesses and threats of a city in significant industrial transition enabled the Planning Consultancy to produce a strategy that is still highly relevant today.”⁴⁶ The “turning the focus of the city to the waterfront and developing adaptive re-use of the woolstores” more broadly have come to fruition since, for example the Waterfront Campus of Deakin University (1994) where more sympathetic and sensitive adaptive reuse strategies were employed by McGlashan and Everist.⁴⁷

Westfield undertook similar processes to contemporary international exemplars, gutting the old and new construction to adaptively reuse the existing structures. However, unlike the American examples, Westfield fails to either connect to its setting or develop a richer architectural language. Ghirardelli Square (considered the first successful adaptive reuse project in the US) makes full use of its position, overlooking the bay of San Francisco.⁴⁸ The Cannery (the world’s largest fruit-canning plant converted into a mall in the 1960s, now containing 30-plus shops and restaurants) developed a new interior experience, while highlighting the industrial aesthetics and recreating certain elements.⁴⁹ Westfield exemplifies none of the transformative approaches adopted in these American examples.

We argue that approaches such as recycling, adaptive reuse and renovations should take advantage of what is already there. The adaptive reuse of old buildings is a creative step in

the evolution of a city. This sustainable urban heritage conservation approach considers the past as beneficial. Lack of connection is Westfield's downfall.

The redevelopment creates an interior with a new urban experience ignoring the existing industrial patina. The carparks, service bays and smooth, luxurious shopping mall atmosphere develop an alternate spatial character separate from its setting. This very aspect presents a problem for Westfield as it develops a "junkspace" in the middle of Geelong's historic woolstore precinct. For Geelong, the retail core became internalised and cut off from the rest of the city, whereas Allotment No. 9 had long played a historically significant role in the city. The creation of a mall that internalises the urban experience into a homogeneous block, raises questions about loss and appropriate use.⁵⁰ If adaptive reuse has demonstrated anything, it is that its criticality lies in finding the balance between the timely needs of function and the poetic narratives of the past.

Notions and understandings of being 'sensitive' to the site and its narratives have deepened as we have become more aware of the environmental benefits and values inherent in the architecture reused. Bargery writes simply that "... in future we should seek to avoid [facadism] by keeping more, not less, of the historic building".⁵¹ Giovana Martino reflects that:

... adaptive reuse projects mean adjusting to new purposes, understanding the site, the relationship with the surroundings and neighbors, the flows that already exist, and the ones you want to achieve, the materials, the volumes, and above all, choosing either to establish a contrast between the old and the new or to create a gentle and delicate intervention.⁵²

Westfield poses multiple questions as to how adaptive reuse can combine the perspectives of urban planning, architecture and heritage conservation in future projects. Geelong continues to re-invent itself on its journey of deindustrialisation. While it continues to see adaptive reuse as a productive approach, recent approaches in Geelong's Worksafe Building (2019) and the former Denny Lascelles Woolstore (2022) perpetuate the Westfield model rather than contemporary thinking about the environmental, social and architectural values of adaptive reuse.



Figure 8. Geelong's Worksafe Building (2019)
(Photograph by the authors, 2022).

The 2019 Worksafe Building at 1 Malop Street (Figure 8), exemplifies a recent reclamation of a historic structure. However, much like Westfield, it gutted the interior before erecting a new structure above and behind the retained façade of the historic Dalgety & Co building.⁵³ Once again the streetscape and its historical narratives are being rewritten, posing critical questions around the direction of the city and its re- imagination.



Figure 9. Woolstore, 20-28 Brougham Street, Geelong
(Photograph by the authors, 2022).

The 2022 Gurner Fender Katsalidis proposal for the woolstore at the former Denny Lascelles Woolstore (20-28 Brougham Street) (Figure 9) completely overwhelms the original building.⁵⁴

The National Trust of Canada's 2022 conference, "The Heritage Reset: Making Critical Choices," may offer valuable deliberations for the City of Greater Geelong around embracing a fuller story and confronting exclusion, championing heritage conservation as climate action and overcoming systemic barriers to reuse.⁵⁵ As the city continues to interact with its remaining built legacy, it becomes more crucial than ever that the impacts of adaptive reuse designs are considered not only for new functions or for preserving the exterior aesthetics, but rather as part of the larger holistic landscape and context of the city. In doing so, heritage can become a progressive positive force for envisioning the city's new identity.

Endnotes

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