

Item name: Former Sydney County Council Building including significant interiors**Location:** 552A-570 George Street Sydney 2000

Sydney

Address: 552A-570 George Street**Planning:** Sydney South**Suburb/nearest town:** Sydney 2000**Local govt area:** Sydney**Parish:****State:** NSW**County:****Other/former names:** Ausgrid, Energy Australia, Sydney Electricity**Area/group/complex:****Group ID:****Aboriginal area:****Curtilage/boundary:****Item type:** Built**Group:** Commercial**Category:** Commercial Office/Building**Owner:** Private - Corporate**Admin codes:****Code 2:****Code 3:****Current use:** Commercial office building**Former uses:** Commercial office building - corporate headquarters**Assessed significance:** Local**Endorsed significance:** Local

Statement of significance: The former Sydney County Council building is a fine and representative example of a Late Twentieth Century International style commercial building that demonstrates many of the characteristics of the style. Its overall form, a tall rectilinear office tower rising at one end of a low horizontal podium, is unusual in Central Sydney, as is the dark and restrained tonal value of its exterior cladding, which although modified retains the tonal value of the original finishes.

It is associated with the prominent architectural firm of Fowell, Mansfield & Maclurcan (later Fowell, Mansfield, Jarvis & Maclurcan) and is understood to have been the only commercial office building to have been the subject of an architectural competition commissioned by the Sydney County Council during the post war period in Central Sydney. The Sydney County Council occupied it for many years. The building is well related to its prominent corner site and makes a positive contribution to the streetscape in an important Central Sydney precinct.

The former Sydney County Council building is of local heritage significance in terms of its historical, associations, aesthetic/technical, rarity and representative value. This satisfies five of the Heritage Council criteria of local heritage significance for local listing.

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Historical notes of provenance: This site forms part of the land of the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of land within the City of Sydney council boundaries. For information about the Aboriginal history of the local area see the City's Barani website: <http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/>

Sydney's first demonstration of the potential of electric lighting took place on 11 June 1863 when the city was illuminated to celebrate the marriage of the Prince of Wales. Electricity was used more pragmatically for the first time when imported generators provided lighting for night work in 1878 associated with the construction of the Garden Palace erected for Sydney's 1879 International Exhibition. Tamworth became the first town in the Southern Hemisphere to provide electric street lighting in 1888 and although the Municipal Council of Sydney endeavoured to supply electricity to the City of Sydney in 1891, the enabling legislation was not passed by the Colonial government until 1896.

The City Council switched on its newly completed supply system, based at Pyrmont, on the evening of 8 July 1904. It quickly grew from street lighting to the supply of electricity to individual customers. By 1914 the Council was supplying 23 municipalities. Demand for electricity after World War I was such that it became necessary to construct a new power station and the Council's power station at Bunnerong commenced operation in January 1929.

On 6 March 1935 a bill was introduced into State parliament that included removal of electricity supply from the Municipal Council of Sydney. The Act that established the Sydney County Council was assented to by the Governor on 11 April 1935 and it formally took over the role of generating and reticulating electricity in the area that had been supplied by the Municipal Council of Sydney on 1 January 1936. It supplied to consumers in the city and 32 other municipalities directly, in bulk to 10 other municipalities, four shires and a private company.

From 1 January 1952, the two generating stations and bulk transmission lines operated by the Sydney County Council were transferred to the control of the Electricity Commission of New South Wales. From that date the County Council purchased electricity in bulk from the Commission and continued to distribute electricity to consumers in its area.

In 1957 the Sydney County Council began acquiring sites for new headquarters. The site of the former Sydney County Council Building consists of an amalgamation of Lots 14 to 17 (or parts thereof) of Section 18 of the City of Sydney.

- Lot 14 was granted to James Simmons on 8 April 1840. Further research is required to determine much of the allotment was incorporated into the site of the former Sydney Council Building. By the first half of the 1900s, the property, identified as 546-552 George Street, was owned by magistrate James Nathan Hart and his brother John. They leased the building to furniture retailers Morley Johnson in 1905, which occupied it for many years. James Nathan Hart died in February 1920 and some years later the property was acquired by Gainsborough Limited, which applied to bring it under the provisions of the Real Property Act in December 1931. The site was redeveloped towards the end of the 1930s. At the end of 1964 it was purchased by the Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia and a section if not the whole property was acquired by the Sydney County Council in September 1966.

- Lot 15 was granted to Samuel Perry Jones on 17 May 1838. By the end of the 1880s it was in the possession of David Marks, who in December that year transferred the title to his wife Miriam. The Marks' eventually moved to England, where Mrs Marks died in February 1908. The property, by that time identified as 552A-554 George Street, passed back to David Marks, who sold it in May 1909 to Peter Murphy MLC. At the beginning of 1921 Murphy sold the building to a consortium made up of Mary Ellen Stevenson, Elsie Bird Bramble, Clivayd Smith, Stirling Stevenson, and Benjamin William Stevenson. They were involved with Fisher & Co, homeopathic and dispensing chemists established around 1892, which subsequently occupied the building. By the second half of 1964 only Elsie Bramble, Clivayd Smith and Stirling Stevenson, were left. Fisher & Co was still occupying the building in the early 1960s. It was a three storey Victorian structure built after 1880. On 2 February 1965 the title to 552A-554 George Street was transferred to the Sydney County Council.

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- Lot 16, destined to be the site of 556-558 George Street and 560-562 George Street, was granted to Thomas and George Sewell on 30 March 1840. The chain of title for this part of the site requires further investigation. By the mid 1860s, 556-558 George Street, the site of a small building at the south west corner of Lot 16, was owned by draper Anthony Hordern, who was co-founder of the major retailing firm of the same name and a real estate speculator. After his death in 1876 the property passed to his sons Anthony H and Samuel, and commission agent John Booth, Commission Agent, all of Sydney as proprietors of the estate. After Anthony Hordern died, it passed to Samuel Hordern and John Booth. In June 1918 they transferred the title to the building to importer William Henry Kensit of Sydney. He subsequently transferred the title to his wife Ada in July 1947. In 1951 she sold the building to merchant Mark Margolin and his wife Felicia, who subsequently transferred her share to her husband about three years later. The Sydney County Council acquired the property from Mark Margolin in the middle of 1959.
- The rear of 556-558 George Street is understood to have had some associations with the building at 315-321 Pitt Street, which it partially abutted. The Pitt Street building was built around 1913 for the Australian Workers' Union. 556-558 George Street was purchased by Labor Papers Limited in November 1961. It was acquired by the Sydney County Council several days later.
- The chain of title for 560-562 George Street has not been ascertained.
- Lot 17, the site of 564-570 George Street, was granted to Robert Cooper on 30 January 1835. At some time after 1880 an impressive four storey building was erected over the site. It was known as Commercial Chambers. By the first half of the 1940s the building was owned by the Commonwealth Savings Bank, which sold it to Warner Bros First National Pictures in the first half of 1947. The company intended to erect a theatre on the site but this was refused by the Film Commission. In March 1957 the building entered into the possession of the Sydney County Council.

In 1959-1960, the Sydney County Council staged a competition for the design of its new headquarters, which was approved by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. The conditions were made available on 23 November 1959 and it closed on 2 May 1960. The required characteristics of the building included an efficient flexible plan, large areas of open space with a minimum of solid or high partitions, minimum maintenance and operational costs, and a high architectural standard imparting civic dignity consistent with the importance of the site. The competition attracted 62 entrants.

The judging panel was made up of Max Collard, then president of the NSW Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, George Molnar, senior lecturer in architecture at Sydney University, and Walter (Osborn) McCutcheon, a principal of the Melbourne architectural firm Bates Smart & McCutcheon. Assessing was completed by the beginning of June 1960. The first prize of £5,000 was awarded to Fowell, Mansfield & Maclurcan. The second prize was awarded to Stephenson & Turner and the third prize went to M V E Woodforde. Evidently the judges found some difficulty in choosing between the first and second place-getters, but in the end Fowell Mansfield & Maclurcan's design won because of its competence and efficiency. The building was credited to two architects working for Fowell Mansfield & Maclurcan, James Kell and Diana Parrott, although the concept seems to have been the inspiration of partner Osmond Jarvis. It took the form of a tall slab block rising above the southern end of a low podium, maximising the building's exposure to the sun and therefore to natural light. Its form recalled the design of Skidmore Owing & Merrill's seminal Lever House in New York, completed in 1952.

Fowell Mansfield & Maclurcan was formed after World War II when Joseph Fowell (1891-1970) and J L Stephen Mansfield (1906-1965) went into partnership. Before the war they were partners in the successful firm of Fowell McConnel & Mansfield, whose work included notable buildings for the Catholic Church. The partnership was joined by Donald Maclurcan (1918-1999) in 1946. The firm designed numerous churches of high quality, houses and schools during the 1950s and 1960s. The firm was joined by Osmond Jarvis in 1962 and by this time was large and influential. Apart from the former Sydney County Council Building, other City of Sydney projects included the P & O Building in Hunter Street (1964; since altered) and viaducts and stations associated with the

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Eastern Suburbs railway line (1979).

The building's construction commenced in February 1965. The completed building was officially opened by the Governor of NSW, Sir Roden Cutler, on 5 April 1968. The building, which was 318 feet (96.9 metres) high, housed 1,550 of the SCC's 7,000 staff, customer services and a showroom with demonstration kitchen and theatre at ground floor level. The staff amenities and cafeteria opened onto the roof of the three storey podium. The lifts were located at the rear of the tower, close to a projecting section housing stairs and building services. The exterior of the building was given an uncommon dark tone achieved by polished black granite mullion cladding and exposed aggregate black granite chips in spandrels. Wall linings at ground floor level, which was recessed to form a loggia, were lined with marble.

The restructuring of electricity distribution areas in New South Wales to reduce the number of county councils was implemented on 1 January 1980. Sydney County Council was amalgamated with Brisbane Water, St George and Macellar County Councils. The Sydney Electricity Act 1990 dissolved the Sydney County Council and established Sydney Electricity, which commenced operations in January 1991. It subsequently became Energy Australia and changed its name to Ausgrid in March 2011 after selling its retailing arm.

The NSW Government announced its decision to sell 570 George Street in September 2013. Ausgrid invited expressions of interest for the acquisition of the building, which closed on 24 October 2013.

Themes:	National theme	State theme	Local theme
	4. Settlement	Utilities	Electricity
	8. Culture	Creative endeavour	Modern architecture & art
	3. Economy	Technology	Headquarters

Designer: Fowell Mansfield & Maclurcan

Builder: E A Watts Pty Ltd

Year started: 1965

Year completed: 1968

Circa: No

Physical description: The former Sydney County Council Building is a 24-storey building situated on a prominent corner site. It consists of a low podium covering the entire site, with a rectilinear tower rising above the southern end of the site and aligned with Bathurst Street. A projecting windowless shaft on the north eastern corner of the building contains services and a stair. The ground floor is recessed to form a loggia accessed from the footpath by shallow steps. The building has a steel frame with reinforced concrete floors and is clad with a curtain wall system that consisted of double glazed aluminium windows, precast concrete spandrels with an exposed black granite aggregate finish, and polished granite mullions. The spandrels and projecting shaft have been lined with a smooth dark-toned proprietary panels system, which retains an equivalent tonal value to the original finishes. Metal framed shopfronts have been installed along George and Bathurst Street.

Physical condition level: Good

Physical condition: Good

Archaeological potential level:

Archaeological potential Detail: The building is not included in the Central Sydney Archaeological Zoning Plan.

Modification dates: The building has been modified internally over the years to accommodate changing user needs.
1983-84: Ground and first floor alterations.
1991: Part of the ground floor, including a shop front, modified to incorporate a police.
1994: Façade refurbished to design by architects Peddle Thorp; Level 4 pergola, canopy and ramp installed; original aggregate finish lining the facades and service tower replaced; original marble linings on the ground floor exterior possibly removed as part of these works (if not previously).
c.2000: Automatic telling machines were installed.
c.2011: Illuminated sign installed at parapet level.

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Recommended management: The former Sydney County Council Building should be retained and conserved. All original fabric on the building exterior should be retained. Remaining original surfaces never intended for painting should remain unpainted and be appropriately maintained. Remaining intact original internal fabric should be retained and conserved.

Owners should be encouraged to undertake repairs to the exposed aggregate finish on the building exterior, engaging tradespeople with the appropriate expertise. Any future works to external claddings and finishes should retain the colouring and tonal values of the original building and should reconstruct or interpret the textures of original claddings and finishes.

A conservation management strategy should be prepared to guide future use and maintenance. Any application for future development involving structural changes and/or modification of original and significant building fabric or the building's exterior should be accompanied by a heritage impact statement.

Management: **Management category**
Statutory Instrument

Management name
List on a Local Environmental Plan (LEP)

Further comments: Heritage inventory sheets are often not comprehensive, and should be regarded as a general guide only. Inventory sheets are based on information available, and often do not include the social history of sites and buildings. Inventory sheets are constantly updated by the City as further information becomes available. An inventory sheet with little information may simply indicate that there has been no building work done to the item recently: it does not mean that items are not significant. Further research is always recommended as part of preparation of development proposals for heritage items, and is necessary in preparation of Heritage Impact Assessments and Conservation Management Plans, so that the significance of heritage items can be fully assessed prior to submitting development applications.

Significant interiors for modern office or community buildings generally include interiors with original design quality or fabric, such as entrance foyers, halls, lift lobbies, stairs, meeting or event rooms, and gathering spaces, including original art installations and exposed structural features. It excludes interiors with no significance, such as non-original office or service room fit-outs. Significant interiors can be identified in more detail for each item through preparation of a heritage assessment or conservation management plan.

Criteria a): The former Sydney County Council is understood to have been the only commercial office building to have been the subject of an architectural competition during the post war period in Central Sydney.
[Historical significance]

Meets this criterion at a Local level.

Criteria b): The building has associations with the Sydney County Council, which commissioned it for its own purposes and fully occupied it for many years.
[Historical association significance]

The building is associated with the prominent architectural firm of Fowell, Mansfield & Maclurcan (later Fowell, Mansfield, Jarvis & Maclurcan).

Meets this criterion at a Local level.

Criteria c): The former Sydney County Council is a fine example of a Late Twentieth Century International style commercial building that demonstrates many of the characteristics of the style. Its overall form, a tall rectilinear office tower rising at one end of a low horizontal podium, is unusual in Central Sydney, as is the dark and restrained tonal value of its exterior.
[Aesthetic/Technical significance]

The building is well related to its prominent corner site and makes a positive contribution to the streetscape in an important Central Sydney precinct.

Meets this criterion at a Local level

Criteria d): The building's social significance has not been ascertained.
[Social/Cultural significance] May meet this criterion at a Local Level.

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Criteria e): Does not meet this criterion.
[Research
significance]

Criteria f): The former Sydney County Council is understood to have been the only commercial office building to have been the subject of an architectural competition during the post war period in Central Sydney.
[Rarity]

Meets this criterion at a Local level.

Criteria g): The former Sydney County Council Building is a representative example of a Late Twentieth Century International style commercial building that is distinguished by the dark tone of its external cladding.
[Representative]

Meets this criterion at a Local level.

Intactness/Integrity: The overall form and appearance of the building is intact. The modified external cladding retains the tonal value of the original finishes.

References:	Author	Title	Year
	Fowell Mansfield Jarvis & Maclurcan	Plans BA 1892/65	1965
	Land and Property Information	Land titles	
		"New Cinema Project", Sydney Morning Herald, 3 June 1947	1947
	Sydney County Council	Competition for the design of a new head office for the Sydney	1959
		"All prizemoney goes to Sydney architects" in Australian Arch	1960
		Cross-section	1960
		"Protection to repel grime", Canberra Times, 6 February 1968	1968
	Sydney County Council	The Sydney County Council: building opening, 5th April 1968.	1968
	Jennifer Taylor and others	Australian Business Going Up: tall buildings 1945-1970	2001
	Phillip Goad and Julie Wills (editors)	Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture	2012
		"State gets ball rolling on Ausgrid site sale", The Australian, Se	2013
	State Records	Sydney County Council: administrative history note	
	Australian Energy Regulator	A brief history of the electrical utilities in New South Wales	2007

Studies:	Author	Title	Number	Year
	Tanner Kibble Denton Architects	Modern Movement Architecture in Central Sydney - Heritag		2018

Parcels:	Parcel code	Lot number	Section number	Plan code	Plan number
	LOT	1		DP	231095

Latitude:

Longitude:

Location validity:

Spatial accuracy:

Map name:

Map scale:

AMG zone:

Easting:

Northing:

Listing:	Name	Title	Number	ListingDate
	Modern Movement Architecture in	Heritage study		01/01/2018

Data entry: Data first entered: 24/07/2006 Data updated: 25/03/2019 Status: Completed

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Image:



Caption: Former Sydney County Council Building view from George and Bathurst Street intersection in 2018

Copy right: City of Sydney

Image by: Claudine Loffi

Image date: 10/07/2018

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAP/P/3456d92baac22184630b67c55e1fddc5c2f.JPG>

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Image:



Caption: George Street podium and tower base

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Image date: 10/07/2018

Image number:

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Caption: Podium viewed from the south-west along George Street

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Image by: Tanner Kibble Denton Architects

Image date: 01/01/2014

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAP/P/345239b2476d8c147d1878dc1a0fc675363.jpg>

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Caption: Ground floor loggia and shopfronts view from the south-east corner of George and Bathurst Streets

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Image by: Tanner Kibble Denton Architects

Image date: 01/01/2014

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAP/P/34577e94e12b18a4812ae8df07492d2c517.JPG>

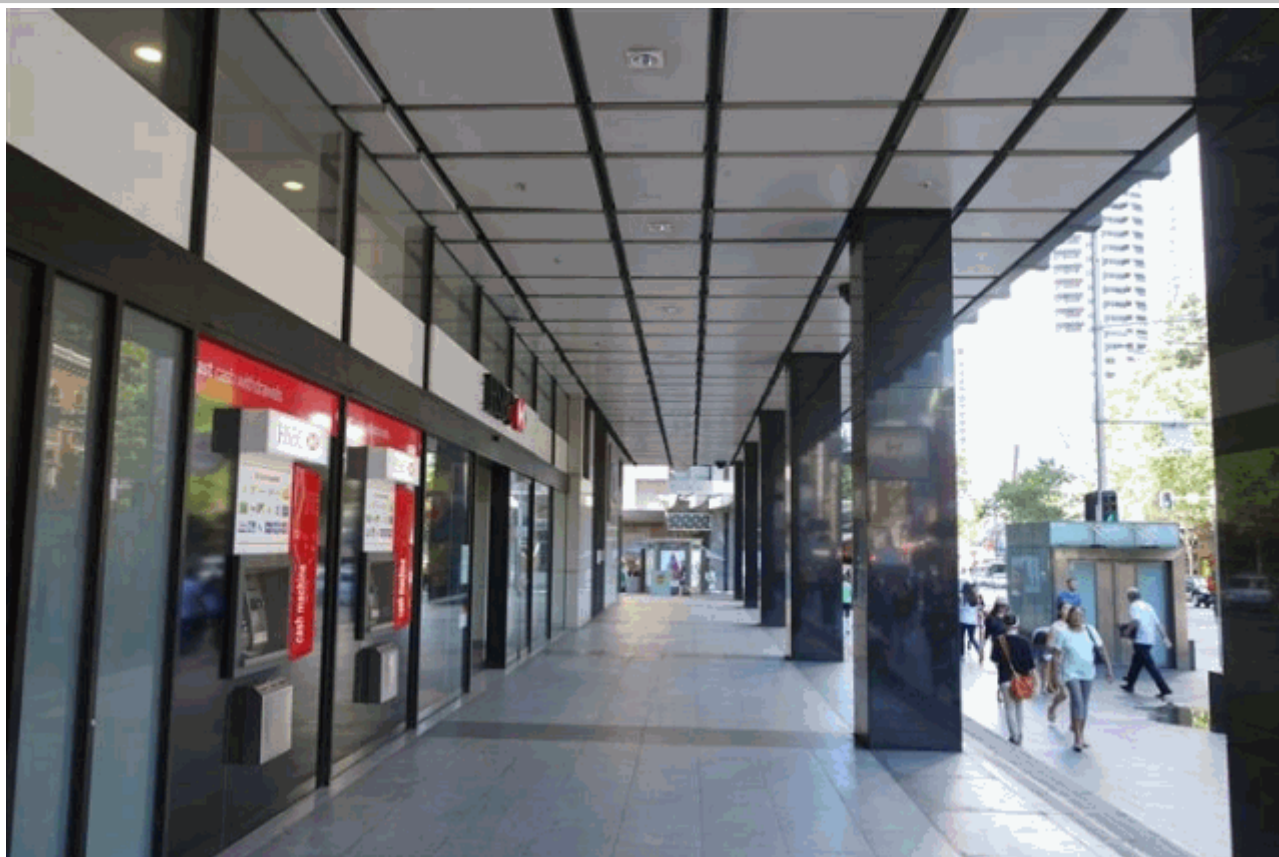
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Caption: George Street loggia

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Image by: Claudine Loffi

Image date: 02/12/2014

Image number:

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Caption: Perspective of the prize-winning scheme published in Cross-section, No 93, July 1, 1960

Copy right: Faculty of Architecture, Building & Planning, University of Melbourne

Image by:

Image date: 01/07/1960

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAPP/34563d095aea9d54d21bc6f43cc807d8311.jpg>

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Caption: Rendering of the final scheme for the former Sydney County Council Building

Copy right:

Image by: Fowell Mansfield & Maclurcan

Image date: 01/01/1962

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAP/P/345a8d8e06967a049468184b53e7989cc33.gif>

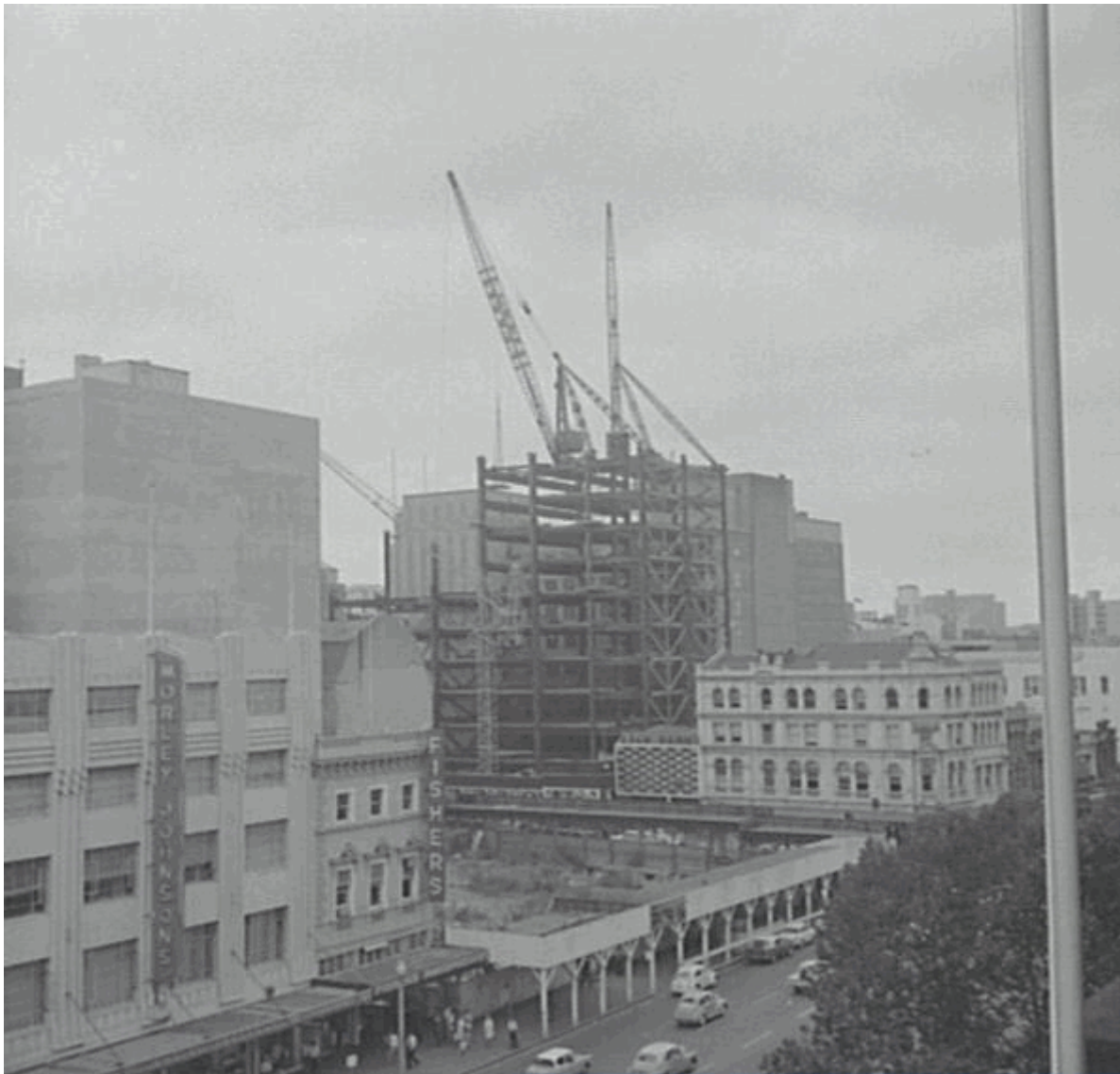
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Caption: Site prepared for construction and before demolition of 552A-554 George Street

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Image date: 17/02/1964

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Caption: Former Sydney County Council Building nearing completion in circa 1968

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Caption: George Street view from north-west in 1999

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Image date: 30/12/1999

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Caption: George Street view from north-west in 2018

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Image by: Claudine Loffi

Image date: 10/07/2018

Image number:

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Caption: Former Sydney County Council Building viewed within its context from the north in 1985

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Caption: Podium corner in 1986, showing original marble cladding and ground floor opening configuration

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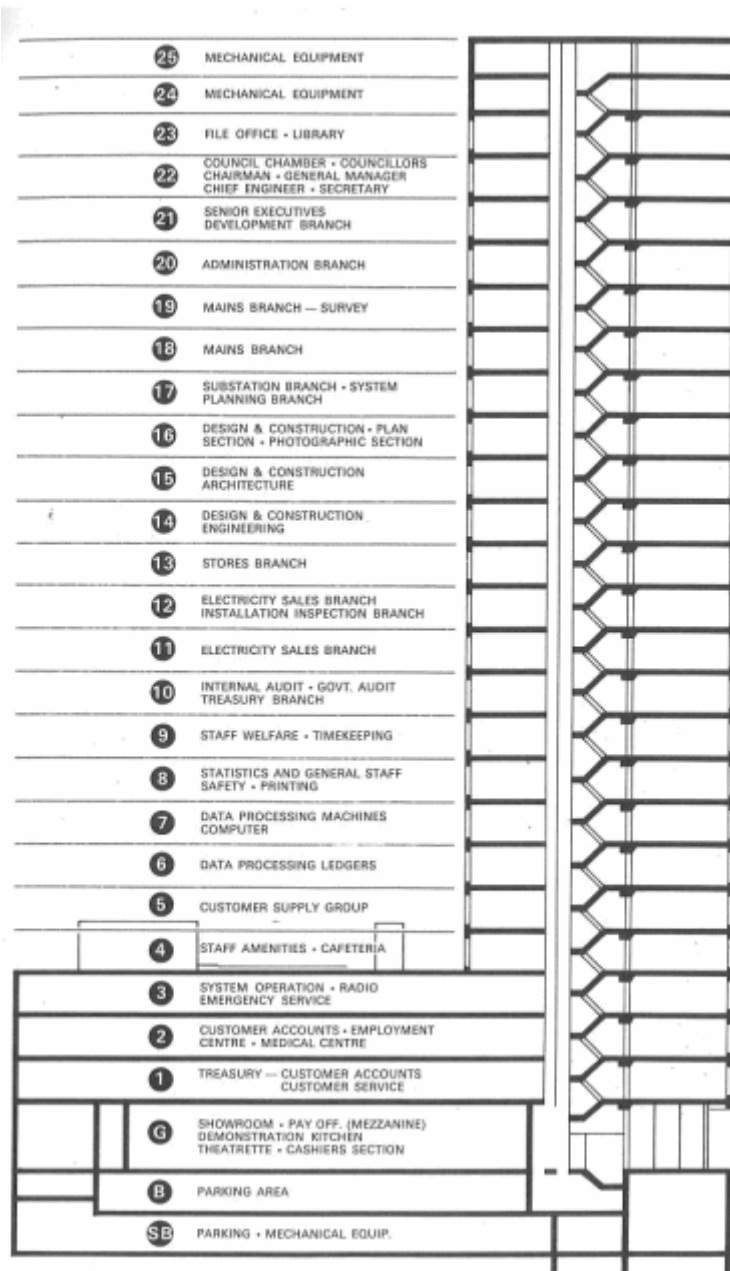
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Caption: Sectional drawing through the building indicating allocation of functions on each level

Copy right: State Library of NSW

Image by: Reproduced in The Sydney County Council: building opening, 5th April 1968

Image date: 05/04/1968

Image number:

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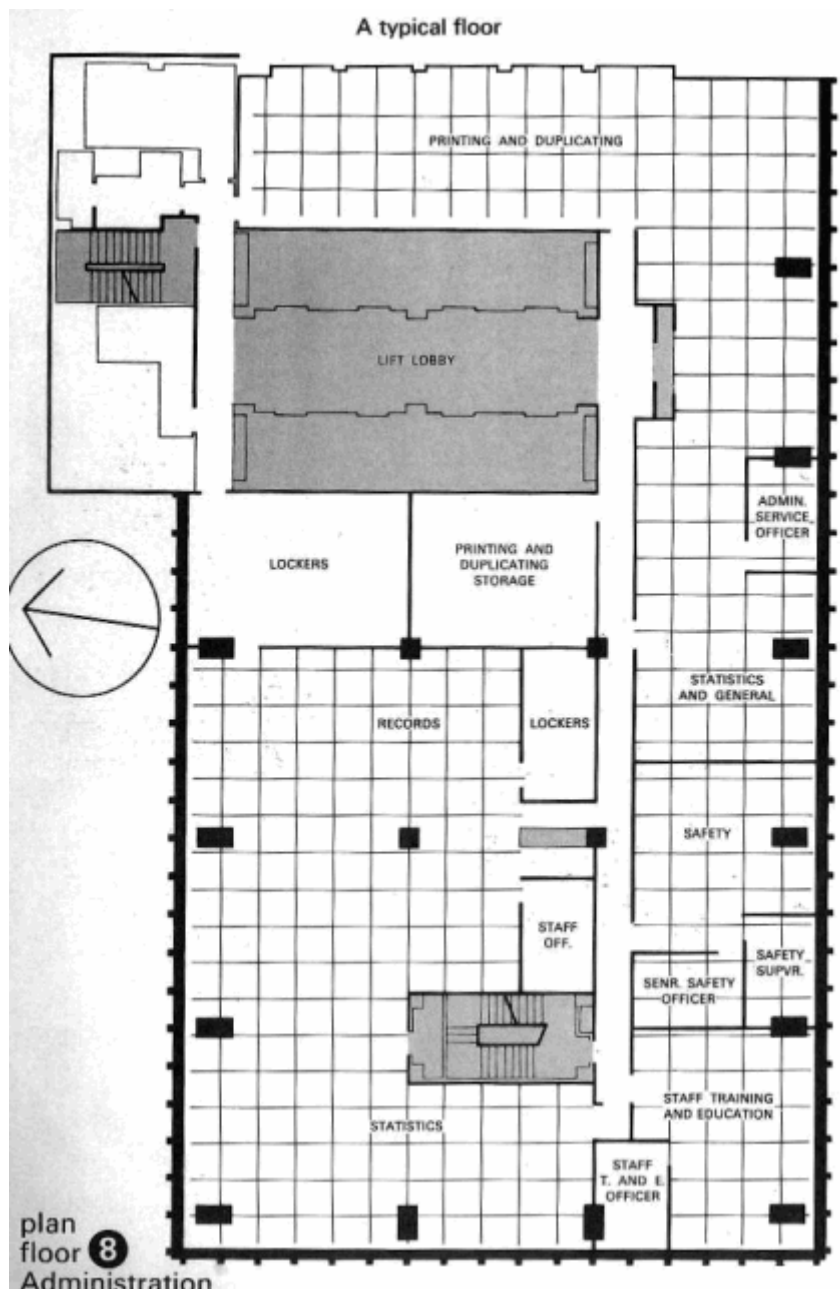
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Caption: Typical office tower floor plan

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Image date: 05/04/1968

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