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# Mace and The Tomb

By TIM PERRIN

There it sits, squat and square, looking for all the world like Victoria's own version of King Tut's Tomb, dominating the corner of Government and Bay with its very bulk. For 28 years it provided power to the city of Victoria. Through the early years of the age of electricity its transformers hummed as they delivered the energy the growing city sought. But eventually our demands outstripped its capacity and, in 1957, B.C. Hydro replaced it with other facilities that could handle the higher loads.

For the better part of two decades it has stood abandoned, its windows broken by vandals' rocks, its walls the notepad for streetside Shakespeares, its only commercial use an annual Christmas-tree sale.

But the old power building, one of the first of the now-familiar reinforced concrete structures on the west coast, is humming again. For several months now it's kept workmen busy—hanging in steel floors, removing old glass and rewiring it for its new role, that of an office building.

Jim Mace, of Mace Developments, is head of the group that owns the building and the surrounding two acres. Mace is slim, athletic and neatly bearded. Working out of an office that's almost pretentious in its modesty, he's hard to identify as the man who helped raise all the uproar when Mayor Peter Pollen first sought to put height limits on buildings in Victoria. Thanks to his concern with the imaginative and efficient use of land, he's not one to throw away a good building. In fact, the old is going to dictate the new.

"We own the two acres under a company called Victoria Centre; whatever the centre is to include, which we hope eventually will be a hotel with some commercial space, it will carry a theme set by this building."

Mace understands why some people don't like the structure, but he disagrees. "The building does have a

monolithic appearance. Quite frankly, it's a fairly attractive building but at first glance you wouldn't appreciate it."

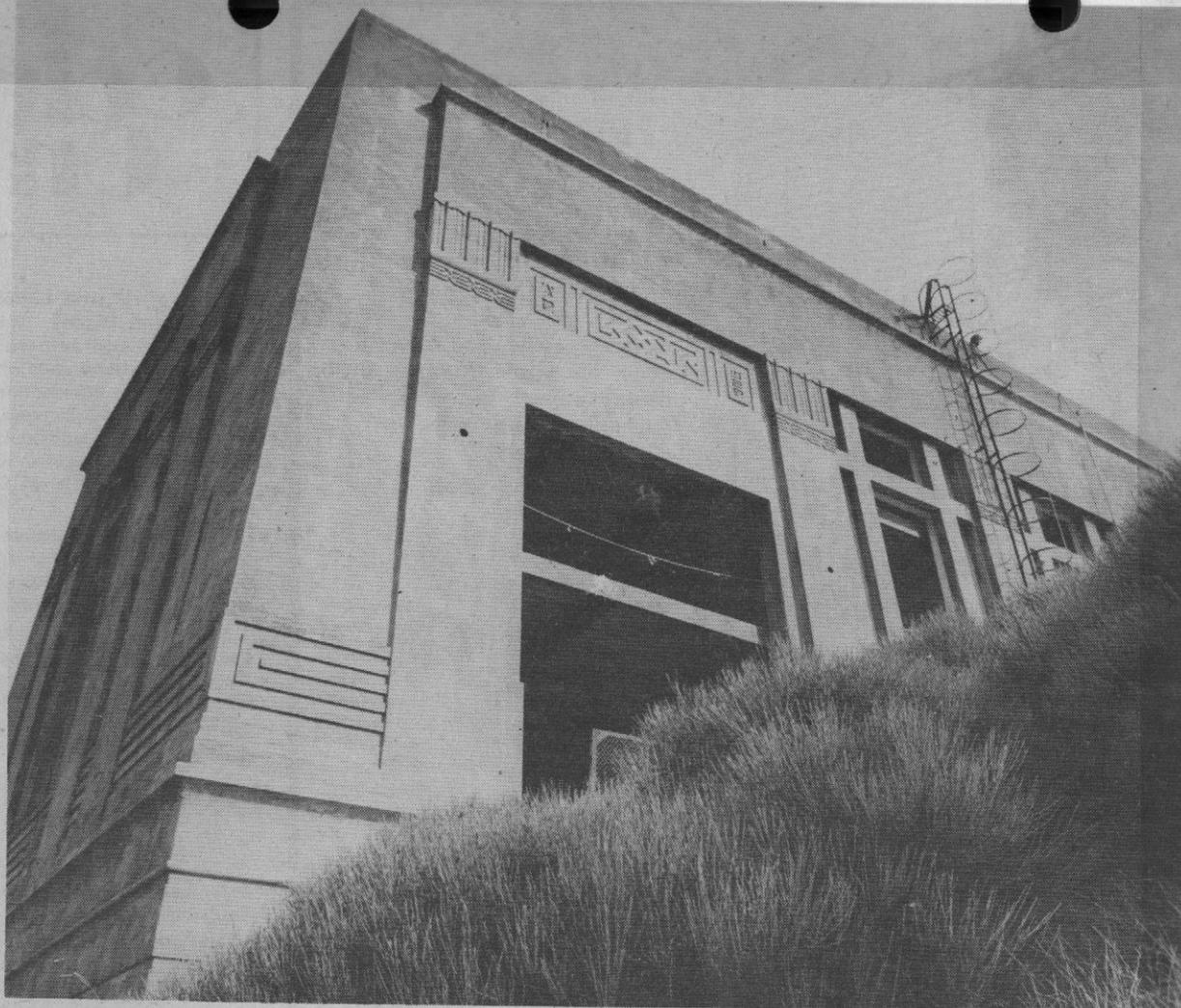
Converting the building is a large project, and an expensive one, but is just part of the plans for the corner. It's unfortunate, though, that they've had to settle for an office building, the last of the alternatives they wanted to implement. "The highest and best use was not an office conversion, but economically, what could you do if you owned it? It must pay. And you've also got to get permission." And in Victoria that can be 90 per cent of the battle.

It can hardly be said that Mace and his partners rushed into an office conversion. They've had the site for over ten years. For most of that time, they've been trying to get various development plans approved for the site with little luck. There have been proposals to turn it into an interim

convention centre until the city could build a proper one ("We did offer it to the city, to lease it to them for a period of years. We couldn't do that"). Also proposed were plans for an entertainment establishment ("I tell you it would have been a fantastic discotheque type thing, multi-layered. But try to get that approved! Ha! It would have been one of the greatest fun places in North America").

Plans for the development of the entire site at one time have also been rejected by the city. "We tried to do these things together, tried to get a hotel project approved and we didn't. So, finally, we're doing it on a piecemeal basis, getting this building to look like something by converting it.

We feel that it will be a great addition to the landscaping of the corner. Then, naturally, we're hoping to go back to the city, and, hopefully, get the balance of the two-acre site developed because it's an important location."



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VICTORIA

VICTORIA CENTRE  
(POWER STATION)

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Mace said that the time to put new life in the power station hasn't always been right, since smoke from the industrial area along the waterway used to blow over the area. But with the advent of tighter controls on aerial effluents, the area is opening up. "I think Victoria, with its limited boundaries, should be looking at developing in this area because Victoria cannot crowd much more into the core. The traffic situation there is so bad already that we can hardly move."

From the summary of his plans for the building, it sounds as if the old power house will be a good start on building up that section of town. "The exterior appearance we'll retain. The building will be coated with a special cement wash coat to give it a good appearance and we're keeping the colours light. The decoration is actually built into the concrete so we'll bring that out with colour to retain its identity."

In spite of his current project, Mace says he's not entering the building recycling business even though putting old structures to new uses is popular right now. (Take a look at lower Johnson Street.) He says, though, that there are few buildings of the quality of the Bay Street Monolith.

"It's a very well-constructed building. I'm always a little afraid to convert buildings made of brick that are coming up from the 1880s. Sometimes a lot of people feel that if it was built in the 1880s it's got to be good. That isn't the case. There were just as many jerry-builders, maybe more, than there are today. As a matter of fact, there was a lot less control on what you could do. Some of that brick was not put together with cement but with a mortar that you can poke out with your fingers. This building, unlike that, is just as strong today as when it was poured, even though it does need a face-lifting. My architects said that they'd never seen a floor over a basement with the capacity of this one.

"My belief in old buildings is that I think that it's very good to have area set aside for old buildings and buildings of quality. A lot of the stuff built in the 1880s was not very well built, in my opinion, and I'm reluctant to convert for that reason."

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It may seem strange to have a man associated with high-rise apartments and modern developments acting as a leader in preserving buildings of quality in our community. But to Mace there's room for both types. "I think variety is the essence of any city. You can revamp all the old junk in attempting to preserve the old, when, in fact, you'd be better with a good variety, the new stuff with the old.

"I've never believed that we tear anything down. All we tore down was total junk, houses that weren't fit for anybody, rat-infested old heaps."

So Jim Mace continues his work of preserving the best of the old and adding what, to him, is the best of the current.

Working like a dynamo (he seems to get the work of two men done in a day) his intent seems to be to make Victoria the kind of place that's nice to live in and his building at Government and Bay is one step.

His philosophy of imaginative use of lands and buildings can be seen in his handiwork throughout the area and is reflected in the work going on daily in the old power house.

He summed it up when he told me, "You can never solve the insoluble, but trying can use up all the land. I do think, though, that we can breathe air up to any height you like. So, with imagination, we've got the potential to be three-dimensional on the surface of this earth rather than spread out."