

# Interpretation Plan

Former Pivot Industries site,  
221A Whitehall Street, Yarraville

Prepared for

Port of Melbourne Corporation

November 2007

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## 1.0 Introduction

This interpretation plan has been prepared for the Port of Melbourne Corporation. The strategy has been prepared in accordance with Condition 6 on Planning Permit no. TP07/0012, issued by the City of Maribyrnong on 16 May 2007. Condition 6 is as follows:

Within six months of the commencement of demolition works an interpretation plan based on the themes outlined in Lovell Chen's 'Notes on the Development of an Interpretation Strategy' 22 March 2007, is to be developed to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority. The plan must include the following elements:

- Brochure for the site
- Conservation of building materials from Sheds 4-6, preparatory to their reuse in interpretation materials, and if appropriate, landscaping works.
- An interpretation sign in the Whitehall Street frontage and a linking sign within the Yarraville Gardens.

Further elements may be included by agreement.

## 2.0 Interpretation elements

In accordance with this condition, the following interpretation elements have been developed and are outlined in this report:

- Interpretive signage to be positioned in the Whitehall Street landscape buffer to the corner of Whitehall Street and Somerville Road west. The signage has not been designed (this work would be undertaken in the implementation stage of the interpretation plan) but would incorporate salvaged site materials (refer to section 3.0). It is also possible that salvaged site materials might be used in the design of the landscape buffer.
- Interpretive signage placed within the front garden of Dee Cottage, briefly outlining the history of the cottage and its occupants. Again, it is anticipated that this will also incorporate salvaged site materials.
- A brochure which outlines the history of the site and briefly contextualises it within the surrounding Yarra River industrial heritage zone along Whitehall Street.
- Text and images for the interpretive signage proposed to be placed within the Yarraville Gardens have not been prepared on advice from the City of Maribyrnong (November 2007). Additional material is included in the brochure as requested instead.



Figure 1 Interior of Shed 4 and 5, prior to demolition. Several of the poles and oregon beams and rafters have been retained for potential reuse in the interpretation scheme.



Figure 2 Collection of oregon beams and rafters retained from Sheds 4 - 6.



Figure 3 Eleven poles retained from Sheds 4 - 6.



Figure 4 Example of tie bolt and washer plate with timber corbel affixed to one of the rafters.



Figure 5 The bluestone keystone from the James MacMeikan Manure Co. premises, previously located towards the river end of the site.

### 3.0 Retained site materials

The following materials have been retained at 221 Whitehall Street for potential reuse and incorporation into the interpretation material;

Eleven timber poles and a number of rafters with remnant bolts, washer plates and fitch plates and flywheels are retained within an open shed structure towards the river end of the site (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4).

The bluestone keystone with the date '1870' incised is a remnant from the James MacMeikan Manure Co., absorbed into the Cuming, Smith & Co works after 1876. At present, it is sited in front of the gatehouse to the Whitehall Street driveway entry (Figure 5).

### 4.0 The Site – Historical outline

As outlined in the 'Notes on the development of an Interpretation Strategy' March 2007, the former Pivot Industries site has a documented site history extending from the late nineteenth century, principally as a major chemical works but also with a bone mill, manure works and rope works being located on the site.

Historically, the site has also formed part of and has had links to a much larger industrial precinct on the Maribyrnong River. This precinct was very significant both in terms both of the history of the western suburbs and more broadly in terms of the industrial history of the state.

However, this strategy, particularly in relation to the broader context of the riverside industrial precinct, has been mindful of other material currently in preparation by the City of Maribyrnong in relation to the Maribyrnong River Heritage Trail and the works in preparation by the Port of Melbourne Corporation in relation to the proposed consideration of the establishment of a Port of Melbourne Heritage Trail. The information brochure component of the strategy particularly has been prepared with this in mind.



The 221 Whitehall Street site has been occupied by two notable separate industrial enterprises – Cuming, Smith & Co chemical works and James Miller & Co ropeworks.

The Cuming, Smith & Co. works absorbed a number of earlier enterprises on this site including

- Robert Smith & Co. chemical works, acquired by Cuming, Smith & Co. in c. 1871.
- James MacMeikan Manure Co, acquired by Cuming, Smith & Co. after 1876.

The company operated the two related commercial concerns as Cuming, Smith & Co. Chemical works and Cuming, Smith & Co.'s Victoria Bone Mills.

Cuming, Smith & Co. was absorbed into Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd, which in turn was acquired by ICI who then sold the fertiliser component of the business to the rival Geelong-based Phosphate Co-operative Company, later Pivot Fertilisers.

James Miller & Co ropeworks occupied a site to the south of Cuming, Smith & Co, from 1888 until 1929. When the company subsequently moved to Brunswick, the site was sold and then consolidated into the Commonwealth Fertilisers business.

The site is also of historical interest as a part of the greater Yarraville waterfront traditionally given over to industry and manufacturing and the interpretation approach briefly contextualises the site within this precinct, recognising, as outlined above, that this may 'dovetail' later into a larger project – the Maribyrnong River Heritage Trail – currently being developed by the City of Maribyrnong.

## **5.0 Information brochure**

### **5.1 Format and proposed content**

It is proposed to provide text and images for the preparation of a brochure which would ideally be available from signage points in the Yarraville Gardens (subject to Council approval), in the Whitehall Street landscape buffer zone to the corner of Whitehall Street and Somerville Road west, and in the front garden of Dee Cottage, on the former Pivot site. Copies of the published brochure will also be supplied to the Footscray Historical Society for reference and distribution as well as to other local interest groups as advised by the City of Maribyrnong. The brochure will provide an outline of the industries and activities which have occupied the former Pivot site over the past 140 years as well as a brief outline of the life and endeavours of James Cuming.

As identified, these industries include Robert Smith & Co.; Cuming, Smith & Co.; James Miller & Co. rope works; James McMeikan Manure Co.; Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd; and the Phosphate Co-operative Company (Pivot).

The brochure will include brief text – generally no more than 2-300 words per phase of site development, with a picture of each operation and a series of maps showing at different times, the site's composition. Dee Cottage will also form a component of the brochure and its history outlined and discussed with a very brief reference to the other demolished workers houses on the site and the row of residences that adjoined the north side of Rona Avenue at the CSR site.

## 5.2 Information Brochure text

### 5.2.1 *Introduction – A River of Industry*

This site, formerly occupied by Pivot Industries, has been used for the manufacture of fertilisers and chemicals since the 1870s. It is one of a number of manufacturing industries which have long occupied Yarraville's river frontage between Somerville Road and Francis Street. The longest continuous occupant of the Yarraville waterfront is the Colonial Sugar Refinery, today Sugar Australia. Their works were established on the adjacent site in 1872.

### 5.2.2 *Early History*

Development occurred on the Yarraville and Footscray portion of the west bank of the Yarra River, as it was before the river's course was changed during the late 1870s, from the early 1840s. The desirability of river front land to facilitate the transport of goods by ship was recognised at an early date and two wharves were already in existence in 1844, when merchant Joseph Raleigh established a meat salting works on part of the site. The wharves are thought to have initially been associated with nearby bluestone quarries. A plan of 1864 shows several small, scattered buildings, thought to be the salting works and the two quarry wharves south of what is now Somerville Road (Figure 6). The former Pivot site would subsequently take up most of Allotments 1 and 2 and sloped down to river flats along its eastern boundary (Figure 7).

### 5.2.3 *Robert Smith & Co. 1870 - 1872*

By 1870 the firm of Robert Smith & Co had established a small chemical works plant at this site, near the centre of Allotment 2. Land was still relatively cheap, considering the easy access to water transport it provided. Shortly after its establishment, George Smith, a former manager of the firm, his brother-in-law James Cuming and businessman Charles Campbell acquired the business and formed a new company - Cuming, Smith & Co.

### 5.2.4 *James MacMeikan & Co. Animal Guano & Converting Works 1855-1873*

Simultaneously, another development was occurring closer to the river, where in April 1870 a large bluestone warehouse was constructed for an 'Animal Guano and Converting works' for James MacMeikan & Co.

James MacMeikan & Co. was a pioneer of the manure industry in Victoria, establishing the Flemington Bone Mills in 1855, before moving to Yarraville (Figure 8). However the firm failed within five years of the move and their site and interests were taken over by their neighbour Cuming, Smith & Co.

The bluestone factory was demolished during the 1920s. However, its keystone was retained on the Whitehall Street site.

#### *What is guano?*

Guano is a natural form of manure derived from the excrement of sea birds. Much of this was shipped from Malden Island in the South Pacific by Australian interests during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The raw product was converted by a process involving sulphuric acid and steam. Bone manures formed from animal bone dust and a super phosphate of lime, referred to as 'dissolved bones' were also manufactured on this site.

### 5.2.5 *Cuming, Smith & Co 1872-1929*

Cuming, Smith & Co. grew from modest beginnings with a workforce of three. A major setback occurred in 1876 when a fire destroyed the plant, leaving only the brick chimney. The blaze could be seen from many miles away, partly due to the nature of the materials destroyed – over eighty tons of sulphur, several tons of nitre – the explosive potassium nitrate – and other acids in the process of manufacture fuelled the fierce blaze.<sup>1</sup>

After the fire the ruins were cleared back to their foundations and new factory buildings were speedily erected.<sup>2</sup> This heralded a process of expansion and development which began with the acquisition of MacMeikan's bone mill. The workforce increased in number with James Cuming continuing to work amongst his employees (Figure 10).

The expansion was fuelled by increased local demand for the manufactured fertilisers, as agricultural activities expanded across the colonies and farmers began to accept the use of synthetic fertilisers over more traditional products such as bone meal. The means of meeting this increased demand was facilitated by the Melbourne Harbour Trust improvement works scheme, conceived by Sir John Coode in 1878. Among these was the cutting of a new course for the Yarra River, west of the site of the Cuming, Smith & Co works. At this time the Yarra River branched off from the Maribyrnong River at a point near Napier Street and was not readily navigable by large vessels. This improvement scheme had the effect of maintaining the joint outfall of both rivers, scouring and deepening the mouth of the Maribyrnong River and thus improving the navigable approach to Footscray and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

The Yarraville works produced a diverse range of chemical products including sulphuric and nitric acid, nitrate of ammonia and various sulphates. A large proportion of the burnt sulphur was used to manufacture artificial fertilisers and required secure chemical storage and packaging facilities due to the volatile nature of the raw materials used in the manufacturing processes. Working with such materials could also be hazardous – sulphuric acid produced dangerous vapors, lime burnt on contact and nitric acid had to be handled very carefully – the ferocity of the 1876 fire was testament to the volatility of materials stored on the site. The company's reach soon extended across Australia and beyond with improvements to both the river and to the works' wharf facilities, crucial to this commercial expansion (Figure 11).

A Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plan shows the development of the site to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 9). The chemical works consisted of a cluster of buildings in the centre of the site, and the former MacMeikan's building close to the river. A number of houses are shown on the Whitehall Street frontage, including Dee Cottage.

In 1897 James Cuming junior became general manager. He subsequently negotiated a price fixing agreement with his Whitehall Street competitors, Wischer & Co, Federal Fertilisers and the Mount Lyell Company which led to the formation of the Victorian Fertiliser Association in 1907.

This coincided with a significant phase of development, with new structures being built on the eastern third of the site, and the demolition of the original MacMeikan bluestone building. The wharf at the south end of the river frontage was also redeveloped, with the Melbourne Harbour Trust permitting the construction of additional wharves, the cost borne by the company.<sup>4</sup> This was undertaken in concert with the construction of sheds linking the waterfront with the factory complex in the centre of the site (Figure 12). Among these was a large composite shed known as Sheds 4, 5 & 6.

### *Sheds 4, 5 & 6*

This large structure, visible in the photographs at Figure 12 and Figure 11, was constructed in two stages; the southern fourteen bays, (Shed 4) were erected c. 1912 and a further twenty bays (Sheds 5 & 6) and a covered loading station - were added in 1922-23. The 'sickle brand' advertisement was painted on its northern end, with 'Cuming Smith & Co.' later over-painted to read 'Commonwealth Fertilisers' after the business was subsumed by the latter after 1929 (Figure 13).

Some of the timbers from this structure have been reused in the site interpretation area at the corner of Whitehall Street and Somerville Road West.

#### *5.2.6 Commonwealth Fertilisers and Chemicals Ltd 1929-1936*

In 1929 a new company, Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd, was formed with James Cuming junior as its general manager. The new company amalgamated the Cuming, Smith & Co. business along with the other Victorian Fertiliser Association member companies and fertiliser interests in Western Australia. The amalgamation sought to take advantage of synergies in production and distribution in the industry, which the resultant company dominated, much as James Cuming senior himself had seen the sense in absorbing MacMeikan's enterprise many years earlier (Figure 14).

#### *5.2.7 Phosphate Co-operative Co. (Pivot) 1936-2000*

In 1936 Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd was taken over by Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), and the Yarraville site was sold to the rival Phosphate Co-operative Company based at Pivot Point, Geelong. The expanded company subsequently took the name of its most popular product - 'Pivot' brand fertiliser. The works were an impressive site, when viewed from the nearby Yarraville Gardens (Figure 15).

Over the following decades most of site was redeveloped, with new storage and processing sheds replacing earlier structures in the centre of the site and along the riverfront, where progressive land reclamation works extended the site eastwards. It was during the 1960s that the massive Shed no.8, a site landmark for many years, was constructed (Figure 16).

Change through the 1990s consisted of the demolition of most of the remaining earlier buildings on the site, thus completing the transformation of the site from one characterised by gable roofed brick stores and chimneys in the nineteenth century to one typified by large steel framed, corrugated iron clad sheds by the late twentieth century. A comparison between the view of the works from the Yarraville Gardens in 1950 with a photograph taken in 2007 from a similar vantage point clearly shows the change in the nature of the works (Figure 18).

#### *5.2.8 James Miller & Co Rope works 1888-1929*

In 1888, James Miller erected a ropeworks on a narrow site to the south of Dee Cottage. The works were originally established in South Melbourne in the 1860s, until Miller profitably sold the land during the 1880s land boom and relocated to Yarraville in 1888.<sup>5</sup>

The plan at Figure 9 shows Miller's premises as a series of sheds towards the eastern end of the site with a rope walk running along the southern boundary ending in a structure to Whitehall Street. A view looking over the site, taken in the late 1880s, shows the run of sheds with distinctive lantern roofs and loft doors at the southern ends (Figure 19).

In the early twentieth century, the company expanded with construction of new wharf facilities, and a second factory in Brunswick (1909). In 1928-29, the Yarraville works closed

with production relocating to Brunswick.<sup>6</sup> An aerial view of the Cuming Smith works of 1920 includes the rope works in the background (Figure 12).

The Miller site was incorporated into the Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd site.

#### 5.2.9 *James Cuming and the Cuming family*

Entrepreneur and local identity James Cuming was born in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1835 and began an apprenticeship as a farrier in 1850. His family emigrated to Canada in 1852, with James remaining behind for a year to finish his apprenticeship. After marrying fellow Scot, Elizabeth Smith in 1858, he opened a business in Portland, Maine in 1859, before the couple left for Melbourne in 1862. James initially resumed business as a blacksmith and farrier in North Melbourne. On establishing the Cuming, Smith & Co. business, the Cuming family moved from Carlton to Yarraville, and built 'Myrus', a substantial brick villa in Hyde Street, south of the corner of Somerville Road (Figure 20). It was named for Cuming's birthplace in Scotland. From its verandah, aligned with Hall Street opposite, James could keep an eye on his enterprise by counting the number of cartloads of fertiliser leaving the premises (Figure 21).

James Cuming became active in local affairs from the 1880s onwards, joining Footscray Council in 1881 and subsequently serving as mayor in 1885-86 and 1890-91. He later travelled extensively and had become a noted philanthropist by the time of his death in 1911.<sup>7</sup> Among his endeavours was a bequest to establish the Yarraville Citizens' Club, today the Yarraville Club in Stephen Street.

His son James Cuming junior (1861-1920) emerged as an important industrialist in his own right, founding the Society of Chemical Industry in Victoria and travelling extensively to keep abreast of developments in the chemical industry overseas.<sup>8</sup> He married Alice Fehon in 1885 and after residing at Dee Cottage for several years, he built the extravagant mansion 'Huntly' in Willis Street, Yarraville, which today remains one of the suburb's largest residences.

A commemorative bust of James Cuming senior, carved by Margaret Baskerville and funded by public subscription, is sited in the Yarraville Gardens.

#### 5.2.10 *Dee Cottage*

Dee Cottage is believed to have been built in 1880 by bricklayer, David Goudie, later the publican of the Commercial Hotel opposite.<sup>9</sup> It was occupied by members of the Cuming family including James Cuming junior and subsequently his brother George.<sup>10</sup> Several other timber houses were built in the vicinity at this time, and used by company workers. These have since been demolished. Dee Cottage was later occupied by company employees including the foreman lead burner Jack Carter, who lived there from 1929 until 1963. Senior maintenance engineer Bruce Norton subsequently occupied Dee Cottage until mid 1972, after which date it ceased to be used as a residence.

The two large elm trees adjacent to the cottage are thought to have been planted in the late nineteenth century.

The provision of accommodation for staff on the company site was a philosophy also undertaken by the CSR, who erected a series of twelve cottages for workers along the north side of what is today Rona Avenue. They can be seen in outline in Figure 9, and have since been demolished.

#### 5.2.11 *Conclusion*

The former Pivot site holds an important place in the history of the Yarraville waterfront and its wider setting. The former chemical works and bone mill were early industries on the east

side of Whitehall Street, and generations of local residents subsequently spent their working lives at the various industries which have operated from the site. The site is also important for its long association with the Cuming family.

#### 5.2.12 *Further reading*

There are a number of authoritative and lively sources for the study of Yarraville's industrial and wider history. Among these are:

City of Footscray, *Footscray: A Pictorial Record of the Municipality from 1859 to 1988*, City of Footscray, 1989.

Cuming, James, *An Autobiography*, City of Footscray Historical Society, 1987.

Lack, John, *A History of Footscray*, Hargreen Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1991.

Michell, H., *Footscray's First Fifty Years*, printed & published by Jamieson, J., The Advertiser Office, Footscray, 1909.

Taig, Carmel, *Yarraville in 1901: Walking Tours dedicated to James Palmer, Frances Maud Wood and James Cuming Snr.*, Carmel Taig, 2001.

Total word count, excluding headings and bibliography (1950 words approx.)

5.3 Suggested illustrative material for brochure

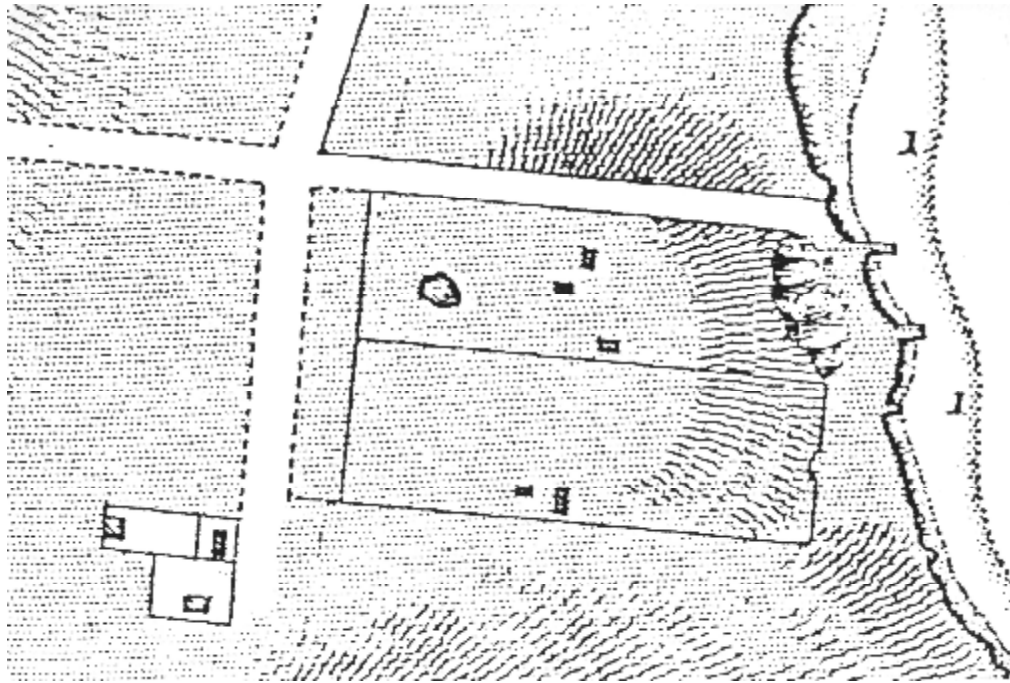


Figure 6 Detail of Commander H L Cox's plan of *Hobson's Bay and River Yarra leading to Melbourne*, 1864, showing the former Pivot Industries site.  
Source: State Library of Victoria.

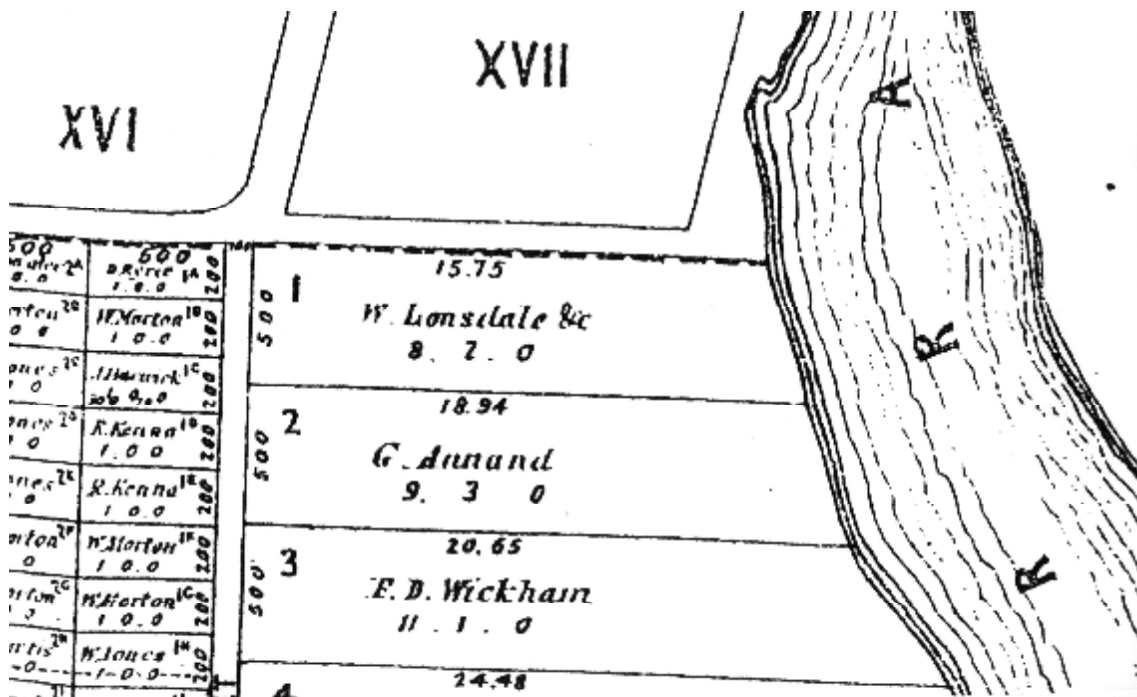


Figure 7 Detail of the original subdivision plan of the Parish of Cut Paw Paw 1884. The former Pivot site occupied much of Allotments 1 and 2.  
Source: Land Victoria.

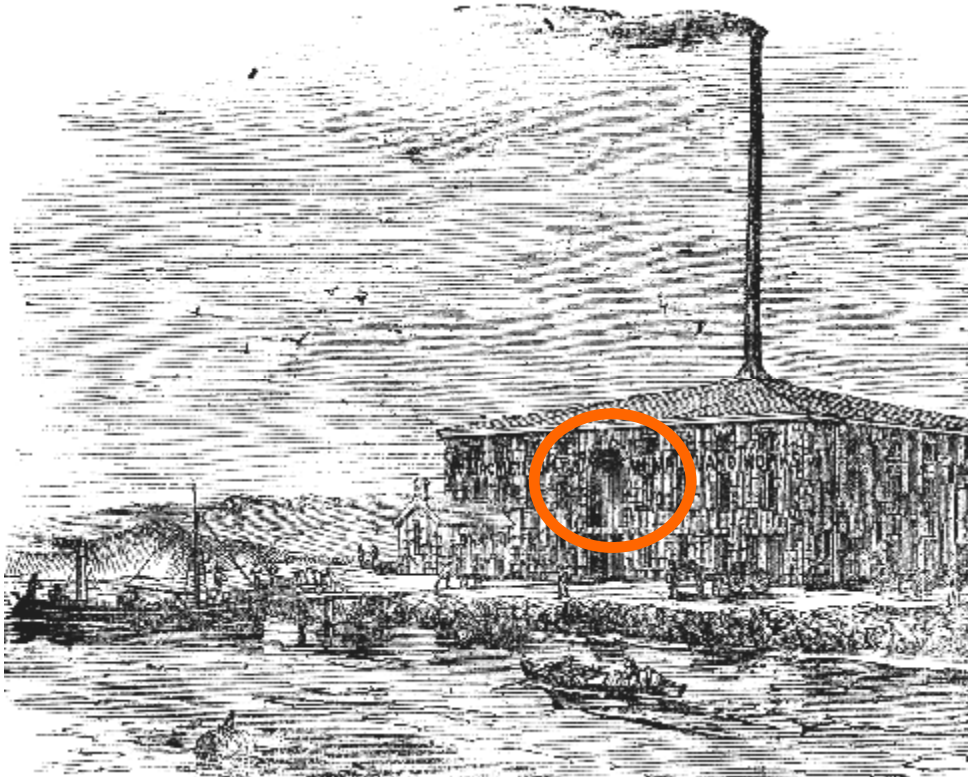


Figure 8 James MacMeikan Animal Guano Works, Yarraville, 1872. The circle indicates the position of the keystone, still extant today.  
 Source: *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, 1873.

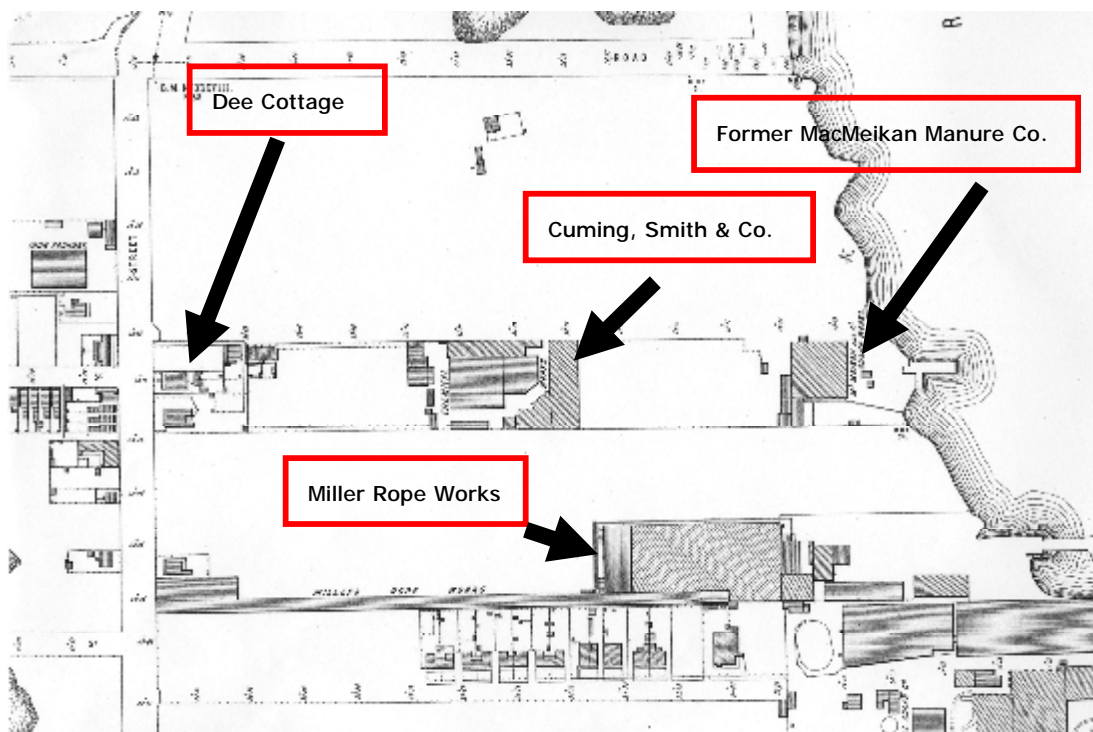


Figure 9 Extract from the MMBW Survey Plan no. 6, 1894, with arrows indicating the various site components.  
 Source: State Library of Victoria.



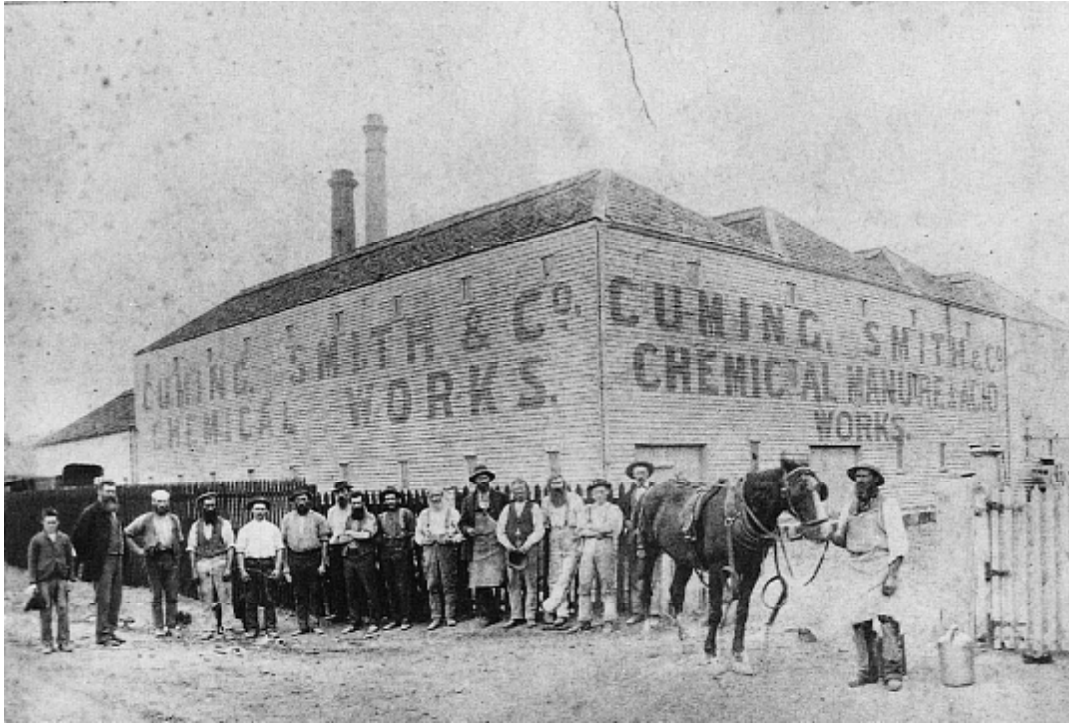


Figure 10 Staff outside the works, c.1880. James Cuming is second from the left. Source: University of Melbourne Archives.



Figure 11 Aerial view of the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, c. 1920, looking west, showing a ship taking on or discharging cargo in the foreground. The waterfront would develop as the works themselves expanded. Note the Yarraville Gardens to the right of the image. Source: University of Melbourne Archives.

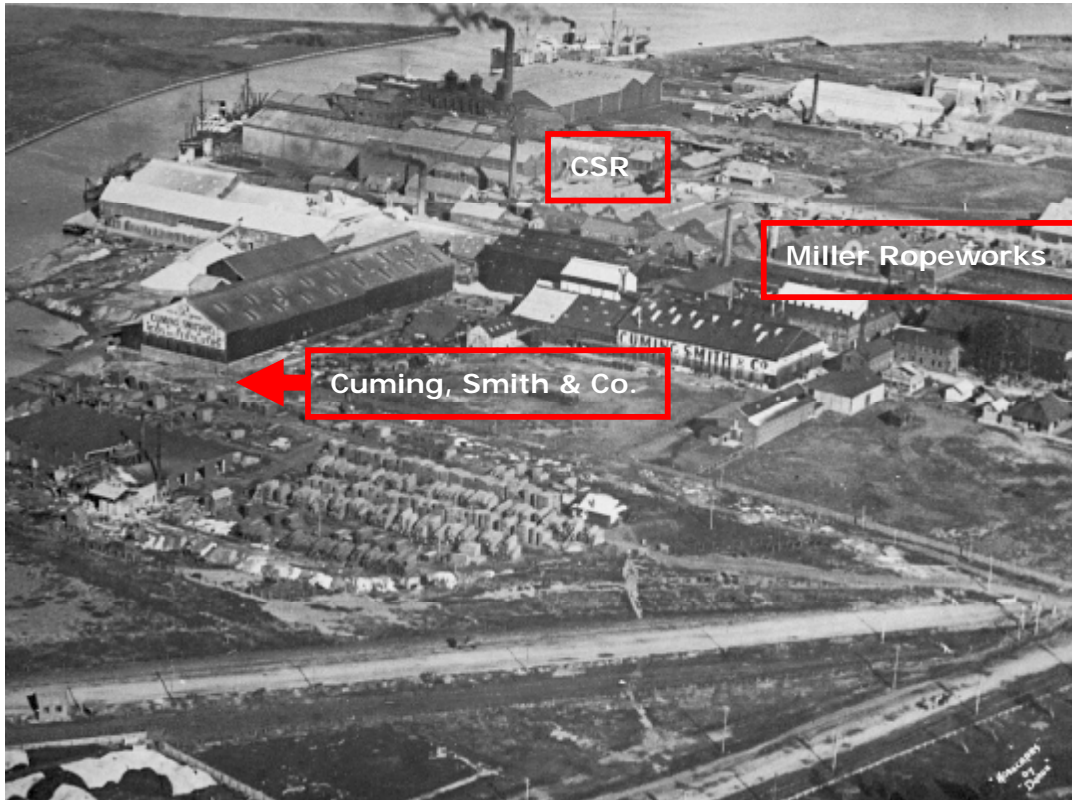


Figure 12 Aerial view of the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, Yarraville during the early 1920s. Shed 4, 5 and 6 with the familiar 'Sickle brand' on the north wall is indicated. Note the number of ships at Cuming, Smith & Co. works as well as at the neighboring CSR wharf.

Source: *Footscray: A Pictorial Record of the Municipality*



Figure 13 North end of Sheds 4, 5 & 6, showing 'Sickle Brand' and Cuming, Smith & Co. signage over-painted by Commonwealth Fertilisers after 1929.  
Source: Peter Bennetts, 2007.

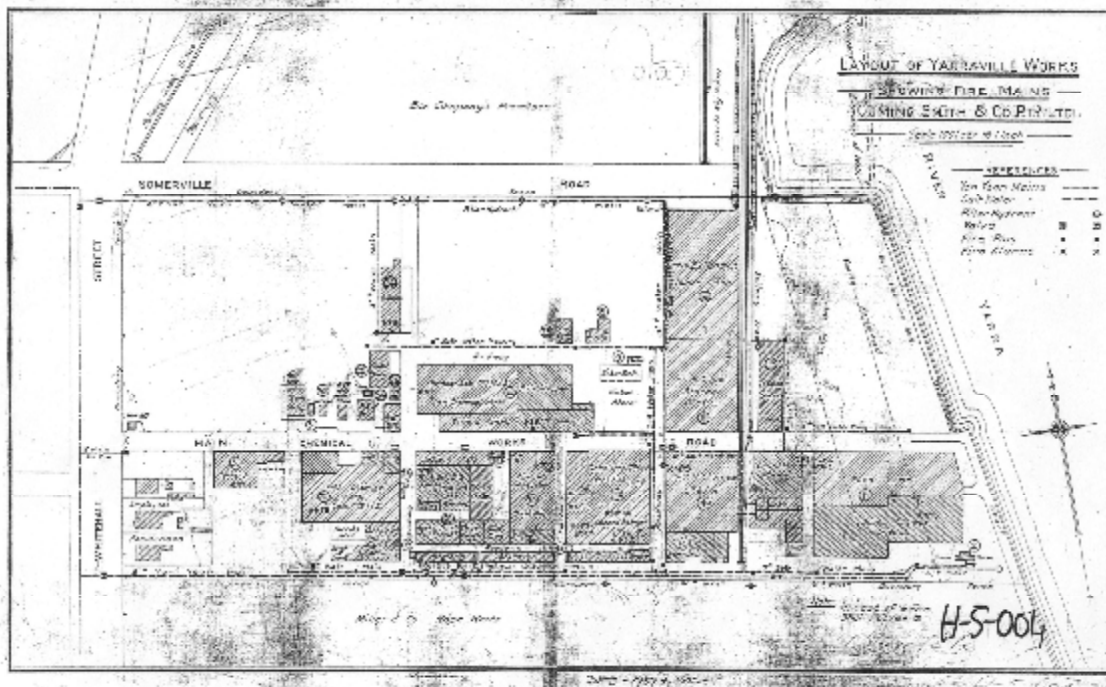


Figure 14 Site plan of the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, c. 1937.  
Source: Port of Melbourne Corporation.



Figure 15 The vast extent of the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, now Pivot, viewed from the Yarraville Gardens, 1950.  
Source: University of Melbourne Archives.



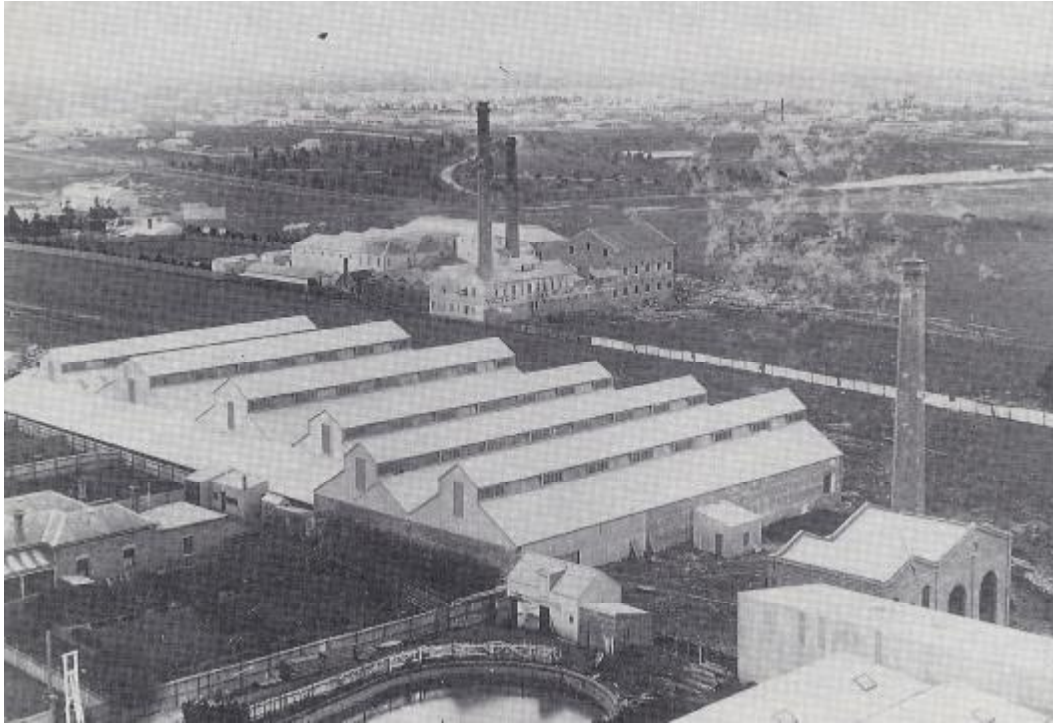
Figure 16 Shed no. 8, a site landmark from the 1960s.



Figure 17 Aerial view of the site, 2003.  
Source: Port of Melbourne Corporation.



Figure 18 The former Pivot site, looking southeast from the Yarraville Gardens, May 2007.  
Source: Peter Bennetts.



**Figure 19** An elevated view from the Victorian Sugar Company's buildings, looking north towards the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, 1889. James Miller & Co.'s ropeworks are housed in the distinctive gabled sheds in the foreground with the serpentine pathway of the Yarraville Gardens beyond.  
Source: CSR.



Figure 20 Elizabeth and James Cuming senior, at 'Myrus', Hyde Street Yarraville.  
Source: University of Melbourne Archives.



Figure 21 James Cuming senior, in the front garden at 'Myrus', 1910.  
Source: University of Melbourne Archives.

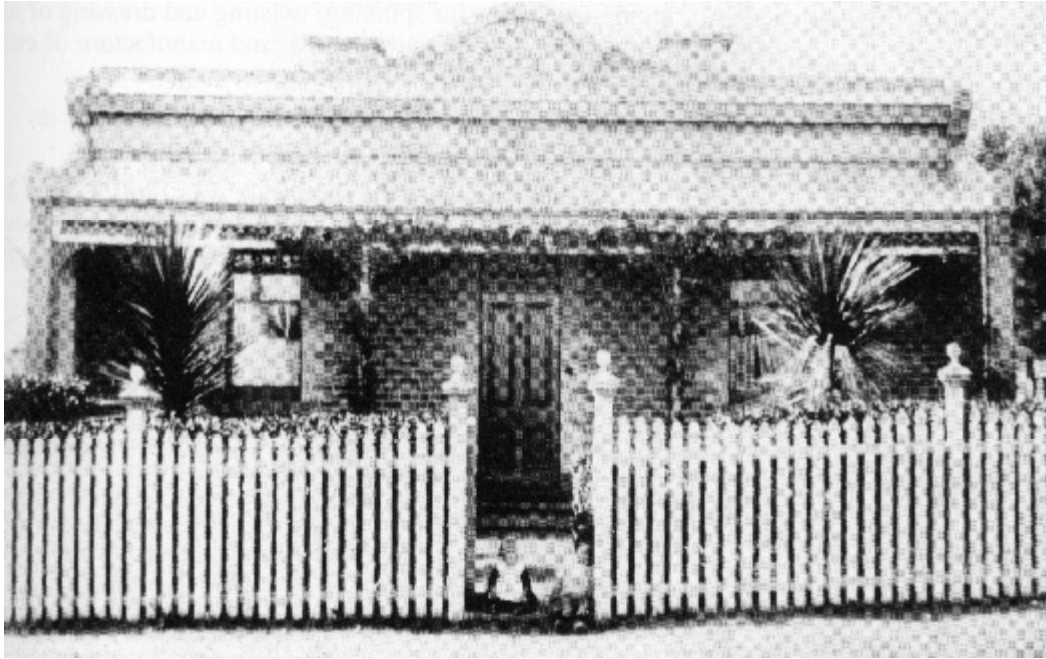


Figure 22 Dee Cottage, Whitehall Street, for several years the home of members of the Cuming family.  
Source: University of Melbourne Archives.

## 6.0 Signage

### 6.1.1 Site specific signage, corner Whitehall Street and Somerville Road, Yarraville

#### Former Pivot site

##### *Introduction*

This site was formerly occupied by Pivot Industries and has been used for the manufacture of fertilisers and chemicals since the 1870s. It is one of a number of manufacturing industries which have long occupied Yarraville's river frontage between Somerville Road and Francis Street.

##### *Cuming, Smith & Co. and its precursors*

Initially Robert Smith & Co.'s chemical works and James MacMeikan & Co.'s fertiliser manufactory occupied this site from the early 1870s. The bluestone keystone placed nearby is the sole remainder of James MacMeikan's large manufactory, demolished in the 1920s. By the middle of the decade both works had been acquired and combined by a partnership known as Cuming, Smith & Co. From a workforce of three, the firm grew steadily, surviving a significant setback when a fire burnt much of the chemical plant to the ground in 1876. The resulting blaze burnt fiercely and could be seen for many miles.

Within six weeks the plant was operational again, testament to the determination and hard work of the owners and their workforce. A significant period of expansion ensued, fuelled by the increased local demand for the manufactured fertilisers, as agricultural activities expanded across the colonies, and as farmers begun to accept the use of synthetic fertilisers over more traditional products such as bone meal.

As the business expanded, so did the workforce and the number and size of the structures that served the works (Figure 24). The means of meeting this increased demand was also facilitated by the Melbourne Harbour Trust improvement works scheme, conceived by Sir



John Coode in 1878. Among these was the cutting of a new course for the Yarra River, west of this site. This had the effect of maintaining the joint outfall of both rivers, scouring and deepening the mouth of the Maribyrnong River and thus improving the navigable approach to Footscray and beyond.<sup>11</sup> A subsequent expansion of the company's wharf facilities followed with the construction of the first portion of a large fertiliser store linking the waterfront to the company's buildings towards the centre of the site in c. 1912.

In 1922-3 a further twenty bays was added to this store. Known as Sheds 4 - 6, the structure was a landmark for many years with its distinctive 'sickle brand' signage (Figure 25). The interior had a timber pole frame with Oregon beams and rafters, elements of which have been reused in this signage (Figure 26).

#### *Absorption and change*

In 1897 James Cuming junior became general manager of the Cuming, Smith & Co. works and established a 'gentleman's agreement' for price fixing with neighbouring competitors, forming the Victorian Fertiliser Association. In 1929 he initiated a new company Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd, which combined the Association member's businesses with fertiliser interests in Western Australia, indicating the national reach of the company. However, its expansion later brought it to the attention of ICI who acquired the business in 1936, and subsequently sold the fertiliser component, then based at Yarraville to a rival, the Phosphate Co-operative Company, based at Pivot Point, Geelong. Adopting the Pivot name, the company continued to expand, boosted by post-war agricultural expansion and food production, before rationalisation in the last years of the twentieth century led to its closure in 2000.

#### *James Miller & Co. Ropeworks.*

In 1888 James Miller & Co. established a ropeworks on the southern portion of the site. The buildings comprised a series of shed to the east of the site and a long shed, containing the 'ropewalk', extending north towards Whitehall Street (Figure 23).

In 1909 the company opened a second factory in Brunswick and subsequently progressively relocated to this site, closing the Yarraville premises in 1929. The site was subsequently acquired by Commonwealth Fertilisers Ltd, the successor to Cuming, Smith & Co. The site buildings were largely demolished in the post-World War 2 period to permit facilities expansion.

#### *Dee Cottage and the Cuming family*

Dee Cottage is believed to have been built in 1880 by bricklayer, David Goudie, later the publican of the Commercial Hotel opposite.<sup>12</sup> It was subsequently occupied by members of the Cuming family during the late 1880s and 1890s (Figure 28).<sup>13</sup> James Cuming junior married Alice Fehon in 1885 and, after several years in residence at Dee Cottage, moved in 1892 to an extravagantly-scaled mansion, 'Huntly' still extant today, in Willis Street, Yarraville.

To the south of Dee Cottage two other timber houses were built and used by company workers. These have subsequently been demolished. Dee Cottage was occupied by company staff until mid 1972, after which date it ceased to be used as a residence.

Although the practice may seem unusual today, residences for employees were erected by the neighbouring Colonial Sugar Refinery, today Sugar Australia. Thirteen residences (since demolished) were constructed on company land to the north of the main road into the refinery, today known as Rona Avenue.



Figure 23 An elevated view from the Victorian Sugar Company's buildings, looking north towards the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, 1889. James Miller & Co.'s rope works are housed in the distinctive gabled sheds in the foreground and the serpentine pathway of the Yarraville Gardens are beyond. Source: CSR.



Figure 24 Staff outside the works, c.1880. James Cuming is second from the left. Source: University of Melbourne Archives.

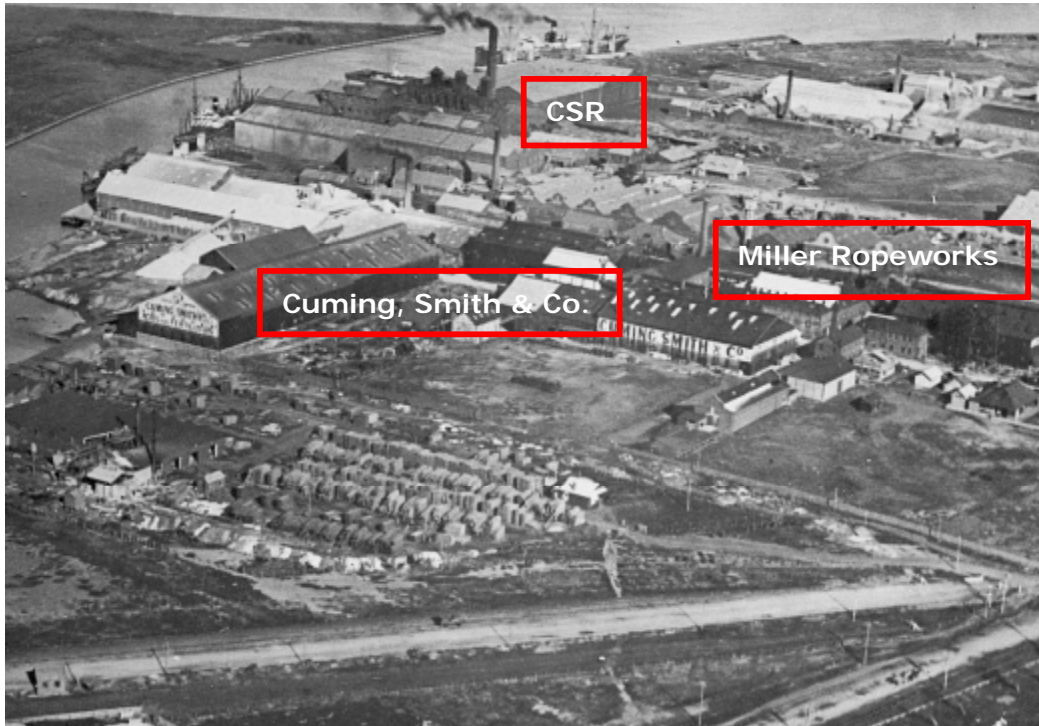


Figure 25 Aerial view of the Cuming, Smith & Co. works, Yarraville in 1920. Shed 4, 5 and 6 with the familiar 'Sickle brand' on the north wall is at upper left. Source: University of Melbourne Archives.



Figure 26 Interior of sheds 4, 5 & 6. Several of the poles and Oregon beams and rafters have been reused in the site interpretation.



Figure 27 The enormous Shed no. 8, a landmark structure from the 1960s.

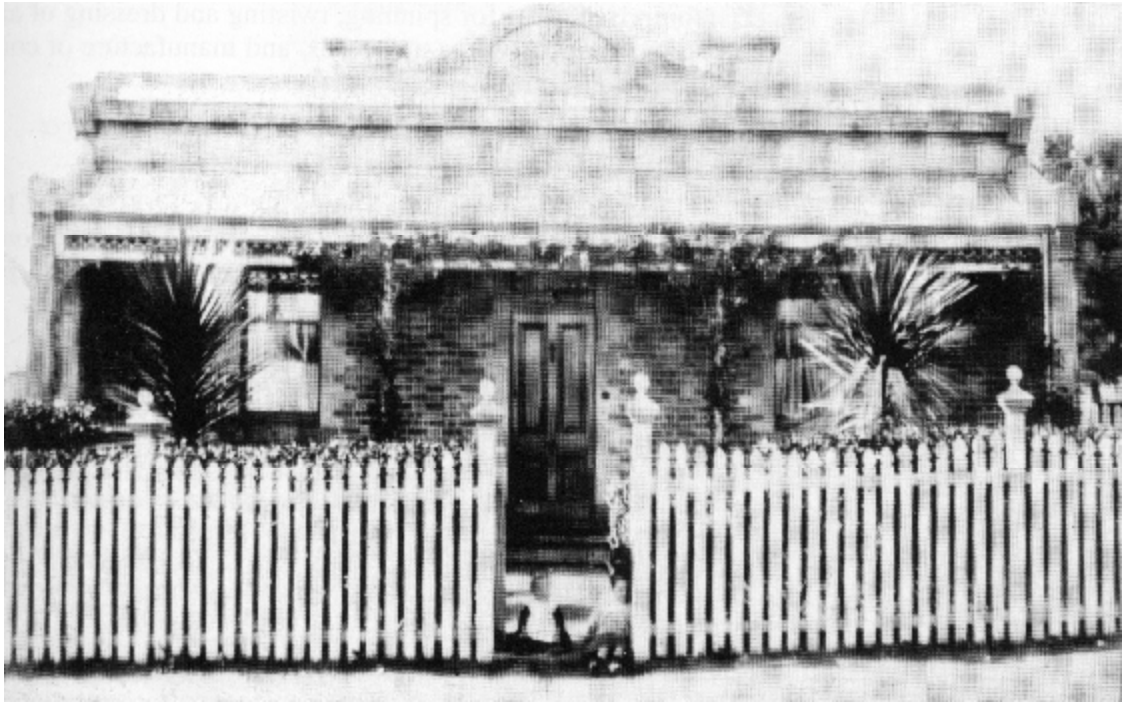


Figure 28 Dee Cottage, Whitehall Street, for several years the home of members of the Cuming family.  
Source: University of Melbourne Archives.

### 6.1.2 Signage node, Dee Cottage garden

#### *Dee Cottage and the Cuming family*

Dee Cottage is believed to have been built in 1880 by bricklayer, David Goudie, later the publican of the Commercial Hotel opposite.<sup>14</sup> It was subsequently occupied by members of the Cuming family during the late 1880s and 1890s (Figure 28).<sup>15</sup> James Cuming junior married Alice Fehon in 1885 and, after several years in residence at Dee Cottage, moved in 1892 to an extravagantly-scaled mansion, 'Huntly' still extant today, in Willis Street, Yarraville.

Entrepreneur and local identity James Cuming senior (1835-1911) had established Cuming, Smith and Co in 1872 on the land surrounding Dee Cottage. For more than a hundred years chemical and fertiliser manufacturing took place at the site, with products shipped across Australia and the world from the Yarraville waterfront.

After the Cuming family moved out, the cottage was occupied by company employees including the foreman lead burner Jack Carter, who lived there from 1929 until 1963. Senior maintenance engineer Bruce Norton subsequently occupied Dee Cottage until mid 1972, after which date it ceased to be used as a residence.

To the south of Dee Cottage two other timber houses, since demolished, were built and used by company employees.

Although the practice may seem unusual today, residences for employees were erected by the neighbouring Colonial Sugar Refinery, today Sugar Australia. Thirteen residences (since demolished) were constructed on company land to the north of the main road into the refinery, today known as Rona Avenue.

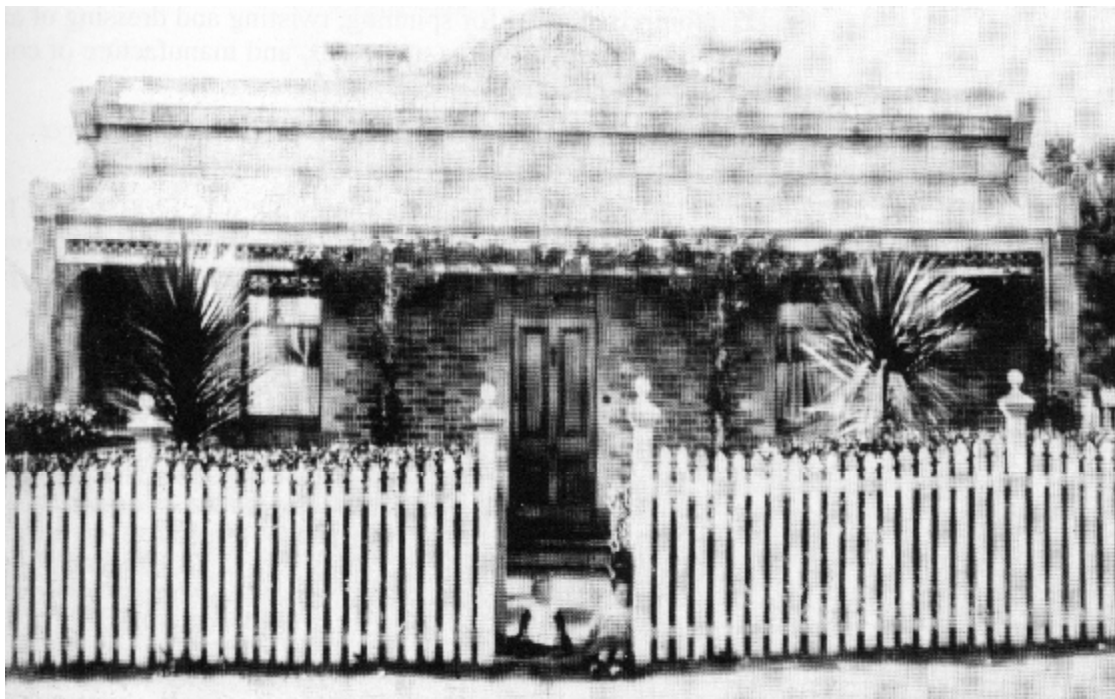


Figure 29 Dee Cottage, Whitehall Street, for several years the home of members of the Cuming family.

Source: University of Melbourne Archives.

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- 1 'Burning of the Chemical works at Yarraville', *Argus*, 11 September 1876, p. 7.
  - 2 James Cuming, *An Autobiography*, p. 84.
  - 3 Melbourne Harbor Trust Commissioners, *Jubilee Report 1877-1927, 1927*, p. 30.
  - 4 Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners, *Jubilee Report 1877-1927, 1927*, p. 255.
  - 5 H Michell, *Footscray's First Fifty Years*, (pages unnumbered).
  - 6 John Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 307.
  - 7 James Cuming, *An Autobiography*, pp. 22-23.
  - 8 *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 8, p. 173.
  - 9 Jill Barnard, Graeme Butler, Francis Gilfedder & Gary Vines, *Maribyrnong Heritage Review*, Volume 3, Appendix 1, p. 215.
  - 10 James Cuming, *An Autobiography*, p. 133.
  - 11 Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners, *Jubilee Report 1877-1927, 1927*, p. 30.
  - 12 Jill Barnard, Graeme Butler, Francis Gilfedder & Gary Vines, *Maribyrnong Heritage Review*, Volume 3, Appendix 1, p. 215.
  - 13 James Cuming, *An Autobiography*, p. 133.
  - 14 Jill Barnard, Graeme Butler, Francis Gilfedder & Gary Vines, *Maribyrnong Heritage Review*, Volume 3, Appendix 1, p. 215.
  - 15 James Cuming, *An Autobiography*, p. 133.