

11 February 2009

Identifier Silos
Formerly Brunswick Plaster Mills Pty Ltd (non-fibrous plaster works) (part)



Address 20-24 Tinning Street (part)
 BRUNSWICK

Designer -

Built 1952

Builder -

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The concrete structure at the edge of 20-24 Tinning Street comprises an attached pair of cylindrical silos (each about 10 metres diameter by 25 metres tall), an attached rectilinear chute containing the materials handling equipment, and a roof-mounted head house. The silos were built in 1952 by Brunswick Plaster Mills Pty Ltd, manufacturers of Plaster of Paris and other building products, which had occupied the original building factory on the property (a large galvanised iron shed, now no longer extant) since 1926.

How is it Significant?

The silos are of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Moreland.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the silos are significant for associations with the expansion of industry in Brunswick in the post-war period (*AHC Criterion A.4*). As such, they demonstrate the ongoing development of a theme that has played a significant part in Brunswick (and, more broadly, in the entire City of Moreland) since the mid-nineteenth century. More specifically, the silos provide evidence of the local presence of the building product industry, which, apart from the celebrated brick kilns and chimneys, is not well demonstrated by surviving built fabric in Brunswick (*AHC Criterion B.2*). They also stand as the last surviving remnant of a plaster factory that operated from this site (under various proprietors) between 1917 and 1966. At that time, the complex was one of only a few non-fibrous plaster factories in the metropolitan area. Although there was a number of fibrous plaster factories in Brunswick and Coburg, most have since been demolished, leaving these silos as a rare (and readily interpreted) evidence of this specific industry within the City of Moreland (*AHC Criterion B.2*).

Aesthetically, the silos are significant for their distinctive form and appearance. A unique surviving example of its type in the City of Moreland (*AHC Criterion B.2*), the structure exhibits almost sculptural qualities in its massive scale, its bold cylindrical form and its stark concrete finish (*AHC Criterion F.1*). The silos are a prominent local landmark that is visible from many parts of the area, and also forms an important element along the major vista of the Upfield railway line (*AHC Criterion E.1*).

History

The concrete silos formed part of a larger industrial complex that once occupied what is now known as 20-24 Tinning Street. This began with a vast galvanised iron shed, first recorded in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* in 1890 as the premises of T Warr & Co, carriers. It was then used for grain storage, initially by Lightfoot & Co (1892) and later by Goldsborough Mort & Co (1893-1903). The shed subsequently lay vacant for several years before it was used, in fairly rapid succession, as a picture theatre, skating rink and motor omnibus depot. At one point, the shed was listed as 'Pender's Hall', after its owner, John Pender, who was the proprietor of a nail factory on the adjacent property (later No 12)

On the MMBW plan of the area (dated 1906), the building at No 20 was clearly identified as a "grain shed", with a railway siding shown emerging from its north side. Along the western side of the property, where the silos would later be built, was a narrow wedge-shaped strip of fenced land containing a small structure identified as a closet (ie toilet). To the immediate south of this yard, fronting Tinning Street, was a small house labelled as 'gate house'. This building, which was the residence of the railway gate keeper and his family, was then designated at No 83, but later became No 26 when properties along Tinning Street were renumbered in the late 1920s.

In 1917, the grain shed was taken over by S King & Company, cement works, and the property would remain occupied by firms engaged in similar activities for the next fifty years. Directories reveal subsequent occupants as the Planet Company, plaster and dry colour works (1918-22), Southern Chemicals, manufacturers of Plaster of Paris (1923-26), the Victoria Plaster Mills (1927-29) and the Brunswick Plaster Works (from 1930). The last two were evidently associated, as records of the Brunswick Plaster Company Pty Ltd confirm that the firm's registered office was at 20 Tinning Street when it was incorporated in October 1926.¹ These records also clarify the nature of the business, described as "manufacturers, dealers and workers in plasterboard, cement, lime, plasters, whiting, clay, gravel, sand, minerals, earth, coke, fuel, artificial stone and builder's requisites of all kinds". The company had originally leased the Tinning Street property from the executors of John Pender (who died in 1923), but had purchased it outright by the mid-1930s. The company also acquired Pender's former nail factory on the adjacent site (No 12), which was subsequently leased to Beatzall Fibrous Plaster Company.

The property at No 20 was still rated as a 'galvanised iron shed' in 1950, with a Net Annual Value (NAV) of £145. In the ratebook for 1952-53 (dated 24 November 1952), that figure had increased to £750, indicating that substantial improvements had been made. The following year, the property was rated for the first time as a "galvanised iron factory and silos", still with a NAV of £750. The new silos can be seen in a photograph of the complex taken by Wolfgang Sievers in 1961, which not only shows the original gabled-roofed iron shed but also a small single-storey Moderne-style office block that was presumably erected after Brunswick Plaster Mills purchased the property in the early 1930s. The company remained in occupation until it went into voluntary liquidation in 1966, whereupon its assets, including its freehold property, machinery plant, vehicles and mineral leases, was transferred to Colonial Sugar Refineries Co Ltd, which had been the company's managing agents for several decades. The two factories at 12 and 20 Tinning Street site were subsequently razed for the erection of new brick factories, although the concrete silos were retained. The former gatekeeper's cottage was also demolished, and the site now forms a driveway/carpark associated with the factory.

Description

Set back from the property's Tinning Street frontage, this prominent reinforced concrete landmark comprises an attached pair of cylindrical silos, each about 10 metres in diameter and 25 metres in height. The equipment for loading the silos is contained in a rectilinear tower-like element on the north side, which extends up to the head house (a discrete cube-like room at the top of the structure) and returns thence along the top of the two silos. The head house is slightly cantilevered on two sides and has a flat concrete slab roof, small windows to the north and south sides, and a small double door to the west with a hoist beam above. The tower also has a row of small windows along its north frontage and, at the base, a large doorway (now bricked up) and a smaller opening with a rusty iron hatch. On the western side of the tower is a smaller pedestrian doorway (also bricked up) and a slit-like opening that reveals part of the hoisting machinery within.

1 "Brunswick Plaster Mills Pty Ltd". File No C0012065V, Defunct Company Records, Public Record Office.

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Comparative Analysis

Although concrete silos of this type are often seen alongside railway lines in rural Victoria, they are somewhat more unusual in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Not surprisingly, they tend to be found in those inner suburbs where industrial development has been a particularly significant and recurring theme, such as Collingwood, Richmond, West Melbourne and Kensington. By far the most extensive collection of concrete silos in the metropolitan area is to be found within what is now the City of Yarra. In Richmond, there are several examples at various sites associated with the major twentieth century malting firm of Barrett Brothers/Burston & Company. Of these, the most prominent is the former Richmond Maltings in Gough Street, where there is landmark cluster of eleven silos (1952) and another row of four fronting Harcourt Street (1960-62). There are other examples at the same company's premises at 45 Gibdon Street (group of six) and 22 Abinger Street (group of four). The latter were converted into apartments by award-winning architect Nonda Katsalidis in 1997. There are two notable clusters of twelve silos in Collingwood: one at the former Yorkshire Brewery at 88 Wellington Street, and another at what is now the Melbourne Porsche Centre at 109-111 Victoria Parade. In nearby Islington Street, there is a cluster of six silos at the premises of James Hood Maltsters. Smaller groups of four can be seen at the former Barrett Brothers/Burston & Company maltings at 21 Northumberland Street, Collingwood (1954), and the former Tomlin, Simmie & Company flour mills at 534 Bridge Road, Burnley.

Outside the City of Yarra, there are several examples in Melbourne's inner west, including the Goodman Fielder Mills site in Elizabeth Street, Kensington, and the former James Minifie & Company site in Lennon Street, West Melbourne (1910, and later). Another well-known group of silos is the cluster of twelve that stands alongside the Western Highway at the former premises of grain merchant John Darling at 74 Sydney Street, Albion. A group of notably early concrete silos, designed by John Monash in 1905, exists at the former CUB Brewery site in Swanston Street, Carlton, albeit encased in an Edwardian red brick building by architects Sydney Smith & Ogg.

While the suburbs that comprise the City of Moreland have seen considerable industrial development during the nineteenth century and twentieth century, the industries represented therein tended to be the type that did not require bulk storage of this very specific kind. Indeed, only one other example of concrete silos has been identified in what is now the City of Moreland. These were erected in 1948 at the Hutchison's flour mills site at 9 Hartington Street, Glenroy, which dates back to 1930 but was much expanded in the later 1940s. While several of the mid-century mill buildings remain on the site, the distinctive concrete silos were demolished in 1985.

The silos at Tinning Street can also be placed in the broader context of the plaster industry in Melbourne, and in what is now the City of Moreland. At the time that the Brunswick Plaster Mills Pty Ltd took over the site in 1926, there were only two other manufactures of non-fibrous plaster listed in the Melbourne directories. Manufacturers of *fibrous* plaster were more common, with more than fifty listings including several in Brunswick. These included the Beatzall Fibrous Plaster Company in Tinning Street, which occupied the former Pender's nail factory to the east of the Brunswick Plaster Mills complex. This building has since been demolished, as have the respective premises of the Diamond Fibrous Plaster Company at 12 Weston Street, and the Vaughan Brothers at 26 Ryan Street, Brunswick East. One fibrous plaster factory that still remains is the former premises of Zuleika Pty Ltd at 34 Union Street. This, however, is a fairly typical utilitarian factory building in a rudimentary Moderne style, which, unlike the silos in Tinning Street, does little to suggest its original function.

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion as an individually significant place on the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the City of Moreland Planning Scheme.

References

Sands & McDougall Directories, various.

City of Brunswick Rate Books, various volumes, 1930-1955. Public Record Office.

'Brunswick Plaster Mills Pty Ltd'. File No C0012065V, Defunct Company Records, Public Record Office.



*View of the Brunswick Plaster Mills site in Tinning Street in 1961, showing iron shed, silos and office building.
(Source: State Library of Victoria)*



*Silos and plaster factory from the north. Image ID: 12903-p00001-000613-090
(Source: Public Record Office, Victoria)*