

## Identification and location

<b>Name of Place</b>	<b>Cuming Smith</b>		
<b>Other Names</b>	Commonwealth Fertilisers, Pivot Fertilisers, Melbourne Bone Mills, McMeikan's Bone Mills		
<b>Address</b>	219 Whitehall Street Yarraville		
<b>Place Identifier</b>	20237		
<b>Level of Significance</b>	<i>regional</i>		
<b>Creation date (s):</b>	1870	<b>Map (Melway)</b>	42 C10
<b>Boundary description</b>	The extent of the current allotment, including the administration and substation complex, Sheds 4-6 and including including 7 as a supporting structure.		
<b>Local Government Area:</b>	City of Maribyrnong		
<b>Ownership Type</b>	Private / recent acquisition by Melbourne Ports Corporation?		

## Description

**Site Type:** factory

### Physical Description

The core of rendered brick administration buildings from c. 1900 although extensively modified, survive as an isolated group among more recent clear span storage sheds. Of the original group of 19th century buildings little remains, most being demolished in the 1960s. However, the substantial stores built of Mountain ash logs up to fifteen metres long date from the 1920s and are of interest for their large clear span and use of raw logs probably obtained from Cuming Smith's Warburton Timber operation. One of the largest of these has been recently demolished. Bluestone and early brick foundations and walls can be seen in the western end of the site possibly once part of McMeikan's Bone Mill. The cleared area may have sub surface remains of the early buildings.

### Condition

Surviving Buildings are in good condition, although it is understood that the main fertiliser building has structural problems, particularly with rot in timbers.

### Integrity

Much of the site has been demolished including large timber framed fertiliser sheds near the river.

### Context

One of the group of large industrial complexes on the Yarraville waterfront.

### Threats

Redevelopment of the site, probably for further industrial use, is highly likely as recent demolition has occurred. Investigate bluestone foundations further to identify McMeikan's Bone Mill features. Consider archaeological work prior to future construction or demolition.

## History

Cuming Smith purchased the Yarraville Chemical Works of Robert Smith & Co in 1871 and McMeikin's Victoria Bone Mill in 1875. It then amalgamated with Felton Grimwade 1897. It was taken over by Commonwealth Fertilisers in 1929 which incorporated Mt.Lyell and Wischer. (see 0255 & 0362). ICI then took over the complex in 1936 and sold the Cuming Smith part to the Geelong company Pivot who had themselves bought CRESCO in Corio Bay. The works became the Phosphate Co-op of Australia following a further merger and now trades as Pivot fertilisers, with a second plant in Geelong. Cuming Smith pioneered the manufacture of superphosphate in Victoria producing its own acid and other products. The company also undertook experiments with timber derived products such as wood tar, acetone and timber preservatives. James Cuming is commemorated in Footscray as their premier citizen, having been Mayor and councillor many times. His statue stands in the Yarraville Gardens having been relocated from the Footscray Railway Reserve.

## Thematic context

**Australian Principal Theme** Manufacturing and Processing

**PAHT Subtheme:** Manufacturing and Processing

**Local Theme** Industry by the River: Early

## Statement of Significance

Cuming Smith is of Regional historical and architectural significance as it was the largest and one of the first manufacturers of superphosphate fertiliser in Victoria. The works pioneered the manufacture of chemical fertiliser and introduced integrated processes in acid and chemical manufacture. (Criterion A4) The factory is one of the major industrial facilities in the Yarraville area with considerable surviving building stock from the turn of the century period. Its Sickle Brand agricultural products (sheep dip, rabbit poison, wheat pickling, etc) were famous among Australian and overseas farmers. (Criterion D2) Substantial parts of the works dating from the period of greatest expansion and of unusual construction survive, still in the context of chemical fertiliser production. A distinctive group of building forms and highly unusual industrial landscape with the fertiliser cranes on the wharf a local landmark. (Criterion A3) James Cuming made his fortune from this works and for its sake played an influential role in the civic and commercial affairs of Footscray. (Criterion H1)

## Comparative Examples

Compares with the near contemporary Mt.Lyell site nearby, but with less of the associated chemical plant. The large fertiliser sheds of Australian Explosives and Chemicals in Deer Park survived up to the mid 1990s but are now completely demolished. The only other large surviving phosphate works is the Pivot site in Geelong, which is comparable in scale and building form, but reflects a much later development.

## Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register	No
Register of the National Estate	No
National Trust Register	Recommended
Other Heritage Listings	WRIHS
Planning Scheme Protection	Recommended
External Paint Controls Apply?	No

<b>Internal Alteration Controls Apply?</b>	No
<b>Tree Controls Apply?</b>	No
<b>Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act</b>	No
<b>Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?</b>	No
<b>Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?</b>	No

## Recommendation

The following objectives relate to the Statement of Significance and the cited fabric or contributory elements.

To conserve and enhance the significant elements of the place.

To conserve and enhance the public view of these elements.

To conserve and enhance the visual relationships between the contributory elements.

To ensure that new or altered elements within the place are visually recessive and related to the contributory elements.

To prepare a conservation management plan which embodies the above objectives, which would be of assistance in planning the future of the site.

Detailed historical and archaeological investigation is required to fully identify the site's heritage fabric, in particular in relation to the remains of McMeikan's Bone Mills..

## Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

*A3 Importance in exhibiting unusual richness or diversity of flora, fauna, landscape or cultural features*

A distinctive group of building forms and highly unusual industrial landscape with the fertiliser cranes on the wharf a local landmark.

*A4 Importance for their association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, state, region or community.*

The manufacture of superphosphate fertiliser using phosphate rock from the Pacific islands and waste acid from other chemical works revolutionised Australian agriculture and industry.

*D2 Importance in demonstrating the principle characteristics of the range of human activities in the Australian environment (including way of life, custom, process, land-use, function, design or technique).*

This works best demonstrates the complex interrelationship between branches of chemical industry with acid, fertiliser and meat-by product works having come together to create the modern chemical industry..

*H1 Importance for their close associations with individuals whose activities have been significant within the history of the nation, state or region.*

James Cuming made his fortune from this works and for its sake played an influential role in the civic and commercial affairs of Footscray

## Documentation

### References

ADB8 (James Cuming), CUMING a biography 1987, *Forging Ahead*,

*Local Industries in Footscray and Williamstown* 1888, Britannia Ck., VPRS933/1132  
Footscray's First Fifty Years. Footscray's First Hundred Years. Sands & McDougall 1895,  
VPRS932/3125, *City of Footscray 125th Anniversary 1984*.

*MMBW 1" to 400' Sewerage Plan, Footscray, 1895. (SLV)*

*MMBW 1" to 40160 Sewerage Plan No 6, c1910*

## Data recording

**Assessed By** Gary Vines

**Assessed Date:** 3/3/2000