

Building:	Yarra Falls Spinning Mills	Significance:	B
Address:	452 Johnston Street, Abbotsford	Melway Map Ref:	2D B8
Building Type:	Factory	Construction Date:	1918
Architect:	Unknown	Builder:	Unknown



Intactness:		Condition:	
G[]	F[x] P[]	G[x]	F[] P[]
Existing Heritage Listings:		Recommended Heritage Listings:	
Victorian Heritage Register	[]	Victorian Heritage Register	[]
Register of the National Estate	[]	Register of the National Estate	[x]
National Trust	[]	Heritage Overlay Controls	[x]

History

Yarra Falls Spinning Co. Pty Ltd. was established in 1917, both to assist in providing war supplies and as a response to the wartime shortages of textile yarns. The first chairman of the company was Phillip Henry Pearce whose aim was to establish a local, large scale textile industry, able to compete with imports. The firm went on to become one of the most prominent textile manufacturers in Australia, and through its supply of specialist yarns to other firms, helped promote the textile industry in Australia in the 1920s. The company was closely tied to the British firms of Sir Titas Salt, Bart., Sons & Co. Ltd of Saltaire, Yorkshire—one of England's pioneer and premier textile firms, and Sir Henry Whitehead of Bradford—who ran one of England's largest spinning works. In the 1920s the Melbourne directors included William Lawrence Baillieu, Ernest March Pearce, Frederick Farquhar Robinson, who was also managing director, and Arthur Horden. By 1923 the mill was producing 25,000 lbs. of spun yarn and employed about 600 workers, many of whom lived near the mills in low-rent housing owned by the company. Yarra Falls also had a controlling interest in Australian Knitting Mills of Richmond which they eventually sold to Holeproof in 1957, to concentrate on their spinning and weaving activities.

The factory at 452 Johnston Street was built on vacant land in Johnston Street, between the cable tram depot and the Yarra River. In 1913-14, the site was occupied by a brick house; rate books for 1917-18 show Yarra Falls as the owner of two large vacant sites adjacent to the river, valued at £102. By 1919-20, Yarra Falls was shown as the owner of brick mills valued at £3020. By 1930-31, the value of the complex had risen to £4650.¹ In subsequent years Yarra Falls extended the factory through the purchase of additional sites along Trenerry Crescent.

Gary Vines and Matthew Churchward. *Northern Suburbs Factory Study*. 1992.

Description

The Yarra Falls Spinning Mills comprises a series of factory buildings behind a single-storey administration building facing Johnston Street. This building has a wide frontage and is set back from the street, divided into nine bays separated by brick piers which rise through the parapet at the end bays. The central five bays have a high parapet with a dog tooth brick course and a rendered panel bearing the words YARRA FALLS LIMITED in raised letters. The parapet is flanked by brick piers surmounted by large orbs. Windows are large multi-paned steel framed with concrete lintels: most of the windows have been recently replaced. A central projecting entrance porch is decorated with Ionic columns supporting a dentilated entablature and segmented-arched pediment containing the company monogram on a shield. This administration building or office was a later addition to the works, which was initially approached via a bridge connecting the upper floor directly to Johnston Street, the mill being somewhat lower than the street. Behind the office block, the factory proper has brick walls divided by piers. Mill No. 1, a two-storey building with steel-framed windows, was originally used for combing and spinning. At the rear of the site, adjacent to a right of way, the fall in the land accommodates a three-storey section, part of which is of reinforced concrete construction.

Significance

The Yarra Falls Spinning Mills is of local historical and architectural significance. Historically, it is a very important early 20th century textile mill which played a key role in the expansion of the textile industry in Australia following World War One. Architecturally, the Johnston Street building is a typical late Edwardian composition of Classical revival details, which is an interesting heritage element in the streetscape.

Original Source

Gary Vines and Matthew Churchward, *Northern Suburbs Factory Study*, 1992

¹ Collingwood Rate Books, 1913-14, 1915-16, 1916-17, 1917-18, 1919-20, 1924-25, 1930-31.