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<b>Name</b>	Former Kew Fire Station	<b>Reference No</b>	
<b>Address</b>	35-37 Belford Road, Kew	<b>Survey Date</b>	22 November 2005
<b>Building Type</b>	Flats	<b>Grading</b>	B
<b>Date</b>	1940-1	<b>Previous Grading</b>	B



**Extent of Overlay**

To title boundaries.

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**Intactness**     Good     Fair     Poor

**Heritage Status**     HV     AHC     NT     Rec.    BPS Heritage Overlay

**History**

The Kew Fire Station was constructed in Belford Road in 1940-41, replacing an earlier building which was located in Walton Street. The architect of the new station was Harry Winbush.<sup>1</sup> The new site was apparently chosen not only for its more central position but because a larger building was required to house new larger fire engines. The new building contained an engine hall as well as 3 three bedroom flats and 1 two bedroom flat for resident brigade officers. The new complex cost £9,000 and was opened on the 8 May 1941 by Cr. J L Murphy, MLA.<sup>2</sup>

In 1986 an application was lodged with the Kew City Council and subsequently approved for the construction of a hose drying and training tower structure.<sup>3</sup>

In c.1996 the property was put up for sale by the MFB and subsequently purchased by the state government on behalf of the Inner East Housing Group to provide affordable housing for low-income and disabled people, with first priority being those within the immediate district. The property was converted to provide 11 x 1 bedroom units and 2 x bedsitter units. The bedsitters were constructed within the two fire truck garages on the ground floor. The property has been retained as low-income housing and the extent of modification, at least to the outside, is minimal.<sup>4</sup>

(G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded buildings study (draft), 2001, additional research by Lovell Chen, 2005)

**Description & Integrity**

The former Kew Fire Station is a large interwar building of face red brick construction designed around an elongated rectangular plan. The breakfronted parapeted façade is characterized by Modern styling and an essentially symmetrical design, and comprises three bays, with a central bay which projects out and up from the flanking bays. This central element (originally housing the engine bays) is further

articulated by a dentilled cornice, concrete fins and rendered spandrel panel above the original engine bay doors (which survive, albeit with new window and wall insertions within the openings). A flagpole and crest distinguish the building's original use, however the lettering 'METROPOLITAN FIRE BRIGADE' has been removed from beneath the flagpole. The principal elevation is relieved by bands of ribbed Manganese brickwork which define the bands of fenestration. Secondary elevations are in plain red face brick. A pair of pedestrian entrances screened by concrete hoods flank the central bay and provide access to glazed stair halls. Fenestration is generally repetitive between floors with grouped, and window openings containing timber-framed double-hung multi-paned sashes.

The front and side boundaries have low brick walls contemporary with the building and later steel and timber fences. The letterboxes and screen planting to the main entrance date from the conversion of the building for residential use, however the building is otherwise externally intact as viewed from the street.

### Historical Context

The former Kew Fire Station is sited in a primarily residential area, the site chosen for its central location, as Kew expanded to the east and north in the first half of the twentieth century.

### Comparative Analysis

The Kew Fire Station is one of a number of fire station buildings designed by modernist architect Harry Winbush. Winbush had recently completed one of Melbourne's most notable football venues, the Arthur Showers stand at Essendon Oval, in 1939.

Fire station design of the 1930s and '40s followed on from designs of the 1910s and 1920s by architects Smith Ogg and Serpell, Cedric Ballantyne<sup>5</sup> and others. Winbush's commission followed several notable fire station designs by the practice of Seabrook and Fildes, including the cream brick MFB Number 4 (1938-40) a combination truck depot and residential flats in three blocks, originally with a programme similar to this building, at 24 Blyth Street Brunswick.<sup>6</sup> Others from this period include the fire stations at Brighton, now closed, and at Windsor, since demolished.

Camberwell Fire Station, situated in Camberwell Road, Hartwell, was similar in plan form – in that it also consisted of a fire station and residential flats - but was of a more cautious design, with a pitched tile roof. Winbush's Kew design reinstated the red face brick favored in earlier designs by Ballantyne, but combined it with a glazed amber brick in deep relieving courses linking the windows in continuous banding. This had been employed by Mewton and Grounds in their *Belair* flats in Cowderoy Street St Kilda, of 1935-6, and marked several Percy Everett designs in the State Government Architects office, notably the William Angliss School in La Trobe Street, Melbourne, of 1938-40.

Modernist designs such as this dominated small public buildings at this time, as with the Infant Welfare centres at 51 Bluff Road, Black Rock (1939) and elsewhere, and, in Boroondara, Percy Everett's Police Station at 311-317 Camberwell Road, Camberwell (1938-9).<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding this, in some ways Winbush's design is advanced stylistically, and could easily be mistaken for a design of the later 1950s or even the early 1960s.<sup>8</sup> It has a shadow box in thin concrete piers to either side of a paneled entry façade and generally accentuates lightly drawn lines and planes. These contrast with the generally weightier texture and scale in other public utility buildings of the period, such as Seabrook and Fildes' Brunswick MFB No. 4 or the Tramways Board's similarly configured Moreland electricity depot, of 1935.<sup>9</sup> The elevation over the Kew Fire Station entry also resembles the panel-facade on Seabrook and Fildes Barnett's Building in Bourke Street, Melbourne, of the same period, but the details and materials usage have closer parallels to Arthur Baldwinson's *Beaufort* Buildings at Essendon Airport, of c.1940-1.<sup>10</sup> There, Baldwinson abandoned the rounded corners and more obvious streamlining that had marked his earlier designs with Stephenson and Turner, and adopted a formally much simpler, more abstract combination of red brick interspersed with horizontal and vertical sun screen blades in reinforced concrete. Winbush's MFB station has that detailing as well: virtually the only '1930s' elements left are the rings round the flagpole base and the relieving brick ribbon between the windows. The MFB crest was heraldic: traditional emblems were generally accepted in Modernist architecture at that time and recurred in work by both Stephenson and Turner and Seabrook and Fildes.<sup>11</sup>

By contemporary standards the MFB Station was an unusual building in Kew, where pitched tiled roofs and complex elevations were the general rule. These qualities were accentuated by its relatively open

site, at a former Outer Circle railway crossing near the now-demolished East Kew station. In Boroondara more generally, its closest counterparts were Holeproof's two hosiery factories designed by Gawler and Drummond, situated in Whitehorse Road, Deepdene (demolished) and Box Hill, both of 1940-1 (now part of Whitehorse TAFE College), both with pitched roofs but similarly configured elevations. Other buildings with similarly treated exteriors, such as Boyd, Pethebridge and Bell's Dainty Frock factory at 114-6 Church Street Hawthorn (1946-8, heavily altered)<sup>12</sup> and the Herald Gravure Printery in Burwood Road Hawthorn (now demolished), did not appear until after World War II.

### **Assessment Against Criteria**

#### *Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria*

*CRITERION A: The historical importance, association with or relationship to Boroondara's history of the place or object.*

35-37 Belford Road, Kew, is of local historical significance for its role as the Kew Fire Brigade Station between 1941 and the 1990s.

*CRITERION D: The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as a part of a class or type of places or objects.*

The former Kew MFB Station at 35-7 Belford Road, Kew, is a good, representative and externally intact example of a large suburban fire station of the late interwar period, which demonstrates its original use through the retention of details such as the central flagpole and MFB crest, but also through its overall form.

*CRITERION E: The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.*

Architecturally, 135-7 Belford Road, Kew, is a good example of the Modernism dominant in smaller and medium-sized institutional buildings in Melbourne by 1940-1, Winbush's design comparing favourably with contemporary Seabrook and Fildes and Percy Everett designs. It is distinguished by a plainness and elegance in its massing and detailing which sets it aside from earlier Streamlined Moderne treatments, and is a key example in Boroondara of Modern architecture of the period.

### **Statement of Significance**

Designed by architect Harry Winbush in 1940-41, the former MFB fire station at 135-137 Belford Road, Kew is of local historical and architectural significance. It is a good, representative and externally intact example of a large suburban fire station of the late interwar period, which demonstrates its original use through the retention of details such as the central flagpole and MFB crest, but also through its overall form. Architecturally, the building stands as a good example of the Modernism dominant in smaller and medium-sized institutional buildings in Melbourne by 1940-1, Winbush's design comparing favourably with contemporary Seabrook and Fildes and Percy Everett designs. It is distinguished by a plainness and elegance in its massing and detailing which sets it aside from earlier Streamlined Moderne treatments, and is a key example in Boroondara of Modern architecture of the period.

### **Grading Review**

Unchanged

### **Recommendations**

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme.

### **Identified By**

Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, Kew Urban Conservation Study, 1988

### **References**

*General:* Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, Kew Urban Conservation Study, 1988, G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded places study (draft), 2001.

<sup>1</sup> *Pers comm.* Christine Phillips (M. Arch. Candidate, University of Melbourne, thesis topic The Modernist Work of Seabrook & Fildes)

<sup>2</sup> Rogers, Dorothy. *A history of Kew*, 1973, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> City of Boroondara Building File 40/408/01142 Part 1.

<sup>4</sup> Drawings and details of conversion sourced from the City of Boroondara Building File 40/408/01142 Part 1.

<sup>5</sup> As, for example at 264 Bluff Road Sandringham, of 1924, and Atherton Road Oakleigh, 1931, at the Grant Street corner, opposite the present Edmond and Corrigan design. Dates and Sandringham details sourced from Allom Lovell, City of Bayside Heritage Review, v. 2/1: Building citations, pp. 207-9.

<sup>6</sup> Allom Lovell & Associates, City of Moreland Heritage Review, 1999, pp. 105-8.

<sup>7</sup> Graeme Butler, Camberwell Conservation study 1991, vol. 4, pp. 60-1.

<sup>8</sup> It has, in fact, a similar appearance to Stuart Calder's MFB No. 2, in Batman Street West Melbourne, of 1961.

<sup>9</sup> Details sourced from Allom Lovell & Associates, City of Moreland Heritage Review, volumes 2/1, pp. 105-8; 2/2, pp. 615-6.

<sup>10</sup> For manufacture of the Bristol *Beaufort* bomber and, later, the *Beaufighter*. Details sourced from Godden Mackay Logan, Essendon Airport Buildings 46, 47, 61 and 64: Heritage Assessment and Archival record, Sydney, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> As with their Brunswick Fire station.

<sup>12</sup> Details sourced from C Hamann, *Three Leaders of Modern Architecture in Melbourne*, Ph D thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 1978, and *Transition*, 38, p. 195.