

2.1 Yarra Falls Precinct**Abbotsford****Location***parts of Johnston and Turner Streets and Trenerry Crescent***History**

Trenerry Crescent, like Victoria Crescent to the south-east, followed the line of the river and separated the larger riverside allotments from the smaller subdivisions further west. Initially a residential area, the river frontage allotments along Trenerry Crescent underwent a transformation from residential to industrial uses from c.1900, D Stretton and Company's Flour Mills was one industry west of Trenerry Crescent while the Melbourne Flour Milling Company was located at Dight's Mill on the Yarra below Trenerry Crescent. The Shelmerdine's Yarra Hat Works were operational by this date, and a quarry was in existence further south.

By the late 1880s there was also a small residential subdivision at the flood-prone end of Turner Street, east of Trenerry Crescent, which was later replaced by industrial buildings after flood walls were built adjacent to the Yarra Falls complex (Fig 2).

The former Cable Tram Depot was built in 1887 for the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Co. The previous year, the site comprised four 45 foot blocks of vacant land owned by George Sprigg, Jenkin Collier, Frederick Clapp and Horace Wilcox. The cable tram first ran along Johnston Street to the river on 21 December 1887. By 1900, the company was known as the Melbourne Tramway Co, and the Rate Books list a car house and offices on the site. The cable tram service operated until 1939, when it was replaced by a bus service, which still operates today.

Yarra Falls Spinning Co. Pty Ltd. was established in 1917. The company manufactured spinning yarns, and was established partly as a response to 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 company was closely tied to the British firms of Sir Titus Salt 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.

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. Indeed, by the late 1920s, the inventory of property owned by Yarra Falls Spinning Mills, one of Melbourne's major textile producers, was extensive. The industrial complexes along Trenerry Crescent continued to expand until the mid-20th century when the Byfas building was constructed by an offshoot of Yarra Falls to produce textiles during World War Two.

The Yarra Falls factory in Johnston Street began to be built in 1917 on vacant land in Johnston Street, between the cable tram depot and the Yarra River. Prior to this, in 1913-14, the site was occupied by a brick house, and in 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 £3,020, and by

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1930-31, the value of the complex had risen to £4,650.¹ The Byfas building was built c.1940.

Since the 1970s, these large industrial and mill buildings have gradually been decommissioned and progressively recycled for light industrial or commercial uses.

Description

The Yarra Falls Precinct is a small area bounded by the Yarra River to the east, Johnston Street to the south, Trenerry Crescent to the west and Turner Street to the north (Fig 1). The two large factory complexes, the Yarra Falls Spinning Mills and the Byfas Factory, together with the former Cable Tram Depot, dominate the precinct. On Johnston Street are three small residences dating from the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

The Byfas Building, at Nos. 8-12 Trenerry Crescent (fig 3), is a large red brick two- and three-storey building constructed c.1940 and designed in the Moderne style. It is an interesting composition which incorporates a number of distinctive elements including narrow brick string courses, streamlining, narrow bands of windows, textured brick panels and original signage and flagpole (Fig 3).

The former Cable Tram Depot at 438 Johnston Street, Abbotsford (on the corner of Trenerry Crescent, Fig 4) is a large single-storey timber-framed building, clad with vertical sheets of metal decking. The hipped roof is clad in corrugated iron. There are several continuous bays of iron-framed windows which are divided into multiple panes with glazing bars and incorporate hopper sashes. The western and southern facades have been partly remodelled. An extension to the north is probably part of the former depot.

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 pressed cement 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 dentillated 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. A tall red brick chimney bears the name of the factory.

The residences are situated between the entrance building of the spinning mills complex and the former tram depot. The 19th century house is a double-fronted villa of brick construction with a hipped corrugated iron roof and a verandah extending across the facade. The adjacent pair of Edwardian cottages are identical, and have block-fronted facades and gabled corrugated iron roofs.

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

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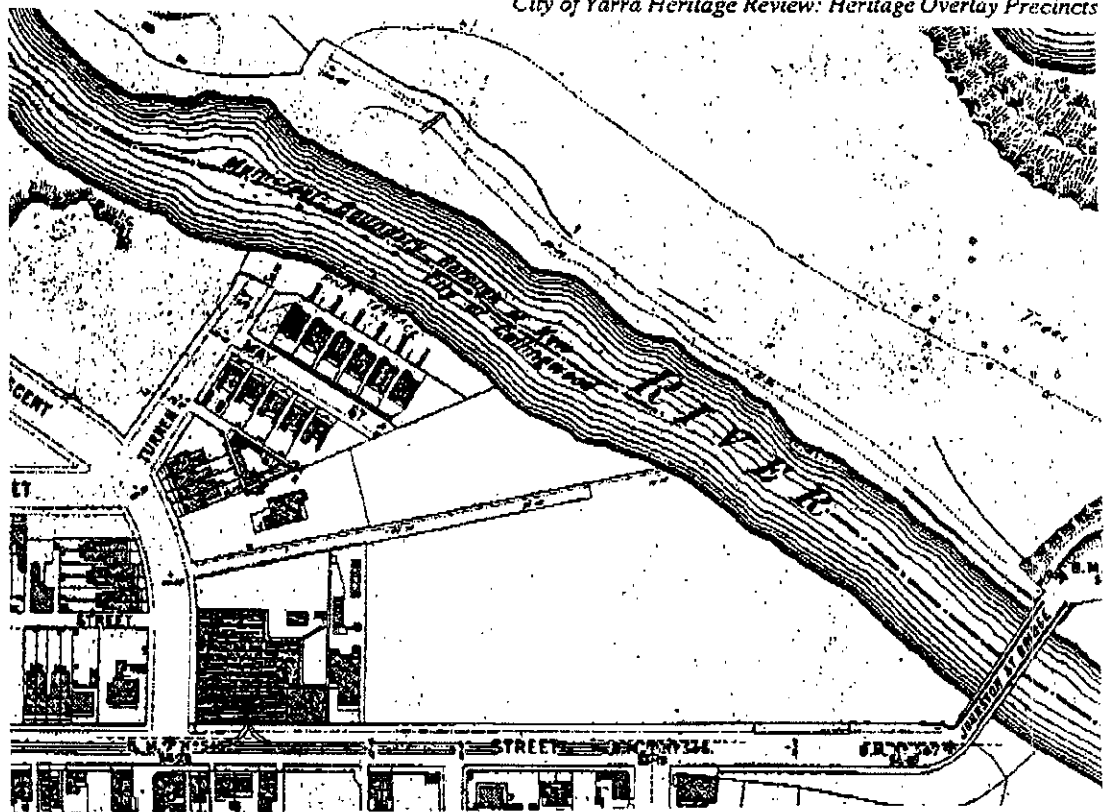


Figure 2 MMBW plan of Trenergy Crescent and Johnston Street, Abbotsford, c.1895

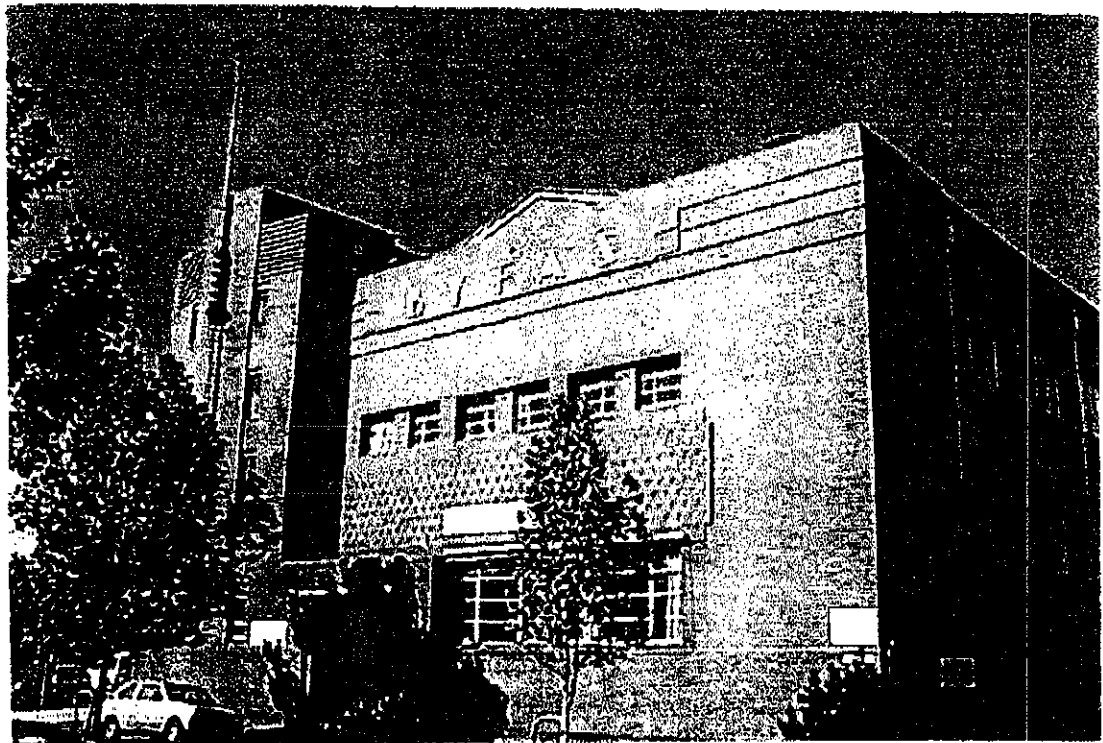


Figure 3 The Byfas Building

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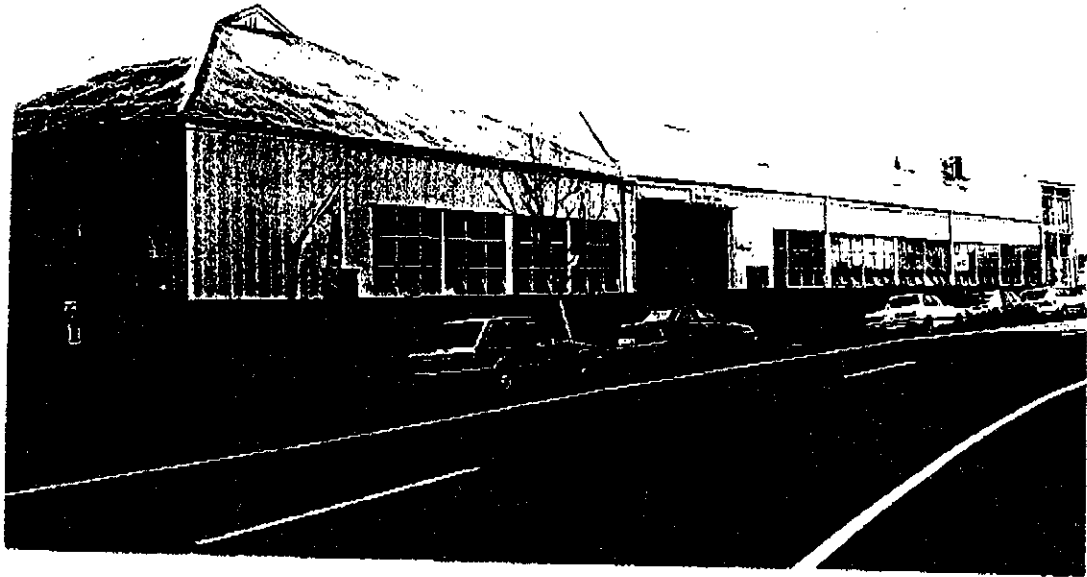


Figure 4 The former Cable Tram Depot, Trenerry Crescent elevation

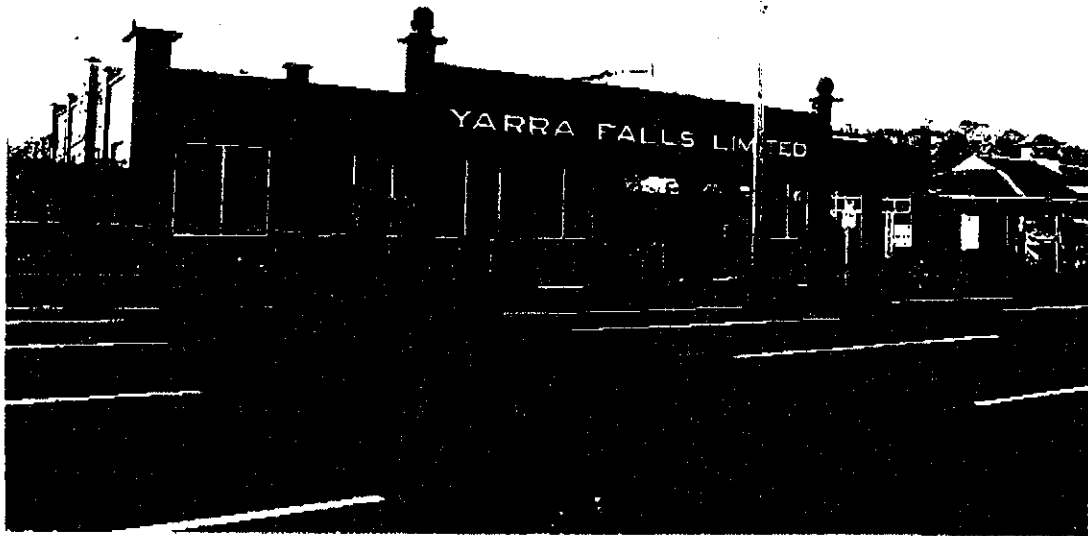


Figure 5 The Yarra Falls Spinning Mills, 452 Johnston Street

*City of Yarra Heritage Review: Heritage Overlay Precincts***Statement of Significance**

The Yarra Falls Precinct is of historical and architectural significance. The three large surviving complexes, the former Cable Tram Depot, the Yarra Falls Spinning Mills and the Byfas Building, demonstrate the importance of Abbotsford as one of Melbourne's key inner suburban centres of industrial activity. Its location on the river is illustrative of the role of the Yarra River as a waste dump for industrial effluent in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The former Cable Tram Depot at 438 Johnston Street is of local historical significance and architectural interest. Historically, it is the only remaining structure associated with the former Johnston Street cable tram service. Architecturally, it is a relatively modest structure, partly clad in corrugated iron, which has been considerably altered. It is less substantial in construction and less ornate in decoration than many of Melbourne's other cable tram structures.

The Yarra Falls Spinning Mills at 452 Johnston Street 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.

The Byfas Building at 8-12 Trennery Crescent, associated with the Yarra Falls Spinning Mills, is of architectural significance. The building is a large and distinctive example of the Moderne style; of note are its decorative brick elements and the original signage and flagpole.

The following buildings are of significance within the heritage overlay precinct:

- Yarra Falls Spinning Mills, 452 Johnston Street, Abbotsford
- Byfas Building, 8-12 Trennery Crescent, Abbotsford

Original Sources

Andrew Ward. *Collingwood Conservation Study*. 1995.

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