



## Identification and location

Name of Place	Ajax Pumps Pty Ltd (factory)		
Other names	Wiltshire Files Company Pty Ltd (factory) McPhersons Ltd (factory)		
Address	213-221 Sunshine Road Tottenham		
Place Identifier	8826		
Heritage significance	City		
Creation dates	1939-40	Map (Melway)	41 C4
Boundary description	The extent of the current allotment		
Local Government Area	City of Maribyrnong		
Ownership Type	Private – subleased		

## Description

Site type: factory

### Physical Description

This site actually comprised two discrete but affiliated factories: that of the Wiltshire Files Company (fronting Sunshine Rd) and that of the Ajax Pumps Company (at the rear).

Until the recent demolition of certain portions, the former Ajax Pumps building was a sprawling single-storey complex that comprised the original sawtooth-roofed factory, enclosed on the north and west sides by red brick walling with rendered parapet capping, with later additions to the north, south and east. The original portion is now most easily interpreted on the western frontage. Here, the façade incorporates a curved bay (formerly containing the main entrance to the offices), a squat rectilinear tower (actually a water tower) and two vehicular doorways. The façade is enlivened by horizontal rendered trim above windows and doors, while the tower has similar fin-like elements that emphasise its verticality. It also includes a clock without numerals – a ubiquitous and recurring element favoured by progressive Modernist architects in the late 1930s.

The additions to the south, completed in 1947 and 1965, echo the style and materials of the original building, having similar stark red brick walls and capped parapets, with matching rendered surrounds to tall rectangular windows. The 1947 addition incorporates a distinctive corner entrance (which presumably replaced the function of the original 1939 entry in the curved bay), comprising a multi-paned window wall that opens onto a porch sheltered by a perforated flat roof supported on a row of posts. The 1973 additions, to the north of the original factory, were completed in a more contemporary idiom, with fin-like brick piers creating bays with large windows and brick spandrels, and a flat roof with a prominent fascia clad in metal tray decking.

### Condition

Portions of the complex are in poor condition. Some elements have been demolished, roof cladding has been removed, window glazing has been broken, and the interior otherwise subject to vandalism. Nevertheless, much of the original external fabric along the western frontage – including red brick walls, rendered trim, clock tower and office entrance porch – still remains in fair-to-good condition.

## Integrity

Those parts of the building built in 1939, 1947 and 1965 are consistent in materials, form and detailing and, even in their damaged state, remain as a cohesive whole. The 1973 addition to the north side is less sympathetic, with one particular element – the extension of the tray-deck roof fascia along the curved bay of the 1939 building – that must be considered as intrusive. Much of the original northern façade of the 1939 building (including a porthole window) still remains intact within the 1973 addition.

## Context

Adjacent to the near contemporary Olex Cables factory

## Threats

The building is under threat from further deterioration due to neglect and vandalism.

## History

It was in 1860 that Scottish immigrant Thomas McPherson founded a hardware and machinery business in Melbourne that grew to become one of the largest and most successful of its type in Australia. The company changed direction from 1929 after Thomas' grandson, William Edward McPherson (1898-1950) became its governing directing. Anticipating the start of the War, McPherson pushed the company towards the local manufacture of goods that had previously been imported. Consequently, the late 1930s saw McPhersons expand considerably with the acquisition of several other companies, and the creation of subsidiaries that included the Australian Abrasives Pty Ltd, the Associated Machine Tools Pty Ltd and Ajax Pumps Pty Ltd. Also in 1938, McPherson sponsored and funded the formation of the Wiltshire Files Company Pty Ltd, launched in association with Frederick (later Sir Frederick) Wiltshire.

A large site in Sunshine Road, Sunshine, was subsequently developed with new factories for two of these new companies: Wiltshire Files and Ajax Pumps. The former building was completed in 1939, and the latter in 1940. Both were designed by the noted Moderne architect Stuart Calder (1893-1991) working in association with Reid & Pearson. These two firms had an ongoing association with McPhersons, having collaborated on the design of the company's new head office and showroom at 546 Collins Street (1934-35). The connection, however, ran even deeper: McPherson's father (one-time premier of Victoria) and Calder's father (the first Chairman of the Country Roads Board) were close friends, while architect John Pearson just happened to be McPherson's nephew.

The Wiltshire Files factory was a simple sawtooth-roofed building clad in cement sheet. Its principal façade, to Sunshine Road, was enlivened by raised mouldings that, as reported in a contemporary journal, 'provided a most modern horizontal line effect'. The elongated façade also incorporated vertical panels 'giving the impression of fluted columns – an inexpensive method of obtaining an unusual and attractive effect'.

The Ajax Pumps building at the rear, however, demonstrated a slightly different approach. Here, the similarly utilitarian sawtooth-roofed factory component was clad in cement sheet to the south and east sides – in anticipation of proposed future extensions – while the north and west sides were finished with 'permanent' walls of red brick. This brick portion, incorporating the offices, was articulated by rendered parapet capping and projecting window hoods, with an entry marked by a curved bay inset with glass blocks and, alongside, a squat clock tower (actually a water tower) with its verticality emphasised by tall rendered fins and a flagpole. The journal *Decoration & Glass*, which illustrated the new factory on the front cover of its issue for September 1940, was moved to comment that, 'the building presents a pleasing appearance suggestive of industrial efficiency'.

The same source noted that the completed building was only the first section of a 'comprehensive scheme which will be developed as occasion permits'. The Ajax Pumps factory was duly extended in 1947 and 1965, perhaps by the same architects, as a similar aesthetic of red brick and rendered trim remained consistent throughout. Further additions in 1973 broke this tradition, utilising larger windows, brick piers and a flat roof with broad fascia clad in metal decking.



## Thematic Context

Australian Principal Theme

Manufacturing and processing

PAHT Subtheme

Manufacturing and processing

## Cultural Significance

### *What is Significant?*

The McPhersons factory complex in Sunshine Road, Sunshine, originally comprised two factories that were erected in 1939-40 for two subsidiary companies associated with McPhersons, the prominent hardware and machinery enterprise founded by Thomas McPherson in 1860. The first factory, built for the Wiltshire File Company (1938-39), was a utilitarian sawtooth-roofed building clad in cement sheeting, with an elongated façade to Sunshine Road, enlivened with horizontal mouldings. The second factory, for the Ajax Pumps Company (1939-40) was more architectural considered, with red brick facades in the streamlined Moderne style that incorporated a curved bay and clock tower, typical of the idiom. Both buildings were designed by noted Moderne architect Stuart Calder in association with Reid & Pearson, who enjoyed a long and fruitful association with the various branches of McPherson's company.

### *How is it significant?*

The complex is of aesthetic, architectural and historical significance to the City of Maribyrnong.

### *Why is it significant?*

Historically, the factory complex is significant for its associations with this important and long-running Australian company, and, more specifically, with the expansion of its manufacturing activities in the 1930s – a significant initiative of then director William Edward McPherson, who anticipated the start of the War and consequently sought to develop Australia's self-sufficiency by making tools and equipment that had been previously imported.

More broadly, the factory complex provides evidence of the industrial development of the western suburbs – a strong and recurring theme in that area since the late nineteenth century. The factory demonstrates, in particular, the intense industrial boom of the inter-war period that saw numerous factories erected in Sunshine and environs (and, indeed, along this part of Sunshine Road)

Aesthetically, the Ajax factory is significant as a fine example of the streamlined Moderne style as applied to an industrial complex. Although the building has been altered, and subject to vandalism and neglect, it nevertheless demonstrates much of the typical progressive character of a late 1930s factory, most notably by its horizontal composition, its use of face bricks with rendered trim, and its curved entrance bay and squat tower with ubiquitous numberless clock.

Architecturally, the McPhersons factory complex is significant for its associations with architect Stuart Calder, a progressive designer who was one of the leading exponents of the Moderne style in Melbourne in the 1930s. Even in its currently poor condition, the Ajax Pumps building – with its streamlined form, curved bay and clock tower – can be considered as one of Calder's most distinguished and published projects, along with the McPherson's head office in Collins Street (1936) and the celebrated grandstand at the Hawthorn Football ground (1938).

## Comparative examples

Historically, the factory can be compared to numerous contemporaneous factories along the major roadways through the Western suburbs, such as the Olympic Cables factory (1940), also in Sunshine Road, the Southern Can Company (1937) and the former Apex Belting factory (1940), both in Geelong Road, and the British Australian Carpet Manufacturers factory in Paramount Road (1944).

Historically and architecturally, the factory can also be compared to other factories designed by Stuart Calder in the late 1930s, such as the Diamond Cutlery Company factory in Collingwood (1938) and the Associated Machine Tools workshop in Kensington (1938). The latter represents a particularly pertinent historic comparison as, like both Wiltshire Files and Ajax Pumps, this company was affiliated with McPhersons Pty Ltd.



Aesthetically, the Ajax Pump Factory has stylistic similarities with some of the contemporaneous factories in the area identified above. Its streamlined form and use of a tower-like element are most comparable to the Southern Can Company (1937) and the former Apex Belting factory (1940) in Geelong Road. The external appearance of the Ajax Pump factory also has strong similarities with an example outside the municipality – the premises of Stokes Foundry Pty Ltd in Fallon Street, Brunswick (c.1939; demolished), designed by the noted Modernists architects Seabrook & Fildes.

## Recommendations

Victorian Heritage Register	No
Register of the National Estate	No
National Trust Register	Recommended
Other Heritage Listings	No
Planning Scheme Protection	Recommended
External paint controls?	Yes
Internal alterations controls?	No
Tree controls?	Yes
Included on VHR under the Act	No
Outbuildings & fences not exempt	
Prohibited uses may be permitted	

## Recommendations

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

To encourage continuation of the original use of the place

## Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

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

For associations with the important firm of McPhersons Ltd, and specifically with the bold initiative implemented by W E McPherson in the late 1930s to expand the company's manufacturing activities, and thus achieve national self-sufficiency, with the then-imminent threat of war.

*F1 Importance for their technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation of achievement*

As a representative example of the Streamlined Moderne style as applied to an industrial building, which was characterised by a dominant horizontal composition, stark wall surfaces, curved projecting bays, squat tower-like elements and the use of glass bricks and porthole windows.

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

Associations with William Edward McPherson (1898-1950), a leading Australian industrialist who developed the family company – originally founded by his grandfather in 1860 – to a new level of manufacturing excellence in the years leading up to the Second War War, and beyond.

Also of significance for associations with noted architect Stuart Calder, a progressive designer and one of the leading exponents of the Moderne style in Melbourne in the 1930s.

## Documentation

### References

'Wiltshire File Co Pty Ltd, new factory', *Building*, 23 December 1939, p 78

'Ajax pumps, new factory building', *Building*, 24 August 1940, p 27.

'The Ajax Pump Factory', *Decoration & Glass*, September 1940, cover and pp 27-28.

Grow, Robin. 'Stuart Calder: Designer & Preserver', *Spirit of Progress*, V, 4 (2004), pp 10-12.

Heintz, Alfred. *McPhersons of Australia*. Melbourne: McPhersons Ltd, 1965.

Strahan, Frank, "McPherson, William Edward (1898-1950)" in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 15, pp 274-275.

*Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, various.

## Data Recording

Assessed by

Gary Vines

Assessed date:

28/2/2000

Re-assessed by

Heritage Alliance

Re-assessed date:

12/7/2006



View from North



View from west of south extension