

Identification and location

Name of Place:

Other Name

Address

Place Identifier

Heritage Significance

Creation date(s): **Map (Melway)**

Boundary description

Local Government Area:

Ownership Type

Description

Site Type: manufacture

Physical Description

Complex of factory buildings of predominantly saw-tooth roof form with brick walls. The external facade presents a unified tall parapetted red-brick wall with generally steel hopper sash windows and steel lintels (segmental arches to earliest parts). Internal structure is timber king-post truss and sawtooth truss, with some later sections in welded steel. Modern clear span stores have been added to the western end of the site. The rope walk which was originally 1500 foot in length was contained within the long, low, gable roofed building along the northern boundary on the south side of Kinnear Street, which originally extended through to Gordon Street. This is a king-post truss, gable roof form structure of timber framing and corrugated iron cladding. The roof was reclad in new zincalume about 4 years ago, at which time the small towered structure that contained the rope tensioning equipment was removed. At last internal inspection in 1997, the rope walk retained original equipment including the belt driven rope twisting machinery and the traveller which ran on c30cm diam. steel flanged wheels on light gauge rails. It is believed that at least some of this has been removed. The original western extent of the rope walk is still identifiable by an undeveloped area at the corner of Kinnear and Gordon Streets which has a concrete slab, although the building structure stops well short of this point. Further inspection is required to determine the extent of survival of this machinery.

Distinctive early buildings are evident in the north east corner of the site. The sections with a double hipped roof containing clerestory lights and a roof lantern and the long gabled rope walk parallel to Kinnear Street are probably the earliest parts. Also in the north west corner of the site, the double timber doors in a segmentally-arched carriage entrance may indicate the original loading out and stables.

One of the lantern roofed sections includes a timber panelled mezzanine/second storey which indicates the former drafting office. The original boiler chimney survives although reduced in

height, while the former coal fired boilers are partly intact.

Condition

In good condition and externally intact. Internally the structure is original although equipment has been replaced. The rope walk has recently been reclad, and shortened, and original rope making machinery was in place at last inspection (1997)

Integrity

Externally the works is intact to its Post War state with accretions rather than reconstruction being the pattern of redevelopment. The progressive development of the site is shown in the cohesive red brick elevations to Ballarat Road which represent various periods of construction from the 1900s to 1960s. The Rope walk and its machinery have been altered, but at last inspection was still relatively intact, - further inspection is required.

Context

Located in a residential precinct on the main road, former adjacent housing has been demolished as the factory expanded.

Threats

With rezoning of other industrial land in the area, there may be pressure for closure and redevelopment of the site in the future.

History

George Kinnear (b.1825 - d.1902) came originally from Nottingham, England via Canada and the US, in 1864 to install rope-making equipment in Melbourne from the New Jersey company Todd & Rafferty. He then took a position with James Miller & Co to manage their new Port Melbourne rope works. In 1874 Kinnear established his own rope walk in Queen's Park, Essendon and later moved the factory to a one acre block in Kensington. The firm's name changed to George Kinnear & Sons and by 1890 had acquired two spindle automatic spinning frames for a well established business manufacturing rope, hay bands and leather lashings. In 1899, George's two sons, Edward H. and Henry Humphrey, purchased the business of their father and three years later, in 1902, moved the machinery from there to the present Footscray site, purchasing 4 acres initially which was subsequently expanded to 10 acres (4 hectares). The factory, which included a continuous covered rope walk along Kinnear Street, was erected on an undeveloped triangular block facing Ballarat Road. A small strip on the north side was created for the rope walk, originally 1500 feet length, although only about 1000 feet were used in later years. This was, however, rebuilt after being destroyed by fire in 1908. The brothers resumed manufacture within the short space of four months, having made a quick (for the times) trip to England to buy new machinery.

The Kinnear brothers may have been involved in the subdivision of a large block of land to the north into 90 large blocks on Gordon, Empire and Eldridge Streets as the Workingmen's Estate, with the blocks large enough to ensure occupants could supplement their income by growing their own fruit and vegetables, run chickens and the like. Few of the original timber cottages survived the massive flat building boom of the 1960s and 70s.

In the 1930s Kinnear's pioneered the production in Australia of sewing twines, netting and

butchers twine as well as specialty yarns for the manufacture of flax canvas for the navy, railways, postal service and general consumers. In 1958 Kinnear's began production of carpet yarn adapting their existing flax spinning technology. By the 1970s technological changes forced the company to adapt its traditional production methods to new materials such as man-made fibres, rayon, nylon and polypropylene. In the post war period production of carpet yard expanded and Kinnear's took a substantial interest in a Sydney-based tufted carpet manufacturing company. This wound down in the mid 1970s, and the firm began importing natural and artificial fibre cordage in the 80s as well as manufacturing new products such as artificial sporting surfaces. They also took over and ran the former Donaghy's rope works in Geelong until its recent closure.

Edward went on to become Managing Director following World War II, when the firm boasted it had installed the most modern equipment available and was manufacturing all types of ropes, cordage, twines, yarns and threads, which were marketed under the single brand of "EMU".

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

Kinnear's rope works is of State historical and architectural significance as one of only a handful of traditional rope making factories to survive in Victoria and one of only two factories which retain a rope walk. The place is of technical significance for the unique rope walk and rope laying machinery. It is of architectural significance as a unique purpose-built industrial building which demonstrates a range of factory building types including the exceptionally long rope walk building, the distinctive saw-tooth roofed twine-spinning buildings, the lantern-roofed boiler and engine houses, and the clerestory-lit and board-lined drafting office.

Along with Miller's Yarraville rope works this is the largest and oldest surviving in Melbourne and the only works retaining evidence of the rope walk. (Criterion A4) The rope walk along Kinnear St. may be the last surviving example of this form of building in Melbourne, with one other known in Victoria (Donaghy's in Geelong). (Criterion B2) The rope walk began as an uncovered path or a long alley where strands of fibre were run out to a winding machine which twisted them together. More elaborate systems involved steam power and a building over the walk. (Criterion D2)

Kinnear's is, however, the only early ropeworks still operating in its original premises in Victoria, Millers Brunswick and Yarraville works being long closed and Donaghy's having closed more recently.

The works is also of historical significance for its association with George Kinnear, who was the pioneer of rope making in Victoria, and his descendants in the firm who were important local identities who had influence in Civic matters and at the industrial level Statewide. (Criterion H1)

Comparative Examples

Along with Miller's Yarraville rope works, and the single building which remains from Millers Brunswick works (now converted for TAFE use) this is the largest and oldest surviving in Melbourne. Some elements, in particular the rope walk, compare with Donaghy's in Geelong.

Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register

Register of the National Estate

National Trust Register

Other Heritage Listings

Planning Scheme Protection

External Paint Controls Apply?

Internal Alteration Controls Apply?

Tree Controls Apply?

Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act

Are there Outbuildings or 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. This should clearly identify internal machinery and fittings which contribute to the sites significance.
- To encourage continuation of the original use of the place.

Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

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.

Kinnear's is an example of an industry which grew to meet nineteenth century industrial and commercial requirements such as supplying ships ropes, binder twines and other fibres in a self contained economy, which has adapted to modern circumstances.

B2 Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practised, in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest.

Manufacture of twisted rope on a rope walk has ceased in Australia. This and Donaghy's Geelong are the only known surviving examples of the process.

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).

Rope manufacture was an essential component in development of a range of industries and activities with shipping, agriculture and transport dependent on its products.

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

The development of rope making was pioneered by the likes of George Kinnear who was the dominant personality in the rope industry. He, and his descendants in the firm were important local identities who had influence in Civic matters and at the industrial level.

Documentation

References

ADB 9 Kinnear, E.H. & H.H.

Ferguson, J. pers.comm.

Footscray's First Fifty Years

Footscray's First 100 years

Forging Ahead

125th Anniversary Celebration pp 43-4.

Vines, G. Geelong Ropeworks heritage assessment (report to Heritage Victoria)

Data recording

Assessed By

Assessed Date: