

## Identification and location

**Name of Place:** **Melbourne Woollen Mills**

**Other Name** Yarraville Woollen Mills, Australian Porcelain Insulator Co. Morlynn Ceramics P/L.

**Address** 2 Banool Avenue

Yarraville

**Place Identifier** 8739

**Heritage Significance** *national*

**Creation date(s):** 1869 - 1871, 1920C

**Map (Melway)** 42 A10

**Boundary description** bounded on the west by the railway, on the south by Stony Creek, on the east by Banool Ave. and on the north by housing

**Local Government Area:** City of Maribyrnong

**Ownership Type** Private

## Description

**Site Type:** manufacture

### Physical Description

Most of the externally visible construction is of 1920-1940 origin but a bluestone wall with pilasters and arched openings survives parallel to and about 8 m. inside the eastern wall of the factory introducing a remarkably intact mid-nineteenth century industrial complex, hidden from view by later construction.

This first-seen wall corresponds to the east wall featured in an 1882 photo of the Melbourne Woollen Mills. Much of the central area of the factory is of 19th century origin with substantial bluestone walls forming three sides of the main production space. Another wall, also with arches, marks the former spinning hall, and a two storey brick and stone section identifies the (probably) centrally placed boiler/engine house. The major missing component is the chimney which stood on the east side, and may survive as archaeological evidence in the form of the base and flue, beneath the present concrete floor.

The painted word "porcelain" (part of a larger sign) is visible on one elevated part from a high vantage point to the north identifying the subsequent occupant. Two bottle kilns are shown on the 1900 MMBW plan but could not be identified in the factory, but again may survive as footings. A photo dated c.1882 and the 1895 MMBW plan appear to record the central core of the factory which has been enclosed in later construction.

### Condition

In good condition

### Integrity

The majority of the original woollen mill can be discerned and missing components can be

inferred from internal clues (eg. breaks in construction of later additions) the significant saw tooth roof has had the uprights replaced by a steel lattice truss slung below the timber trusses, and the external cladding has been replaced.

### Context

In an isolated location adjacent to the Williamstown Railway and Stony Creek on the south edge of the Yarraville residential area.

### Threats

Future redevelopment may be likely as the building has probably outlived its usefulness for the present manufacturer.

## History

The Melbourne Woollen Mills were one of, if not the first manufacturer of worsted woollens in Victoria. Established by the brothers Edwin and Walter Gaunt, who had gained their expertise in the north of England and were significant in the development of the woollen industry in Australia, the company was for a long time the largest of its kind, but collapsed in 1884. Its assets were taken over for 21,530 pounds in 1885 to form the Yarraville Woollen Mills with John Tayler as manager until 1889. However, by 1891 the Bacchus Marsh Brick & Pottery Co had taken over the site, followed by the Melbourne Pottery Co in 1895. By 1921 it had become the Australian Porcelain Insulator Co. which continued into the 1950s. Presently the property is occupied by Morlynn Ceramics Pty Ltd which still produces High Tension insulators.

This site is particularly complex in terms of its industrial archaeology and company history. The original works for the Melbourne Woollen Mills were substantially built in local bluestone and typical of mills of the period. Melbourne Woollen Mills were one of the dominant mills in the 1870s and 80s and pioneered the industry in the region. The buildings employed the standard British practice of single story sawtooth roof sheds and is probably the oldest surviving example of the saw tooth roof in Victoria, and possibly Australia.

The later development of the site saw it switch to ceramics in an unusual reuse of an existing factory for a very different process. A series of changes of ownership in the 1890s reflect the unstable financial conditions of the depression years and by the beginning of the twentieth century stability had returned and the works prospered in its new role. The Australian Porcelain Insulator Co. which produced high tension insulators up to 500,000 volts was one of the largest industries of its type in the southern hemisphere in the 1940s. This combination of factors makes the site extremely interesting from the point of view of understanding the processes of change and development in manufacturing technology and industrial history in Victoria.

### Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:  Local Theme

## Cultural Significance

The Melbourne Woollen Mills/Morlynn Ceramics P/L. site is significant as a rare and substantially intact example of mid nineteenth century industrial building specifically adapted to the needs of a woollen mill. (Criterion C2)

The building is historically significant as one of the earliest woollen mills in Australia, the first woollen mill in Melbourne (Criterion A4) and for its association with the prominent mill builders and managers Edwin and Walter Gaunt. (Criterion H1)

It is also important as an early example of recycling of an industrial building for other uses, in this case, its conversion to a pottery in 1889, and as a major manufacturer of porcelain insulators in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The building is architecturally significant for the use of ashlar bluestone masonry featuring prominent string courses and pilasters and arched openings with quoin-work of projecting, drafted-edge bluestone blocks and decorated keystones. (Criterion E1)

The building may also attain the level of potential national architectural significance as the earliest surviving example of the sawtooth roof form in Victoria and the earliest known example in Australia, with the large timber-framed saw-tooth roof of the main weaving hall surviving intact apart from the removal of the upright posts and recladding.(Criterion F1)

## Comparative Examples

With the demolition of the Alfred Woollen Mill in Williamstown in 1998, this is the sole survivor of the nineteenth century textile industry in Melbourne. It compares with the several Geelong Mills (Collins Brothers Victorian Woollen and Cloth Co., Godfrey Hirst, etc) but on a smaller scale since it did not achieve the later expansion of the Geelong mills.

## Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
Register of the National Estate	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
National Trust Register	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
Other Heritage Listings	<input type="text" value="WRIHS"/>
Planning Scheme Protection	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
External Paint Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="Yes - bluestone walls and timber framing"/>
Tree Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?	<input type="text" value="No"/>

## Recommendations

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 or historical use of the place.

## Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

*A3 Importance in exhibiting unusual richness or diversity of flora, fauna, landscape or cultural features.*

The textile industry became a significant component in Australia's manufacture, its origins being expressed in this place, along with the process of adaptation for other industries, brick, ceramics, insulators, etc.

*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.*

One of the first and largest manufacturers of Worsted woollens in Victoria, which obtained a Government prize for its production.

*C2 Importance for information contributing to a wider understanding of the history of human occupation of Australia.*

The promotion of textile manufacture was a significant component of Government policy in mid century following the gold rushes and played a key part in economic prosperity in the colony.

*E1 Importance for a community for aesthetic characteristics held in high esteem or otherwise valued by the community.*

The bluestone architecture is a fine, although hidden example of a craft and building material which was characteristic of the Footscray area in the nineteenth century

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

The oldest known surviving example in Australia of a saw-tooth roof factory, a form which was for over 100 years the standard factory form in the world.

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

Associated with the prominent mill builders and managers Edwin and Walter Gaunt, pioneers of the woollen industry in Australia.

## Documentation

### References

Forging Ahead.  
MMBW 160' to 1" Plan 8,  
Local Industries in Footscray and Williamstown 1882,  
Elsam, A History of Williamstown: 54,  
Rate Books 1875-82,  
Footscray's First Fifty Years,  
Sands & McDougall Directories

## Data recording

Assessed By

Assessed Date: