

Identification and location

Name of Place: Olympic Tyre & Rubber

Other Name Beaurepaire's, Dunlop Olympic, Pacific Dunlop.

Address 56-84 Cross Street
Footscray West

Place Identifier 30

Heritage Significance state

Creation date(s): 1933, 1934-1940

Map (Melway) 41 J4

Boundary description The major buildings facing Cross Street to the depth of the sawtooth roof sections behind.

Local Government Area: City of Maribyrnong

Ownership Type Private

Description

Site Type: manufacture

Physical Description

Like many similar-sized factory complexes, this site possesses a stylish office and showroom facade in front of acres of unadorned factory space behind. The sawtooth roof is used extensively, and the facade carries the firm's image in the latest architectural style of coloured brickwork, curves and architectural fins of the advanced Streamlined Moderne. Going a step further than the contemporary factories in Geelong Road, the facade is in three parts with a central pedimented wing set back from a garden court and alluding to the Neo Greek style of the 1920s. The concrete water tank towers above and behind the centre of the pediment and main entrance. Moderne styling is apparent, however, in the flanking two and three story wings which involve rounded forms with a central raised section dividing the fenestration with manganese brick fins.

In imitation of the picture theatres of the period, the eastern wing has the rolling brick curved walls which tuck into a recessed glazed entrance sitting beneath a slim, curved, cantilevered concrete canopy. Either side of this, the formal, classical landscape is evoked by Italian Cypress, typical of the style. The British Hoover factory in London (1932-5) may have been an inspiration or perhaps even the now demolished Firestone Tyre Factory of 1928.

Condition

The buildings are in good condition apart from minor alterations and the removal of some elements, for example the original steel boiler chimney.

Integrity

Intact to its original external condition on the Cross Street elevation apart from minor alterations to openings, considerable reconstruction and alteration to factory buildings behind.

Context

Located opposite Footscray West rail yards, and can be seen as an extension of the early 20th century industrial south of the railway and along Geelong Road.

Threats

None current

History

Frank Beaurepaire, the Olympic swimming champion in the 1908, 1920 and 1924 Games, established the Olympic Tyre and Rubber Co. in Footscray in 1933 following beginnings as a tyre retreader in 1922. The first tyres were manufactured in the Cross Street works in 1934. The company was wholly Australian owned using 90% Australian workmanship at a time when the main competitor, Dunlop, was producing tyres and rubber of British invention. The major architectural facades of the factory were opened in 1939, just before the war and the firm established a competitive position in the rubber industry adapting overseas technology such as tubeless tyres and radial ply to Australian conditions. The company formed a subsidiary, Olympic Cables, to manufacture insulated electric cables in 1940.

Dunlop Australia Ltd. had first manufactured cycle tyres in Australia in 1899 using the British parent company's own invention they began making pneumatic car tyres in Melbourne during the 1900s. Their other products in the prewar period included tennis balls and garden hose, and in 1934 they began producing Dunlopillo foam latex rubber cushioning. Like Dunlop, Beaurepaire undertook research into synthetic rubber during shortages in World War II, and also produced the first Australian-made black inner tubes, previously coloured red by the use of clay fillers. Many later developments, however, such as tubeless tyres, 1955, and radial ply tyres, 1964, were based on overseas precedents, although Beaurepaire adapted them to local conditions. The firm was also responsible for the first vulcanized rubber insulated cables in Australia in 1940 and coaxial cable many years later.

In 1980 The Dunlop and Olympic companies in Australia merged to form Dunlop Olympic Tyres Pty Ltd. and at that time 1000 people were employed at West Footscray. In the 1980s the West Footscray plant was producing aeroplane, earth mover, tractor, truck and light truck tyres and motor tubes, and conducting research and development.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

The Olympic Tyre and Rubber factory is of State architectural and historical significance as one of the most accomplished examples of the Moderne style factory facades which are well represented in the region but otherwise relatively rare. (Criterion A3) The extensive elevation to a main rail line demonstrates architectural flair and a consciousness of the world trends in industrial architecture. The building reflects the high point of the period of industrial development in the region in the 1930s and '40s providing contrast to the historical fact of the depression. (Criterion A4)

Within the framework of the Moderne style current at the time, the architectural treatment presents a distinctive approach and creates a considerable impact. (Criterion F1)

Historically the site is associated with the business and personal success of Sir Frank Bearepaire who achieved fame in his triple Olympic attendance, 1908, 1920, 1924, was Lord Mayor in 1940-42 and knighted in 1940. The building reflects the prosperity of an Australian firm which achieved major successes and innovations in an industry dominated by overseas technologies and competition. (Criterion H1)

The landscape elements of the formal garden remnants, including the Italian Cypress trees contribute to the aesthetic value of the place.

Comparative Examples

The most elaborated and accomplished of a series of relatively large Moderne industrial complexes which became a feature of development in West Footscray in the 1930s and 40s. It compares with the Geelong Road group - Southern Can Co. and Hopkins Odlum.

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

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

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

The Olympic Tyres and Rubber factory is one of the most accomplished of the Moderne industrial building in the region and in Victoria, demonstrating the range of architectural style applied to factories in the mid 20th century.

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.

Olympic Tyres and Rubber is representative of the important industrial development in Victoria initiated from the end of the Depression into the Post War period.

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

Within the framework of the Moderne style current at the time, the architectural treatment presents a distinctive approach and creates a considerable impact.

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

The place is closely associated with Sir Frank Beaurepaire and is the major site (in conjunction with the nearby Olympic Cables) of his industrial interests.

Documentation

References

Forging Ahead, 1947

Butler Footscray Conservation Study, 1989:4-39

City of Footscray 125th Anniversary Celebrations 1984, 40.

The Age 2/6/34

Victorian Year Book 1973. p.748f

Forsythe, *Building for the Age*, p46.

Data recording

Assessed By

Assessed Date: