

Identification and location

Name of Place: Saltwater River Gunpowder Magazine

Other Name Jacks Magazine, Maribyrnong Explosives Depot

Address 1 Gordon Street

Maidstone

Place Identifier 8776

Heritage Significance national

Creation date(s): 1878

Map (Melway) 28 B11

Boundary description Maribyrnong River, the fence on the north side of the Commonwealth land, the top of the escarpment and the south wall with a curtilage of 50 metres.

Local Government Area: City of Maribyrnong

Ownership Type Commonwealth (ADI)

Description

Site Type: magazine

Physical Description

Two substantial bluestone magazines with twin vault interiors, buttressed walls and gabled, slate roofs surrounded by nine metre high earth blast mounds. The high bluestone perimeter wall is of large coursed axe-faced blocks, stepping up the slope. There are two smaller slate-roofed bluestone decanting buildings on the west side of the complex and the timber and galvanised iron unloading buildings at the head of the canal and tramway. These connect with the river, where there was originally a second smaller jetty of which only sunken piles remain. The canal has been blocked at the junction with the river. Additional smaller magazines built during the Second World War on the east side of the blast mounds, complete the complex. Stone lined, semicircular-arched tunnels connect each of the magazines with the loading shed through the blast mounds. Much of the original tramway system is still in place, although in disrepair and dismantled in parts.

This is a powder magazine complex with original buildings of exceptional size and massive bluestone construction, reflecting the aspirations of the colony and aspects of a now obsolete technology. The canal by which the complex was serviced is unusual in Australian terms, and forms a part of the place, as do the tramway lines, the blast mounds, perimeter walls, the zig-zag access roads with its remnants Telford cobbled pavement and gutters, and the more modest brick magazines of the early twentieth century. Also within the boundary walls, remnant vegetation and some introduced landscape have been preserved and protected.

Condition

Good, some former vents (for relieving pressure in a blast and ventilating the buildings) have been opened out into windows. internal painting is only fair, and some roofing is in need of repair. The tramway has been dismantled in parts.

Integrity

Generally original apart from the alterations to the loading wing, a later entrance through the wall, and minor changes to the magazines such as services and window treatments.

Context

Located in the Maribyrnong River valley, which originally provided natural protection, also adjacent to the Colonial, later Commonwealth ammunition factory, now demolished, and in the centre of the 20th century munitions industries of Maribyrnong.

Threats

The redevelopment of the surrounding ammunition factory site, and particularly proposals for new housing in close proximity to the perimeter wall pose serious threats to the site's integrity.

History

The first storage of gunpowder was uncontrolled in the primitive settlement of Melbourne, but by the end of the 1830s a magazine had been provided on the west side of Batman's Hill. This served the community for 20 years before concern for public safety sought its removal. A site was found in Royal Park, but was abandoned for the same reason, followed by a new location in Footscray at the foot of Lyons Street by the river. This was erected in 1858, but almost immediately brought demands for its removal again because of safety concerns. These magazines were primarily constructed to store military gunpowder, but with the gold rushes creating a massive demand for blasting powder once the miners had exhausted the alluvial and got down into the hard rock, then the need for government controlled bonded storage was pressing.

A board of inquiry under Col E.W. Ward was commissioned to consider the proper location of magazines in 1872. He made recommendations for an arsenal and magazine to be sited at Sunbury, but a Footscray committee member W.M. Fehon representing the Victorian Railways, disagreed, suggesting instead a relatively inaccessible and uninhabited site opposite Flemington Racecourse, which was set conveniently between two hills to act as blast mounds.

Constructed 1878 on the site of Blair's former farm (purchased for £5,000) and known as the "Saltwater River Powder Magazine", contracts being let in 1875 to the principal contractor George Cornwall of Williamstown. Further contracts amounted to more than £25,000 including one for copper roof sheeting and lightening conductors to William Smith who also erected three brick cottages for housing magazine staff. William Tozer supplied two horse trucks and the landing cages used to transport powder.

A 400 metre canal connected an elevated loading building outside the perimeter wall with the river and gunpowder barges were drawn up the river to a loading gantry where the cargo could be transferred to tramway trucks which ran into the magazine. An alternative arrangement for unloading from a wharf on the river was also provided with a tramway running parallel to the canal.

In January 1878 it was declared open and gunpowder importers required to lodge their goods here prior to payment of duty and sale. John Keays was the head keeper, having transferred

from the old Footscray magazine. As well as the two double vaulted magazines, a bluestone loading building and two decanting buildings (where gunpowder was transferred from barrels to small containers) were built in the original scheme.

During World War II the magazine became the "Ammunition Depot, Maribyrnong" but was popularly known as Jacks Magazine after the keeper from the 1920s, Wally Jack. Further brick stores were built outside the blast walls on the east side and near the entrance during the Second World War.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme: **Local Theme**

Cultural Significance

The powder magazine is of National historical, architectural, and social significance as by far, the largest and most impressive of its type which demonstrates both the early concern for the defence of the colony of Victoria and the safety requirements of storage of explosives for both military and commercial uses. (Criterion A3) The canal and its associated tramway is unique in Australia while the vaulted bluestone magazines demonstrate a technology concerned with confining an explosion rather than the more modern deflection and absorption principal. (Criterion B2)

Purported to be designed by William Wardell, inspector General of Public Works, it represents a distinctive architectural solution to a rare type of building. (Criterion F1) The fine bluestone masonry provides the prime illustration of Footscray's foremost (stone) industry and remains in a remarkably untouched condition. (Criterion D1)

The more modest twentieth century buildings show the development of the complex as part of the defence supply industry which was unique to Maribyrnong up to World War II.

Jacks Magazine has become a social icon in the district as the most visible focus for the recollections of thousands of people who worked in the now demolished munitions factories. Its role in determining the eventual form of industrial development in the area has indirectly effected all residents since. (Criterion G1)

Remnant native vegetation survives on the escarpment and within the enclosure as a consequence of the quarantine effect of its past use, while its isolation from other development is an important aspect of its visual setting. (Criterion E1)

Comparative Examples

Unique in Australia. Other gold fields magazines, and even the munitions storage of other colonial governments cannot approach Jack's Magazine in scale or sophistication.

Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register

Register of the National Estate

National Trust Register

Other Heritage Listings

Planning Scheme Protection

Maribyrnong Heritage Review - Industrial Places

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. The landscape setting and association between magazines, canal, tramway, river and escarpment need all be respected.
To prepare a conservation management plan which embodies the above objectives and specifically to ensure future use and development is consistent with the conservation of the cultural significance of the site.

Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

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

Built into the side of the valley with unique enclosed spaces, vistas and architectural and landscape treatments, it is clearly a unique cultural feature.

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.

Jacks Magazine is a unique cultural feature reflecting gold rush prosperity, colonial government regulation, aesthetic achievements in local bluestone, and the origins of the defence supply industry in the region.

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.

The storage of gunpowder demanded strict control and specialist architectural and engineering solutions, which were all made redundant with the introduction of dynamite about the time the magazine was built.

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

The Victorian gold rushes gave the impetus for introduction of bonded control over gunpowder imports as on a large scale resulting in this magazine, which then became the catalyst for the explosives and ammunition industry which grew around it to become Australia's Arsenal.

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).

The place demonstrates the role of explosives in mining and warfare and its control by government. The magazines and perimeter wall are the ultimate expression of functional bluestone construction

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

The unique buildings in their special landscape setting presents an unsurpassed aesthetic quality.

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

Technically, the magazine represents the high point in design for safe storage of explosives with a high level of artistic design in the forms, finishes, and detailing of the buildings.

G1 Importance as places highly valued by a community for reasons of religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations.

Jacks Magazine has become a local icon for the industrial and military history of the region, and focus of the recollection of thousands of people who worked in the now demolished munitions factories.

Documentation

References

J.W. Moore, *The Saltwater River Gunpowder Magazine*, notes from Explosives Factory 1969, Footscray's First Fifty Years, p.22
Butler, G. Footscray Conservation Study, 1989:71-2,
Jenson 1964.
Allom Lovell, *ADI Footscray Facility Heritage Study EES. 1989.*

Data recording

Assessed By
Assessed Date: