

Identification and location

Name of Place: **Cuming Smith**

Other Name Commonwealth Fertilisers, Pivot Fertilisers

Address 219 Whitehall Street

Yarraville

Place Identifier 20237

Heritage Significance regional

Creation date(s): 1871

Map (Melway) 42 C10

Boundary description The extent of the current allotment.

Local Government Area: City of Maribyrnong

Ownership Type

Description

Site Type: factory

Physical Description

The core of rendered brick administration buildings from c. 1900 although extensively modified, survive as an isolated group among more recent clear span storage sheds. Of the original group of 19th century buildings little remains, most being demolished in the 1960s. However, the substantial stores built of Mountain ash logs up to fifteen metres long date from the 1920s and are of interest for their large clear span and use of raw logs probably obtained from Cuming Smith's Warburton Timber operation. One of the largest of these has been recently demolished.

Bluestone and early brick foundations and walls can be seen in the western end of the site possibly once part of McMeikan's Bone Mill. The cleared area may have sub surface remains of the early buildings.

Condition

Surviving Buildings are in good condition

Integrity

Much of the site has been demolished including large timber framed fertiliser sheds near the river.

Context

One of the group of large industrial complexes on the Yarraville waterfront.

Threats

Redevelopment of the site, probably for further industrial use, is highly likely as recent demolition has occurred. Investigate bluestone foundations further to identify McMeikan's Bone Mill features. Consider archaeological work prior to future construction or demolition.

History

Cuming Smith purchased the Yarraville Chemical Works of Robert Smith & Co in 1871 and McMeikin's Victoria Bone Mill in 1875. It then amalgamated with Felton Grimwade 1897. It was taken over by Commonwealth Fertilisers in 1929 which incorporated Mt.Lyell and Wischer. (see 0255 & 0362). ICI then took over the complex in 1936 and sold the Cuming Smith part to the Geelong company Pivot who had themselves bought CRESCO in Corio Bay. The works became the Phosphate Co-op of Australia following a further merger and now trades as Pivot fertilisers, with a second plant in Geelong.

Cuming Smith pioneered the manufacture of superphosphate in Victoria producing its own acid and other products. The company also undertook experiments with timber derived products such as wood tar, acetone and timber preservatives. James Cuming is commemorated in Footscray as their premier citizen, having been Mayor and councillor many times. His statue stands in the Yarraville Gardens having been relocated from the Footscray Railway Reserve.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

Cuming Smith is of Regional historical and architectural significance as it was the largest and one of the first manufacturers of superphosphate fertiliser in Victoria. The works pioneered the manufacture of chemical fertiliser and introduced integrated processes in acid and chemical manufacture. (Criterion A4) The factory is one of the major industrial facilities in the Yarraville area with considerable surviving building stock from the turn of the century period. Its Sickle Brand agricultural products (sheep dip, rabbit poison, wheat pickling, etc) were famous among Australian and overseas farmers. (Criterion D2) Substantial parts of the works dating from the period of greatest expansion and of unusual construction survive, still in the context of chemical fertiliser production. A distinctive group of building forms and highly unusual industrial landscape with the fertiliser cranes on the wharf a local landmark. (Criterion A3) James Cuming made his fortune from this works and for its sake played an influential role in the civic and commercial affairs of Footscray. (Criterion H1)

Comparative Examples

Compares with the near contemporary Mt.Lyell site nearby, but with less of the associated chemical plant.

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?

Maribyrnong Heritage Review - Industrial Places

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. Detailed historical and archaeological investigation is required to fully identify the site's heritage fabric.
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.

A distinctive group of building forms and highly unusual industrial landscape with the fertiliser cranes on the wharf a local landmark

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.

manufacture of superphosphate fertiliser using phosphate rock fro, Pacific islands and waste acid from other chemical works revolutionised Australian agriculture and industry.

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).

This works best demonstrates the complex interrelationship between branches of chemical industry with acid, fertiliser and meat-byproduct works having come together to create the modern chemical industry.

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

James Cuming made his fortune from this works and for its sake played an influential role in the civic and commercial affairs of Footscray.

Documentation

References

ADB8 (James Cuming), CUMING a biography 1987,
Forging Ahead,
Local Industries in Footscray and Williamstown 1888,
Britannia Ck., VPRS933/1132
Footscray's First Fifty Years.
Footscray's First Hundred Years.
Sands & McDougall 1895,
VPRS932/3125,
City of Footscray 125th Anniversary 1984.
MMBW 1" to 400' Sewerage Plan Footscray 1895 (SLV)

Data recording

Assessed By

Assessed Date: