

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: factory complex

Physical Description

Viewed from across the river, the 1873-5 core is still visible, albeit since built over extensively. Much of the old machinery also survives including the bone char reprocessing equipment in the 'Char End' and early cisterns and melting pans. Until recent years the CSR-manufactured Golden Syrup packing machine was still in use. Part of the post-1870s building includes the Melt House, a distinctive three-towered structure clad with corrugated iron (reconstructed char house, c1900) which provides a picturesque skyline, and earlier boiler room housings.

Other 19th Century buildings are evident in the complex, some brick, others like the vast packing shed, corrugated iron-clad. A detailed conservation analysis was conducted by Allom Lovell & Associates in 1994.

Much of the works from the early 20th century period survives. The original 1874 refinery building has been stripped internally and the east wall has been replaced with a glass and steel wall during the 1950s when new refining equipment was installed but the basic structure is intact. Several buildings from 1900-10 survive relatively intact including the sack store and sewing building, the pan house and the boiling house, now converted to the engineering department. The char house is exceptional for its completeness, its possibly patented prefabricated iron construction system and the original charcoal plant. The Power-house survives intact with several generators and motors, and has been partly converted to a site museum.

Condition

Most buildings are in good condition, although the char end, having been decommissioned has not been maintained in recent years.

Integrity

The site has a high level of integrity, although representing the on-going process of change in equipment and process which is part of the industry. The bulk of buildings for the 1870s to 1920 period survive, although some, such as the melting house, have been converted to other uses, in this case the engineers offices.

Context

One of the large bulk processing industrial complexes on the Yarraville Waterfront which form a vast and cohesive industrial precinct between Whitehall Street and the Maribyrnong River.

Threats

The closure of the char end and proposals to demolish this is a serious threat to the integrity of the site. The medium and long term future of the site is also unclear as the sugar refining function may not continue on the site.

History

Commencing as the Joshua Brothers Company, later the Victoria Sugar Company and finally the Colonial Sugar Refinery, the first stages of the complex commenced in 1873 (first directory entry 1874), reputedly by Yarraville contractors, Edward Murphy (q.v.) and Timothy Lane. Thomas Waits was the architect of the early stages of the complex calling the initial tenders in November 1872, and adding two brick stores in 1873-4 and 1875, and a timber and iron store in 1875, also for the Joshua Brothers. Either John Campbell or James Muir (there is conflict in sources) were brought out from Scotland to supervise construction and became manager on completion in February 1874. The Victorian Sugar Company, having built a refinery in Sandridge in c.1857 took over Joshua Brothers works when their own Sandridge refinery burnt down in 1875. The company merged in July 1887 with the New South Wales and Queensland based Colonial Sugar Refinery Co. which was itself set up in 1855 having taken over the Australian Sugar Co. (formed in England during 1839, to refine colonial sugar). It was absorbed by the Australasian Sugar Co., in 1842, which was in turn taken over by Colonial Sugar Refinery Co. in 1855. CSR had, by the late nineteenth century, established itself as a virtual monopoly growing and producing sugar cane in Queensland and northern N.S.W. and other pacific countries and refining and packing in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and other cities, and was the second largest sugar refinery in Australia in the 1950s. In the 1960-70s, the Australian sugar growing industry consolidated on the coasts of Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales and became by the 1970s the world's fourth largest sugar producer.

Louis Hope is said to have established the colony's first major sugar mill in 1864 (Ormiston, Queensland) and other mills followed at Maryborough, Mackay (1866), Bundaberg (1872) and Cairns (1882). New South Wales mills (many of them only primitive crushing mills) numbered nine by 1868. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (C.S.R.) established in 1855 and was followed two years later by the Victorian subsidiary, the Victorian Sugar Company, which was half financed by C.S.R. Shareholders and Melbourne merchants.

Meanwhile the merchants, A. Joshua and E.F. Sichel (going under the name Joshua Brothers) had commenced their Yarraville sugar refinery on the present Whitehall Street site. Two years later, the Sandridge mill was burnt down and the Victorian Sugar Company bought out the

Joshuas to use their plant. The 1877 borough plan shows the plant, in outline, facing a long wharf on the Saltwater River. The closest housing was in River Street, to the south. Comparison of this plan with that of 1894 shows that these early factory structures had survived and were built of brick, in contrast to the larger added structures which are shown as timber-framed and corrugated iron-clad. Six brick cottage pairs lined the private road into the complex, lying immediately south of Millers Rope Works. The manager's villa residence, was at the eastern end of this cottage row. A description in 1882 of the then Victoria Sugar Co. works numbered the site acreage as twelve, built over one-third of the area. It noted the 'well-built brick houses' lining the entry road, housing the employees, and the 'large detached villa' at the end, occupied by the manager.

The main building was 10 storeys, 100 by 50 feet in plan, and was soon to be renovated. To fire-proof it, timber floors were replaced with iron and an 'immense' tank placed at its top, all to reduce the insurance premiums. From the 300 feet long wharf, baskets of sugar were loaded by donkey engines from the lighters and taken to the two stone and brick stores (one facing the wharf, another at the works' west end), together holding 9000 tons. From the stores the sugar (Java, Formosa, Mauritius, Philippines and in 1883 from their Queensland mills) was taken by steam lifts to the top of the main building (no. 1 floor) and loaded by steam cranes to begin the refining process.

Number 5 floor held the engines which powered the vacuum boiling pans on the next level down (pan floor, no.6) where the liquid commenced its return to a crystal form. Floors 7 and 8 held agitator tanks for this purpose, the first cooling and the second, drying. The next floor was at ground level where the sugar went into bins. Here it was graded and packed in Hessian bags (supplied by James Miller & Co., adjoining) for temporary warehouse storage, prior to shipping to the Melbourne wharves. A boiler house was at the south-east of the complex, fed by Yan Yean water, and next to it the retort and gas houses (animal bones charred for filters). The char mill' (grinding the char) was at the west end of the complex. Queensland molasses (and soon sugar) was refined at the works and placed in barrels for market. Other ancillary buildings included the cooperage, tradesmen's workshops (engineers, plumbers, carpenters), manager's and customs-house officer's rooms, inflammable items store (at entrance gates) and the fire fighting steam pump housing on the bank of the river. Around 200 were employed at the works.

An early photographic view from the river (1880) shows an extensive brick complex and an etching of 1881 shows even more. A multi-storey hipped roof tower was the dominant building with two-level gabled buildings adjoining to the south and north with lesser height but larger area storage buildings further to the north again. A tall chimney rises from a single storey at the south-east extremity of the complex. Much of the 1894 complex had been built up by the time of this view but later additions included a new bag factory (1913). Drawings held by the company show large-scale additions around 1900- 1, mostly prepared in Sydney and including the surviving multi-storey brick Melting House and smaller buildings such as the Bungalow style staff mess. Hyndman & Bates called tenders for the Colonial Sugar Refinery Co. in 1901 and it is probable that the picturesque, three-towered char station west of the old refinery building was their design. The original plant was built in Scotland, where some of the ironwork for the main refinery building probably also came.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

CSR Yarraville is of National historical and architectural significance as a unique example of the high point of late nineteenth century industrial design, and one of the largest factories of the second half of the nineteenth century left in Australia. It is the oldest surviving sugar refinery, and the last intact of a series of refineries built in the period 1870 to 1890.

The Yarraville Sugar Refinery was the largest industry in the Western region for much of the late 19th Century before the establishment of the Newport railway workshops. (Criterion A3) This is born out by the value of £4000 (NAV) applied for rating by Footscray. This was 8 times any other property in the municipality. The Colonial Sugar Company was instrumental in developing the cane growing and sugar refining industry in Australia and the South Pacific and prominent in the employment of cheap labour first from the Pacific Islands and in the 20th century, from Italy and Southern Europe. (Criterion A4)

The harsh working conditions experienced in the works, are still exemplified by the interior spaces of the pan house and char end, where years of charcoal dust and the effects of the heat of the processes are evident throughout. The company has operated as a virtual monopoly for much of its history and has long been one of the largest businesses in Australia. (Criterion D2)

The Yarraville refinery retains (with modifications) the original refinery building of 1873 with a complex of processing, storage and office buildings dating from c.1900-10. All of these incorporate a cast iron prefabricated construction system similar to Foy & Gibson. The refinery demonstrates both the 19th century Collingwood. The complex is a key element of the industrial landscape of the Lower Yarra. (Criterion F1) The buildings are an important local land mark, in particular the huge Edwardian turrets which feature decorative finials on a giant scale. development of industrial design and sophisticated large scale sugar processing equipment, and the progressive adaptation and development of these technologies to modern conditions. (Criterion E1)

Comparative Examples

The CSR Yarraville works is unique in Australia. A contemporary refinery at Pyrmont, Sydney has all but been demolished in recent decades, while the slightly later Brisbane refinery has been gutted. Other cane crushing works in McKay, Millaquin and elsewhere on the Queensland coast, demonstrate some of the design characteristics and may retain contemporary structures, but these works are generally corrugated iron clad and less complex in their organisation of specialist components. The former Port Melbourne sugar works/starch factory is of the same scale executed in red brick but this has been gutted entirely and converted to apartments.

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?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Tree Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>

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 review and expand on the prior conservation management plan so that it embodies the above objectives and specifically addresses the conservation and future management of significant fabric through redevelopment and operation of the works.
- 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 industrial development of Australia was initially based on the processing of the raw materials of mining and agriculture. CSR demonstrates one of the earliest surviving and largest of the 19th century agricultural products processors. It is also one of Australia's first large scale export industries devoted to processed goods.

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.

The role of CSR in developing north coast cane fields, its involvement in Kanaka labour, and later indentured Italian migrants, and the companies significant place in the South Pacific sugar trade are represented best at this site.

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.

While sugar refining continues, the remnants of the earlier processes, in particular the bone char section, represent a lost process. More generally the buildings demonstrate the high point in industrial design and operating characteristics of the nineteenth century.

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

The development of an international export-based sugar industry played an important role in the settlement of both the north coast cane farming land, and the industrial suburbs of Melbourne's West.

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 harsh working conditions experienced in the works, are still exemplified by the interior spaces of the pan house and char end, where years of charcoal dust and the effects of the heat of the processes are evident throughout.

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

The buildings are an important local land mark, in particular the huge Edwardian turrets which feature decorative finials on a giant scale.

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

The refinery demonstrates both the 19th century development of industrial design and sophisticated large scale sugar processing equipment, and the progressive adaptation and development of these technologies to modern conditions.

Documentation

References

ADB7 Edward Campbell,
Local Industries In Footscray and Williamstown 1882.
Shaw 1969:41 R.B.
Nat.Handbook of Australian Industries 1929.

Ward 1988,
Butler 1989 VPRS932/10
H1311 Victorian Heritage Register
Allom Lovell & Associates, *CSR Yarraville Conservation Analysis*.

Data recording

Assessed By

Assessed Date: