

Identification and location

Name of Place: **Mt. Lyell**

Other Name Orica, Pyrites & General Smelting Works ##

Address 295 Whitehall Street

Yarraville

Place Identifier 20239

Heritage Significance regional

Creation date(s): 1889

Map (Melway) 42 D10

Boundary description The primary area of concern is the group of buildings along Lyell Street, although other isolated structures are located

Local Government Area: City of Maribyrnong

Ownership Type Private (wharf area leased PTC)

Description

Site Type: Factory

Physical Description

The main feature of this extensive site are the very large phosphate storage sheds dating from around 1905-9, along the northern edge of the site on the south side of Lyell Street, stretching from Whitehall Street to the river. Of timber construction they incorporate a wide gable form with a continuous lantern which houses the conveyor system for distribution of bulk phosphate. The westernmost of the buildings has a similar form but has brick walls with large pilasters, twelve pane windows and a stepped gable giving it a somewhat Georgian appearance. This was historically the machine shop of the works, which accounts for the large windows. Other buildings on the site are generally smaller gabled sheds of timber and iron construction, some of which are contemporary with the fertiliser sheds and demonstrate similar type in use of materials and form.

Condition

One of the major fertiliser sheds at the east end of Lyell Street was demolished about 10 years ago. Otherwise the machine shop and phosphate shed are in original condition.

Integrity

One large fertiliser shed has been demolished, although a considerable range of buildings, including some pre WW I survive intact.

Context

One of a group of large bulk processing factories located along the waterfront at Yarraville, including CSR, the former Cuming Smith fertiliser works and the Mobil oil terminal, each of which has been dependent on river wharves for delivery of bulk raw materials.

Threats

Orica is currently considering its position at Yarraville and part of the works will most likely be sold or redeveloped.

History

The Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Co. was formed to exploit the mineral resources of western Tasmania in 1896. They established their works in Yarraville in c. 1905 for the manufacture of sulphuric acid (from the lump pyrites ore from Tasmania) and super phosphate. This new venture took advantage of a pre-existing industry as it was established on the site of the 1889 works of Rocke Tomsitt and Parker & Co's. Victoria Smelting Works which may have already been smelting pyrites. The Pyrites and General Smelting Works is identified on the 1894 Sewerage Plans.

The Mt. Lyell works amalgamated with the nearby works of Cuming Smith and Wischer & Co. to form Commonwealth Fertilisers & Chemicals in 1929 and then in 1936 it was in turn taken over by ICI who still operate the plant in Yarraville. At this time the facilities included river wharves, power plant, offices, workshops, laboratory and a row of small chemical plants of which Chlorine was the core. Chlorine and caustic soda were among the original chemicals produced at the works, first being manufactured in the early 1920s.

Two years after the acquisition, plans were announced for a new phosphate plant, jointly owned by ICI and Albright and Wilson. This plant, constructed beside the chemical works, claimed the distinction of being the first phosphorous factory south of the equator. This opened in 1940 just as the Second World War was curbing imports from the UK and Europe. In the 1980s the major products were liquid chlorine and caustic soda, but it also produced hydrochloric acid, sodium hypochlorite, sodium silicate, sulphuric acid, fluoride concentrate and "Cereclor" for the plastic industry. The Yarraville works also operated a bulk distribution centre for soda ash produced in Osborne, SA. The Yarraville Orica factory covers about 11 hectares and employed over 160 people in the 1980s.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

The phosphate storage sheds are a very function oriented type of building which none the less gain a degree of architectural distinction from their functional form. Mt. Lyell is therefore of historical and architectural significance as a distinctive group of industrial building forms and a highly unusual industrial landscape with the fertiliser cranes on the wharf a local landmark. (Criterion A3) Mount Lyell was one of several companies to develop the chemical fertiliser industry in Yarraville, each of which followed a slightly different route. Wischer used guano and animal manures as a raw material, Cuming Smith imported phosphate rock from Pacific and Indian Ocean islands and Mt Lyell recycled the waste products from their Tasmanian mining ventures. The economic superiority of super phosphate fertilisers eventually lead to all these companies using a similar process which required a large amount of covered storage area for the raw rock and bagged fertiliser. (Criterion A4) The store sheds are therefore a consequence of the manufacturing process. The engineering shop continues the shape of the other buildings but presents a more sophisticated facade. The scale of the buildings reflects the significance of the fertiliser industry in Victoria to the agricultural sector and the general prosperity of the state. (Criterion D2)

Comparative Examples

The other major superphosphate works in Victoria are Pivot (formerly Cuming Smith) also in Yarraville and Pivot Fertilisers in Geelong. The former compares in scale and age although it lacks the major fertiliser stores since a recent program of demolition. Geelong is a more recent and much larger scaled works.

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

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.
- 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.

Documentation

References

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)

MMBW 1" to 40160 Sewerage Plan No 6, c1910

Data recording

Assessed By

Assessed Date: