



4-115 67 Whitehall Street

Colonial Sugar Refinery Company Complex
265 Whitehall Street

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.¹ Thomas Watts 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.² John Campbell, was brought from Scotland to supervise its construction and, once

complete, commenced as its manager in February 1874.³

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 Refining Co. in 1855. In the 1860-70s, the Australian sugar growing industry consolidated on the coasts of Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales and became (1970s) the world's fourth largest sugar producer. This refinery was the second largest in Australia in the late 1950s⁴

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

1 FFOY p.142;D1870-5
2 *Argus* 21/4/72, 12/9/73, 20/5/75, 1/10/75
3 *Local Industries...*, 1882, p.17
4 FFOY p.135

was followed two years later by the Victorian subsidiary, the Victorian Sugar Company, which was half financed by C.S.R. Shareholders and half by Melbourne merchants. Edward Knox was the Melbourne company's chairman of directors and superintendent and their plant was at Sandridge (Port Melbourne) presumably where the surviving but recycled late 19th century C.S.R. mill stands today.

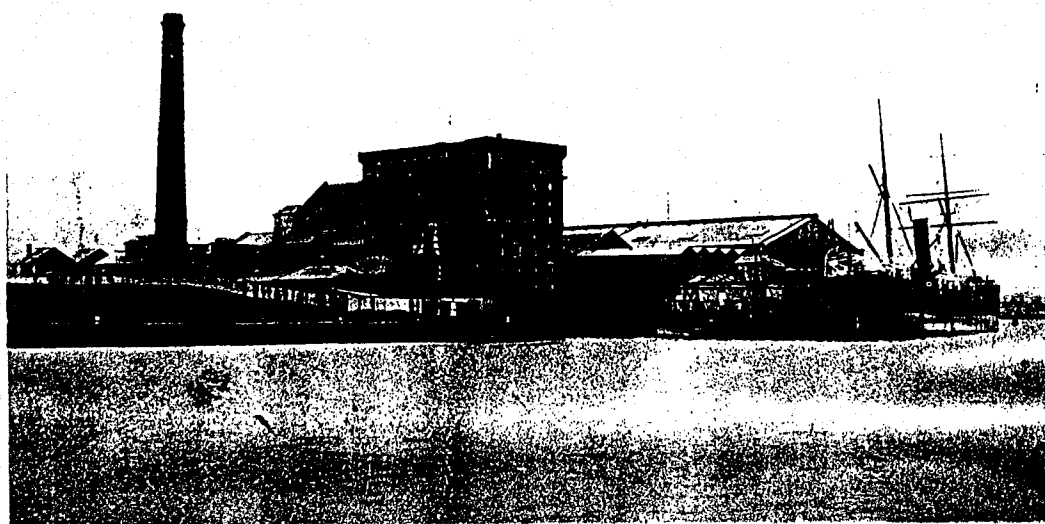
In Queensland, C.S.R. was to expand the joint capacity of the two firms with the Mackay Mill of 1883, leading to amalgamation of the two companies in 1887, as the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Ltd.¹

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 utilize 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 fireproof it, timber floors were replaced with iron and an 'immense' tank



4-116 265 Whitehall Street, view c1880 (CSR collection) showing from left, the boiler house and chimney over, the main refinery tower (part surviving) centre, packing sheds (part surviving) between the large gabled raw sugar store on the left (surviving).

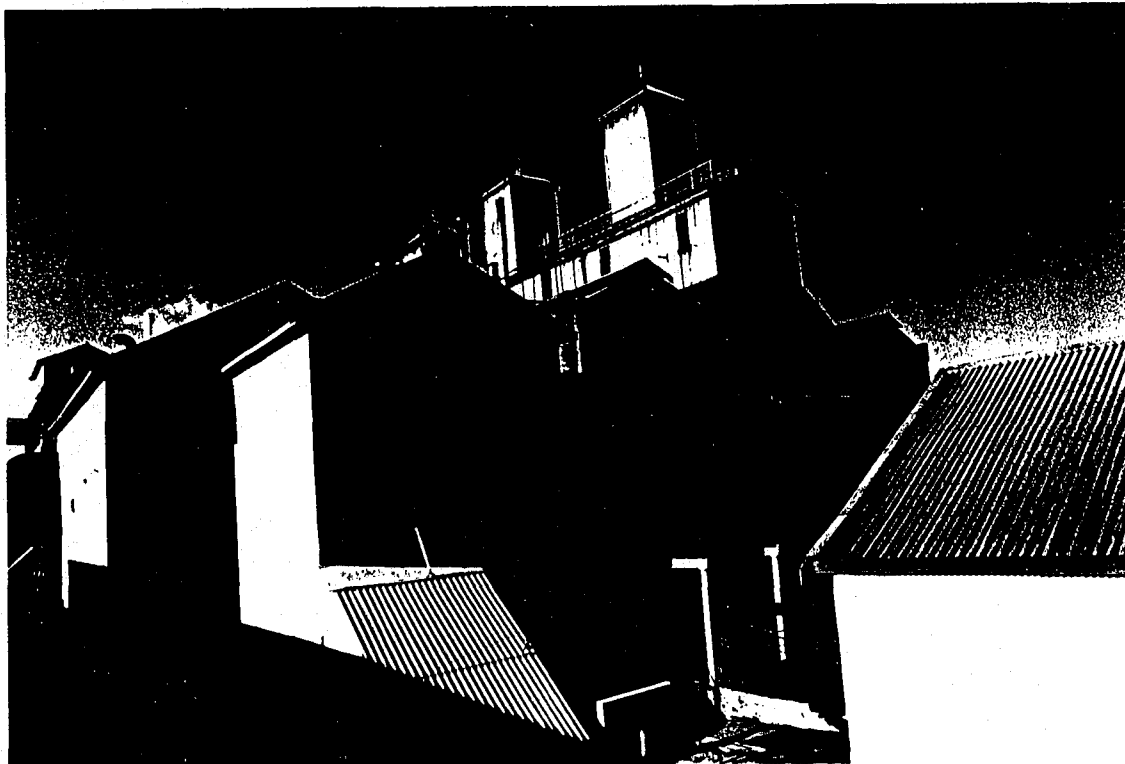
1 SLV. Business History Letters File, said drawn from company records, (see also *Port of Melbourne Quarterly*, Jan.-Mar., 1966, p.31f)

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 into 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.

Guided through grates in the floor, the broken down sugar descended into the three melting pans (round tanks with mechanical agitators driven from floor no.1) on the next level where the syrup formed poured into 24 round iron filter tanks and from there to the 'receiving floor'(no.4) where it was dispersed into the 'charcoal department', housed in an annexe on that level (added since the company's arrival). Thirty 18 feet tall iron cisterns holding 'animal charcoal' (charred and

ground animal bones) provided the next stage of purification as the liquor percolated to the bottom, now golden coloured. The charcoal itself was renewed by continuous conveyer belts.

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 also refined at the works and placed in bar-



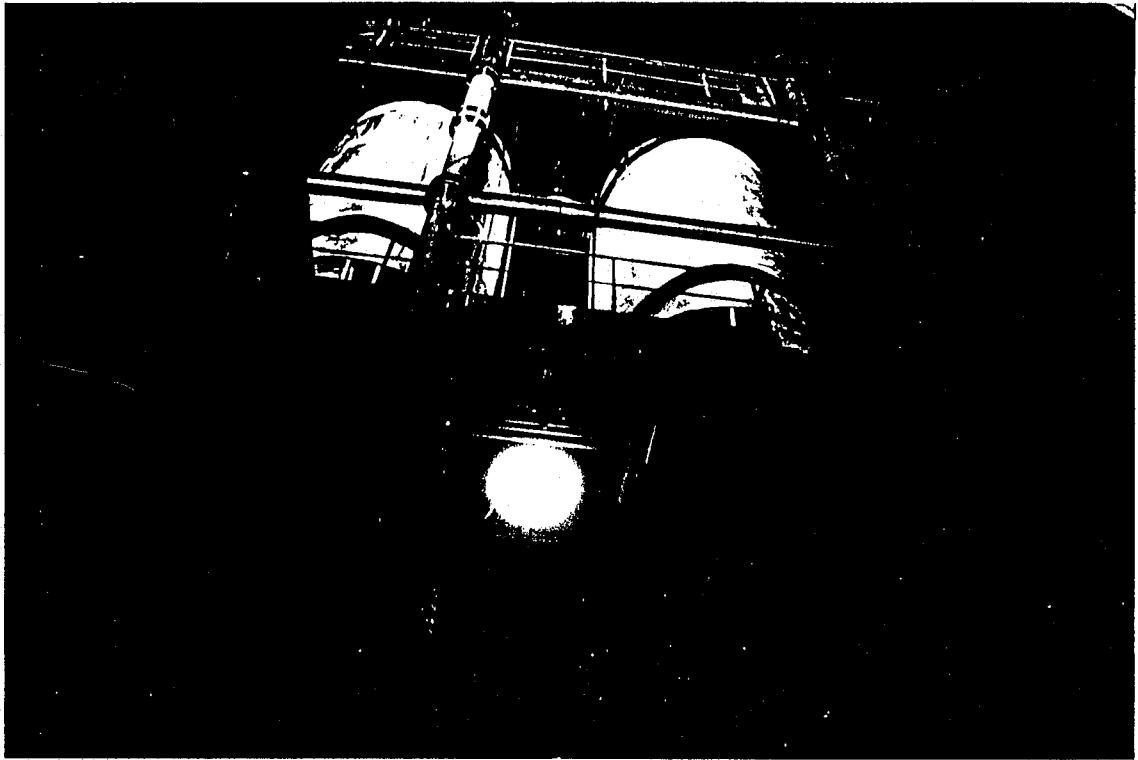
4-117 265 Whitehall Street, new char station of c1900, adjoining old refinery on west side.

rels 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 river¹. Around 200 were employed at the works.²

An early photographic view from the river (1880) shows an extensive brick complex and an etching of 1881 shows even more.³ 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.⁴ A tall chimney rises from a single storey boiler house 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).

The precise location of some of the components of the complex are shown on plans of 1956. These include a large raw sugar store, in the north-east corner of the site, adjoining the refined sugar store, packing station, melting house and carbo (char) station along its southern perimeter; the packing station being part of the 1870s section. South of these were: the customs-house, south char end, jelly house, the main refinery, packing station and tinsmiths shop (fronting the wharf). The boiler house (also on the 1877 plan), coal bin and crusher, power house, and cooperage adjoined to the south. On the western perimeter were the bag store (north) materials store, engineers shop and offices.⁵



4-118 265 Whitehall Street, inside of char station showing riveted cast-iron columns and wrought-iron beams in what appears to have been a prefabricated plant.

- 1 *ibid.*
- 2 *Local Industries...*, 1882, p.17f
- 3 *Australasian Sketcher* 1881 cited in FFOY p.135
- 4 FFOY p.54
- 5 MMBW CF.37314

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.¹

Description

Viewed from across the river, the 1873-5 core is still visible, albeit since built over extensively. Reputedly some of the old machinery also survives. 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. Given the size and potential importance of the complex, it requires a detailed conservation analysis.

Significance (preliminary)

Potentially of national significance as an early and extensive sugar refinery which possesses both architecturally interesting and mammoth (for the time) masonry structures. Of the early Footscray secondary industries, it is the largest and when established possibly the most far-reaching in terms of product marketing.



4-119 4 Willis Street

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