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# FORMER BRUNSWICK CABLE TRAM DEPOT PRECINCT

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## Location

807-823 SYDNEY ROAD BRUNSWICK, MORELAND CITY

## Municipality

MERRI-BEK CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2230

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO171

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 4, 2023

### What is significant?

The Former Brunswick Cable Tram Depot Precinct (VHI H7822-2230) has the potential to contain significant 19th century archaeological remains related to the operation of the Melbourne Tramways Trust cable tram network by the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company (1885-1916) and the MMTB (1918-1935). It also contains evidence of a 1942 zig-zag air raid slit trench, which appears to have been constructed by the MMTB for protection of staff during World War II.

The significant remains within the Brunswick Tramway Depot may include parallel tram tracks, an associated traverser to move the vehicles between the tracks, the drainage system, a turntable, and inspection and access pits for maintenance and repair of the trams.

The Brunswick Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench was identified in the 1945 aerial imagery of the Brunswick Tram Depot site. It comprises a zig-zag air raid slit trench in what is now the Brunswick Tram Depot

car park. Aerial imagery dating from 1945-1988 suggest that this area was primarily used for stockpiling in 1956, and as an unpaved carpark from 1968 to 1972, with evidence of slabs of concrete having been added in 1988, followed by the levelling of the carpark in 2004 through building up the ground surface to form a level surface prior to the addition of modern asphalt. As such, it is possible that the remains of the base of the zig-zag air raid slit trench are still extant in a subsurface context. Features may include sandbags, timbers, corrugated iron, iron rods, and drainage infrastructure, along with the potential for discarded items dating to the period the trench was in use.

The significant remains found within the former tram entry to the depot, and along Sydney Road, may include tram tracks, wood blocked and/or stone setts paving, deep concrete cable tunnels centred under each track, and inspection and access manholes having cast iron covers.

#### **How is it significant?**

The site is of historical and archaeological significance.

#### **Why is it significant?**

The remains within the Brunswick Cable Tram Depot Precinct are highly significant as they have the potential to provide information on how Melbourne's early cable tram system operated, as well as how depot staff responded to the potential threats of World War II. The presence of evidence of early tram infrastructure has the potential to provide information about the technology, construction and operation of the cable tramway.

The zig-zag trench comprises a significant archaeological feature of Melbourne's history during World War II which are not commonly investigated archaeologically. Evidence found has the potential to provide information on the technology, construction, and use of the air raid slit trench in an urban context. This will provide information on how the people of Brunswick responded to the possibility of war during, and after, World War II.

Additionally, as one of the early major thoroughfares in Melbourne and the early construction of cable tramways, Sydney Road is of historical significance. The presence of evidence of early road and tram infrastructure has the potential to provide information about the technology, construction and operation of the cable tramway, and of early road construction.

The tracks and engine houses of the Melbourne cable tram network were constructed by the Melbourne Tramways Trust (MTT) during 1885-91. It was considered to be the world's largest cable tramway network under single ownership. The cable tram car sheds were built by the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company which leased the lines from the MTT between 1885 and 1916 and operated the tram services.

#### **Archaeological Significance**

The former cable tram sheds have potential to contain evidence of significant 19th century archaeological remains such as parallel tram tracks, and an associated traverser to move the vehicles between the tracks, a turntable, and inspection and access pits for maintenance and repair of the trams.

The archaeological remains of the former building site are highly significant as they display how Melbourne's cable tram system operated.

Hermes Number 116181

Property Number

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## **History**

In the 1906, 1908 and 1931 plans, the cable tramway entrance into the tram sheds were situated at the centre of the tram shed facing on Sydney Road. A sketching found on the 1931 plan (Figure 26) shows the rough positions

of the extant Traffic and Revenue office, to the south of the entryway, and the extant depot shed being generally aligned with the track and pit on the north side of the entryway.

This would be situated in the vicinity of the wall between the extant Traffic and Revenue office building and the extant car shed. The tracks connected to the eastern set of Sydney Road cable tram tracks opposite the pavement on the west side of Donald Street, and to the western set of tracks approximately halfway along the building at 824-834 Sydney Road. However, both plans have a slightly different curvature to the tracks leading from the tram shed to the Sydney Road tracks, so the locations of any subsurface infrastructure or tunnels associated with the tram entryway are approximate.

The 1906, the 1908 and the 1931 plans show how the tram shed grew over time since 1906. The tram shed in 1906 comprises a large, irregularly-shaped shed, adjacent office building, toilet block, with a small shed behind the toilet block. Plans dating to 1908 show the tram shed as a square building. This included an L-shaped extension and included the area that would later be the paint shop. The ancillary buildings do not appear to have undergone any changes. The 1931 plan shows the greatest number of changes, with the tram shed having been extended to the boundary of the property in the south, with further extensions to the west, although the paint shop section was not extended. The stores were also added to the north wall of the tram shed. The shed behind the toilet block also appears to have been extended. In all three plans, tracks run from the tram entryway on Sydney Road into the shed. A tram turntable and pit were sited within the building on these tracks. A single pit was noted in the northwest corner of the tram shed on the 1908 plan, with two in this area by 1931. Other features shown on the 1931 pit appear to be drainage pits at regular intervals across the floor of the site, between the tram tracks.

The whole area covered by the tram sheds, the office building, toilet block, and the shed, as shows in 1931 plan, appears to comprise the full extent of the earlier Brunswick cable tram depot as no plans show any structures at the rear of the property. While it is possible that there may have been buildings adjacent to Cameron and Peveril Streets (as visible in aerial imagery), these have not been mapped in the plans and may thus not be permanent structures, but may instead be photographic artefacts (localised islands of distortion) due to the low quality nature of the available 1931 aerial imagery. As such, the possible structures noted in the 1931 aerial imagery do not inform the archaeological potential for the pre-1936 cable tram site, but their potential presence cannot be entirely discounted.

The area to the south (apart from the construction of a bicycle shelter) and west of the Traffic and Revenue office does not appear to have undergone significant works since the construction of the tram shed and Traffic and Revenue office in 1936. The area primarily appears to have been a slightly sloped dirt surface, into which a zig-zag air raid slit trench was excavated during World War II. This was subsequently filled in by 1956. The area, outside of the office compound, has since been used for car parking. In 2006, the area was surfaced with asphalt for carparking, with painted car parking spaces, handicapped carparks, and two gardens at the east end of the carpark. The area appears to have been levelled through the addition of a layer of fill at the east end of this area, rather than the excavation of the land. As such, it is likely that the historical ground surface, and the zig-zag air raid slit trench and the original asphalt tram shed surface, may still be present under the introduced fill.

The areas of archaeological potential within the Brunswick Tram Depot site have been divided into three categories (depicted in Figure 3). These comprise:

- Areas of high archaeological potential:
  - The location of the former cable tram tracks along Sydney Road
  - The location where the former cable tram tracks entered the non-extant tram sheds
  - The location of the non-extant tram sheds to the south and west of the Traffic and Revenue office
  - The location of the former World War II zig-zag air raid slit trench
  
- Areas of low to moderate archaeological potential:
  - The location of the former cable tram tracks along Sydney Road
  - The location where the former cable tram tracks entered the non-extant tram sheds
  - The current footprint of the bicycle shed to the south of the Traffic and Revenue office
  - The land between the former shed and the extant workshops along Peveril Street

- Land to the southeast of the extant 1936 tram shed surrounding the zig-zag air raid slit trench
- Areas of little to no archaeological potential:
  - The current footprint of the extant tram shed, shopfronts and workshops
  - The current footprint of the extant Traffic and Revenue office
  - The current footprint of the tram tracks behind, and adjacent to, the tram shed
  - The locations of the tanks behind the Traffic and Revenue office.

A full-sized version of the areas of archaeological potential figure can be found in the attached *Brunswick Tram Depot site cards updates* memorandum (see Section 4).

The Brunswick Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets the definition of archaeological site under the Heritage Act, as a site that is likely to contain artefacts, deposits or features 75 or more years old, that would provide information relation to the former use of the site, that requires archaeological methods to reveal such information. While there are no surface features, due to the asphalt of the extant carpark covering the site, there is aerial imagery showing that the slit trench was extant in 1945. Additionally, photographic evidence of the Brunswick Tram Depot from the 1950s shows the outline of the filled-in zig-zag slit trench. The site has subsequently been levelled through the introduction of fill, and archaeological features associated with the slit trench are likely to still be in situ underneath the carpark. This is likely to contribute to an understanding of how Brunswick Tram Depot staff, and possibly the wider Brunswick community, responded to the threat of World War II. As such the Brunswick Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets Threshold A (archaeology).

As there is limited historical information about the Brunswick Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench, archaeological investigation and detailed recording could provide information not available elsewhere, particularly in relation to the construction and use of the slit trench. The limited historical information suggests that Brunswick Tram Depot was one of the open areas around Melbourne utilised in this fashion, although, while it was built for the depot employees, it is currently unknown as to whether the Brunswick community would also have had access to this slit trench in a time of crisis. Archaeological investigation could provide information about other slit trenches and their usage across suburban Melbourne. The site is significant in a local context under the 'defending Victoria and Australia' (Theme 7.4) in Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes (Heritage Council of Victoria 2010 (Heritage Council of Victoria 2010). As such, the Brunswick Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets Threshold B (place history).

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*