

Former Cohn Brothers Ice Works and Brewery



Aerial view of Cohns Brothers ice works and brewery (former) July 2013



North elevation of the former ice works (corner building, Building 1) and the adjacent fermentation rooms (foreground, Building 2)



Building 4, looking west; the entry to Building 3 is to the right of the picture



East elevation (first floor) of Building 5, possibly an office or administration building



Building 5 ground level, integrated into the recent Coliban Water development



Roof form of Building 6



Retaining wall and raised platform (Element 7)

Location

37-45 Bridge Street, BENDIGO VIC 3550 - Property No 212801

Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO866

Heritage Listing

Greater Bendigo City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

Statement of significance

What is significant?

The former Cohn Brothers brewery was established in 1858. Today, only remnants of the once substantial complex survive, including the ice works building (1880s), built for the storage of lager beer on site, and the adjacent fermentation vats building. The ice works and fermentation buildings constitute the public interface with the site, as viewed from Water Street. The site also includes other process and ancillary buildings and a building which appears likely to have been for office/administration use. There is also a substantial retaining concrete wall which provides a reference to the site boundary.

How is it significant?

The former Cohn Brothers ice works and brewery is of local historical and aesthetic/architectural significance.

Why is it significant?

The former Cohn Brothers ice works and brewery, a long-standing and once extensive industrial site, is of local historical significance. Established in the 1850s, the site was contemporary with establishment and rapid expansion of Bendigo during the alluvial gold rushes. The Cohn Bros.' brewery was one of the largest and longest-running in the city, outlasting many of the small breweries which had been established during the 1850s. It operated continuously as a brewery and aerated drinks manufactory from 1858 to 1984. The Cohn Bros installed extensive refrigeration and ice-making facilities in the 1880s, to facilitate the production and storage of lager beer. The equipment was acquired from J H Schwalbe and Son of Chemnitz, Germany. The brewery is noted as the first in Australia to produce lager beer. The ice works building, at the north-west corner of the site addressing Water Street, is a remnant of the significant investment in ice making and refrigeration equipment in the 1880s. The construction of the building is specialised, including 76cm-thick walls enclosing chambers housing non-conducting material for insulation purposes.

Individual buildings and elements at the evolved former Cohn Brothers ice works and brewery are of some aesthetic/architectural significance, specifically the ice works and fermentation buildings at the north-west corner of the site. While not elaborate architecturally, they display a robust industrial aesthetic, and are highly distinctive structures. They appear to be largely intact as built, with ground levels of rendered brick, timber-clad upper levels and roof profiles with prominent venting elements. These elements are also reflective of the building's original functions.

The former office/administration buildings (Buildings 5 and 6) have been largely subsumed by later development and partially over-painted. However, their upper levels and roof forms are evocative of their late-nineteenth century date of construction, and provide a sense of the grandeur of the complex. The extant nineteenth century buildings and the large retaining wall provide a sense of the original scale and operation of the brewery, and are broadly representative of industrial sites as a type of place.

Theme

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce

Heritage Study/Consultant	Greater Bendigo - White Hills & East Bendigo Heritage Study 2014, Lovell Chen, 2015;
Other Names	Coliban Water,
Hermes Number	199277
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

Description and integrity

The former Cohn Brothers brewery has frontages to both Bridge and Water streets. The site is highly evolved, having undergone a series of phases of development and operation over its history. From the mid-1850s until the 1980s it operated as brewery, ice works and aerated drinks manufactory, however in more recent times it has been occupied by Coliban Water, which occupies a new office building on the Bridge Street frontage. The west side of the site comprises a large at-grade car park and the remnants of the brewery.

Oblique aerials of the site dating to 1934 indicate that the site was accessed by a laneway to the south, running parallel with Bridge Street (the present Bridge Lane is a remnant of this access way). The lane led to an open courtyard, with low-scale structures (possibly stabling) to the east; a complex of brewery and ice works buildings of varying height (one to three storeys) to the north-west; and large shed structures in the excavated area to the south-west. A pair of two-storey brick buildings is shown opposite the laneway, with their rear walls to Water Street. The tallest elements of the site are a chimney stack, possibly required for the boiler that supported the ice works machinery, and a brew tower, an approximately three-level structure surmounted by a mansard-form roof clad with sheet metal of alternating dark and light colour. Painted signage reading 'Cohn Bros' is visible to the south elevation of the tower.

Today, extant elements relating to the brewery operations are:

- The ice and fermentation rooms at the north-west corner of the site (respectively, Buildings 1 and 2 on the recent aerial view above). The former is approximately a three-storey building, the latter two storeys. Both buildings are rendered brick at ground level, with timber upper levels. The ice works building at the corner of the site has a Dutch gable roof, clad with corrugated sheeting (Building 1). There is a pronounced ridge vent to the roof of the fermentation building. Arch-headed window openings (infilled) are evident in the ground floor of the fermentation building. There are no openings to the ice works at ground level. This is consistent with the specialised nature of its construction, as described in the *Argus* in 1887: 'The walls are 2ft 6" [76.2cm] in thickness. Within the walls, which are 22ft [6.7m] high, are two air chambers, and between these air chambers is a solid 18" [45cm] of non-conducting material, the component parts of which consist of sawdust and tan. The roofing is of the same thickness as the walls, the inner lining being of corrugated iron, on account of the moisture'.²⁴ The two chambers survive. The upper levels (which were not accessible for reasons of structural instability) also stored ice slabs. There are gaps between the floor boards to allow melting ice to run off. There are openings (sealed) to the west face of the timber super structure. A sign reading 'Cohn Bros Ltd, Brewery and Ice Works Soft Drink and Coca Cola Factory 1856-1984' is fixed to the north face of the ice works building. There is painted Cohn Bros signage to the south-facing wall of the ice works building (now an internal wall), indicating that this was originally an external wall and that the two-storey building came later. Multi-pane sash windows (blocked) are extant to the east elevation of the fermentation building, and there is a top-hung service hatch to the south elevation, above an arch-headed doorway.

- There are two long gabled structures, oriented east-west, to the north of the site (Buildings 3 and 4 on the recent aerial view above). Building 3 is described as the Bottling Department in a c. 1885 sketch of the site.²⁵ Building 4, which abuts Building 3, was built between 1918 and 1934; a specific date has not been established. Internally the double-height bottling building is a single volume with timber trusses. The 1934 image shows two large vents to the ridge (removed) and the no door openings to Water Street (a double-height opening with roller door has been introduced). The second gabled structure, to the rear of the former brew tower (demolished) has thick masonry walls at ground level, possibly indicating that it was a cool store. There is a hay loft on the first floor, with an opening at the east end. The building has been reclad externally in corrugated sheet metal.

- There are two brick buildings in the centre of the site, opposite the historic entry to the site (Buildings 5 and 6 on the recent aerial view above). It is possible that they were built for office or administrative purposes. They have been incorporated into the modern Coliban Water development. Sections of the original south and east elevations (ground level) of Building 5 remain unpainted within the Coliban development. Almost all others walls have been enclosed or overpainted. The west elevation of Building 5 has also been overpainted. However, the roof structures and sections of the first floor elevations are extant, including the polychrome brickwork (unpainted) and chimneys. Building 5 has a hipped gable roof form, and Building 6 has a ridge vent superstructure.

- There is a concrete retaining wall of unknown age to the west and south of the site (Element 7 on the recent aerial view above). This part of the site appears to have been excavated or benched, possibly simply as a response to the topography and in order to achieve a flat site. There are raised platforms to the south and west of the site.

Intactness

Fair

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/>