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# FORMER COLONIAL GAS ASSOCIATION BUILDING

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## Location

942-946 WHITEHORSE ROAD BOX HILL, WHITEHORSE CITY

## Municipality

WHITEHORSE CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7922-0515

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 16, 2022

### What is significant?

The site is of moderate archaeological significance and moderate archaeological potential for its association with the developing character of the Box Hill city centre from the 1880s boom through to the present day. The site is representative of both small local businesses and larger corporations including the Colonial Gas Association and Coles Supermarkets. The Colonial Gas Association has a novel approach in the early 20th century for marketing their product with a theatrette and cookery school, it is possible these aspects will be represented in the archaeological record. In addition, it is associated with early franchising of the Coles supermarket chain alongside small retail stores representing the changing character of the Box Hill city centre.

### How is it significant?

### Why is it significant?

Interpretation of Site	In the late 19th and early 20th C the site was associated with small, local commercial businesses. On the 23rd October 1936 the site was officially opened as the Colonial Gas Association Building, with Coles setting up a branch in one of the shopfronts. For the next decade or so, activities at the site were associated with larger commercial and industrial enterprises. Following the closure of the Colonial Gas Association and the relocation of the Coles store, the site once again became primarily associated with small local business. These activities are maintained within the site to the present day. The building is representative of the developing retail market and technology of the 20th century for its association with the gasworks, and it's novel approach to marketing uses for gas, as electricity was becoming a popular alternative. In addition, it is associated with early franchising of the Coles supermarket chain alongside small retail stores representing the changing character of the Box Hill city centre. The site is also representative of the Moderne architectural style of the 1930s. It is the last remaining building relating to the local gas industry, particularly since the gasworks themselves was demolished in the 1970's.
Heritage Act Categories	Registered archaeological place,
Hermes Number	208509
Property Number	

## History

Crown land auctions took place from 1851 in the parish of Nunawading, which includes the Box Hill area, particularly to the north of Whitehorse Road. Allotments to the south of Whitehorse Road were sold in 1853-1854. The primary use of the land was agricultural comprising market gardens and orchards (AJM JV, 2021). Through the 1850s and 1860s services began to be established in Box Hill including the White Horse hotel, the post office and small shops. The character of Box Hill began to change during the 1880s land boom. The railway line to Box Hill was constructed in 1882 which led to increased commercial and residential development, concentrated around the station and Whitehorse Road (AJM JV, 2021).

The site is located within Crown Allotment 29A, which was purchased by William Hill in 1853 (Coleman Architects, 2012). In 1883 Alfred Rawlings erected a butchers shop 'next door' to the Railway Hotel (Coleman Architects, 2012). It is possible, although not confirmed, that this butcher shop was subsequently taken over by Kefford in 1885 (see below).

The 1905 plan indicates that at this time the site had two owners and/or occupiers: J. Musson (Machinist) and H. Kefford (Butcher). The 1905 plan does not indicate the individual structures that may have been present at the property.

J. Musson was advertising his services as a practical clockmaker, watch and sewing machine repairer on Whitehorse Road, "two doors from the Recreation Hall" from at least July 1902 (Box Hill Reporter, 25 July 1902, p.3). Horatio Robert Kefford was an early settler to the Box Hill district, arriving in the 1860s he established his butchering business in 1885, although it has not been confirmed if the butcher always operated from the site depicted in the 1905 plan. Kefford died aged 83 in 1921 (Box Hill Reporter, 3 June, 1921, p:2).

By the 1928 Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) plan, the property is vacant. The 1931 aerial photo demonstrates the property remains vacant with a footpath bisecting the property from north to south.

In the 1933 MMBW plan a large, rectangular, brick structure is indicated, set back from Whitehorse Road in the south-western corner of the property. The Colonial Gas Association building was built in 1936, designed by architects R M and M H King. The design captured the Moderne style that was gaining popularity at the time, particularly in businesses. This denotes a cream brick structure with asymmetrical facade which holds an off-

centre recessed window. The building is evident in the 1945 and 1954 aerial photos, which demonstrate the building encompassed the entire property. An aerial photo of Whitehorse Road ca.1950-1956 shows the distinctive

Moderne architecture in the built landscape (Figure 8). Aerial imagery from 1945 and 1954 is somewhat indistinct, but in the 1975 aerial image (Figure 9) it appears that the large rectangular brick structure in the south-western corner of the building in the 1933 MMBW may have been incorporated into the 1936 construction of the Colonial Gas Association building.

The ground floor contained a showroom space, a small theatrette, and shop fronts which were leased out. The upper floor comprised a cookery school, and general offices for the gasworks (Allom Lovell & Associates, 1999). The purpose of the theatrette being to advertise uses for their gas as a marketing strategy, with “futuristic bathrooms, kitchens and cosy gas-heated dens” (Lemon, 1978). This was particularly important with the growing use of electricity which meant that the gas works could monopolise the market in the region. The Colonial Gas Association was one of the first companies to implement this strategy, first in their Footscray showroom and then in Box Hill. In 1936 Coles set up their first Box Hill branch in the shopfront at No. 942. After the Colonial Gas Association closed in 1953, the whole building was bought by Coles (Allom Lovell & Associates, 1999). It was one of the earliest Coles stores in the state, and the only one in this region. The building remains extant with a variety of businesses operating from the shop fronts throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The shopfronts at the ground level have been substantially altered, it is unclear whether these alterations have caused ground disturbance within the footprint of the building.

*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/>*