

## FORMER CABLE TRAM ENGINE HOUSE



FORMER CABLE TRAM  
ENGINE HOUSE SOHE 2008



FORMER CABLE TRAM  
ENGINE HOUSE SOHE 2008



FORMER CABLE TRAM  
ENGINE HOUSE SOHE 2008



1 cable tram engine house  
gertrude street fitzroy front  
corner tower jan1983



cable tram engine house  
gertrude street fitzroy detail  
front entrance



cable tram engine house  
gertrude street fitzroy front  
facade feb1993



cable tram engine house  
gertrude street fitzroy street  
view

### Location

48 NICHOLSON STREET FITZROY, YARRA CITY

### Municipality

YARRA CITY

### Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0584

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO181

## VHR Registration

August 29, 1984

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 13, 2024

### What is significant?

The former Nicholson Street Cable Tram Engine House, was built in 1886-1887 for the Melbourne Tramway Trust who leased it to the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company. The building was designed by Alexander Davidson, an architect in the employ of the trust, and built by Martin and Peacock at a cost of 11,137 Pounds. The building was the third, and one of the biggest, of twelve engine houses on the cable system, of which eleven were built for the trust and one for the independent Northcote system. The Nicholson Street building drove three cables and was the last operating engine house in Melbourne, operating until 26 October, 1940. The building is finely detailed, with the window sills and supporting volutes in blue-stone, while the window dressings, representative cement cable and brackets are in pre-cast units. The facade is in two-tone brickwork with the piers in brighter red.

### How is it significant?

The MMTB building is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

### Why is it significant?

The MMTB building is of historical significance as an important surviving element of what was once the world's largest cable tram system, and also as the last operating engine house in Melbourne. The Engine House is a symbol of an important phase in Melbourne's transport history and the development of the city, a phase which saw mechanical power supersede horse power on Melbourne's streets and allowed further development of the city's outer reaches. The Engine House and the tram routes that it serviced made the corner of Nicholson and Gertrude Streets a focal point for the city and provided an impetus to the development of the commercial precincts of Fitzroy. The Nicholson Street Engine House was one of the biggest engine houses, driving three cables, the longest one extending to 23,880 feet. Out of the six surviving substantially intact engine houses, the Nicholson Street building is the best, most complete example. The Nicholson Street Engine House was the last operating engine house in Melbourne, finally closing on the 26th October 1940.

The MMTB building is of architectural significance as a particularly fine example of a 19th century industrial and transport infrastructure building. The Italianate-style building was finely detailed and more ornamental than other engine houses, employing cement and bluestone dressings against bi-chrome red brick, an eclectic use of architectural motifs and a particularly fine corbelled polygonal signal box mounted above the parapet over the corner splay of the building. The parapet urns and miniature dome of the signal box echo those of the Exhibition Buildings opposite. The fine architecture provides evidence of the pride with which Melbourne viewed its tramway system and of the importance of the system to the life of the city.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Construction dates	1886,
Architect/Designer	Davidson, Alexander,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	MMTB BUILDING, FORMER CABLE TRAMWAY ENGINE HOUSE,
Hermes Number	456
Property Number	

---

## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

Between 1885 and 1891 seventeen cable tram lines were commissioned, totalling 43 miles of double track tramway. Eleven engine houses were built to power the underground cables, and seventeen car sheds were constructed to house more than 400 trams. At its peak (1923), the cable tram system was carrying more than 155 million passengers annually. Between 1925 and 1940 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board, which took responsibility for the lines in 1919, converted the cable tram lines to either electric tramways or bus services.

## Extent of Registration

AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 584 Former Cable Tram Engine House, corner Gertrude and Nicholson Streets, Fitzroy (to the extent of the total building and land entered in the Register Book as Volume 1821 Folio 077).

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. 91 29 August 1984 pp. 2985]

*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/>*