
Former Footscray Drill Hall



HO93 (1) - Drill Hall, 395
Barkly Street, West
Footscray.JPG



HO93 (2) - Drill Hall, 395
Barkly Street, West
Footscray.JPG

Location

395 Barkly Street and Gordon Street FOOTSCRAY, MARIBYRNONG CITY

Municipality

MARIBYRNONG CITY

Level of significance

-

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO93

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

Please refer to attached document for full citation report

The Footscray Drill Hall and adjacent Officers' Mess were built as a result of the introduction of compulsory military service within Australia prior to the outbreak of WWI, and it was one of a number of drill halls built between 1911 and 1918 in Victoria. The site is thus intimately connected with Australia's preparations for WWI.

It represents the Footscray community's endeavours to establish a local militia and training facility prior to WWI, and may be the only Footscray site that also represents the considerable community conflict over compulsory military service at this time.

The Drill Hall/Officers' Mess group was one of nearly fifty such buildings erected between 1911 and 1918. Around one third of these buildings are still extant. Most are no longer used as drill halls, and few are protected. While it cannot be claimed that the Footscray Drill Hall group is rare or unique, it is part of a diminishing number of buildings that reflect this aspect of history.

The Footscray Drill Hall group is a relatively intact exemplar of the pre-World War I drill halls, and as such is highly significant.

The design of this drill hall type [one of two designs employed for the 1911-1918 buildings] was strongly influenced by the then Commonwealth architect John Smith Murdoch, and is thus significant. In other respects the drill hall is a strong, but strictly utilitarian, structure.

The drill hall and mess complex has high social and cultural significance, particularly within the suburb of Footscray. It is potentially significant to those associated with the Footscray militia units as a place where military traditions have been practiced and handed-on, as a meeting place over many years for this "community", and as a symbol of military service, in war and peace times, and of sacrifice in war.

It is significant to the Footscray community as a local landmark, largely because of its corner site and location next to the Whitten Oval, for its association with events having a profound effect on the community (WWI and WWVII), and as a symbol of the local community's response to the need for national and local defence.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Maribyrnong - Former Drill Hall Precinct Comparative Heritage Assessment, Peter Freeman Pty Ltd And Context Pty Ltd, 1999;
Other Names	Listed as number 411 in Hardcopy report prepared by Context in 1999,
Hermes Number	125656
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

Please refer to attached document for full citation report

The Former Drill Hall is a large timber structure with a steel truss gable roof. To either side of the central gable section are skillion buildings. Externally the building is clad in corrugated Iron which has been placed horizontally; internally the skillion rooms are lined with timber tongue and groove [T&G] boards. There is also some hard sheet lining to the main section of the building. The gable roof has lantern light style vents formed from curved sections of corrugated iron.

The building is located on the corner of Gordon and Barkly Streets, Footscray West, within a block that is dominated by the Western Oval. The building is set hard on the street boundaries.

The building consists of the main Drill Hall [150 x 50 feet] made up of one single space with a door and windows at either end, and with numerous skillion rooms along the entire eastern side of the hall. On the western side of the oval is the Sergeants Mess, in one skillion, and the toilets in another smaller skillion. The Sergeants Mess is lined with timber panelling of Australian hardwood with inset plywood panels.

The spaces, which include the mess, ante room to the mess and a small servery, are all lined with plaster ceilings, and have double hung windows, architraves and skirtings.

The skillion roofs on the Gordon Street side and that of the toilets are below the line of the main roof whilst the skillion roof of the Sergeants Mess is a continuation of the main roof.

The primary structure of the main hall is timber posts supporting steel trusses. The timber posts are set in the ground on a load spreading consists of timber plate. Located above each of the posts are steel trusses. These trusses have inclined compression webs of angled steel bar and an inclined bottom chord to a horizontal central section. The bottom chord consists of a pair of flat steel bars. The truss members are bolted together, and the roof structure is braced at each corner with angle iron, with the roofing attached to purlins fastened to the trusses with steel lugs. The roof is clad in corrugated iron with several clear sheets to provide internal light.

The walls between the timber posts are timber framed from hard wood and there is a non-load bearing beam at the top of the wall. There are few horizontal noggings as the corrugated iron cladding is fastened horizontally to the walls.

The skillion sections have a timber foundation of timber stumps supporting the timber platform of the floor on which the timber walls are stood. The general construction of the skillions is a timber balloon frame with a simple skillion roof off the main section of the building. The dividing walls in the eastern skillion are of timber boarding.

The floor of the drill hall was originally concrete laid between the timber walls with a tar finish over. This original fabric is no longer visible, thus its nature cannot be described in more detail. In 1938 this floor was covered with a timber board floor set on timber battens fastened to the original concrete floor.

Doors and Windows

There are entries to the drill hall from each end and two on the western side. The Barkly Street entry is a modern steel roller door with a timber side door. All the other access doors are double timber doors. The internal doors are mostly four panel doors; those in then drill hall are painted and have suffered much damage from the installation of locks etc over the life of the building.

The windows in the Drill Hall are large fixed pane windows whilst the windows in the skillions are double hung sash windows. Although the joinery to the skillions [east and west] are of 1913 and 1938 dates respectively, they are similar in detail and form.

Modifications

Generally, the former Drill Hall is largely in its original condition. The modifications that have been made to it are minor in nature. In 1938 the Sergeants Mess was added and the floor generally was covered in timber. The obvious modifications to the building are as follows:

The skillion on the Gordon Street side originally contained small offices and stores. These are still largely intact. However, several dividing walls have been removed, several doors have been added, several doors removed and the shelving removed from some of the storerooms. The timber floors in these rooms are original whilst the floor in the hall has a later timber floor over which has resulted in a step between the two.

On the Barkly Street end of the building is a roller door with a standard door next to it. This is not the original configuration. The original door was similar to the door to the southern end of the building. This modification appears to have been undertaken after 1945, probably in the 1960s.

The original floor to the building was tar paving installed after the construction of the building, which was placed on filling which appears to have been a non-structural concrete. It might be assumed that with time and wear this became unserviceable. In 1938 this earlier fabric was covered with a timber floor attached to the existing substrate with timber battens. In several sections on the western wall [the uphill wall with the ground level close to the floor level] there are sections of rot in the flooring.

In 1938 the armoury was moved to a room in. the centre of the eastern skillion. The room was lined with steel

plate on the floor, steel mesh on the walls and a steel door and frame to the drill hall.

In 1938 showers were added to the toilets on the western side of the building. The shower and toilet remain unchanged from that date.

Comment

The condition of the Drill Hall is generally very good. The two major areas where deterioration has occurred is firstly in the heavy wear and tear to the building, and secondly in the degradation of the timber stumps of the building.

The building was constructed with a timber foundation.

Although there is no major evidence that this has failed there are some signs which suggest that it is in a process of failing.

Firstly, there is one post on the western wall which has been cut off and reinforced with sections of angle iron. Secondly, the floor on the western wall is slightly bowed up between the posts suggesting that the posts have or are settling.

Finally, the floors in the Gordon Street skillion slope in towards the drill hall, suggesting that the posts on which the skillion floor and the drill hall roof are supported have settled or are settling.

If the bases of the posts have rotted away it is likely that the structure is inherently unstable, with the skillion buildings providing most of the lateral stability for the building. The provision of new foundations for the building would be difficult and costly. The internal lining to the building has been severely damaged by the heavy use of the building. Most of the hard sheet [Masonite] has been smashed. Whilst this is unsightly it is not of major concern.

The roofing is in serviceable condition; however the guttering and downpipes are in poor condition with water spilling from the broken downpipes into drains, particularly at the rear of the buildings, leaving water pooling around the lower structure of the building. Due to the nature of the structure and the large roof area of the Drill Hall this factor may be a considerable concern.

In summary, the Drill Hall is large hall building built at the beginning of the First World War. It was built during a period of material and labour shortages and the fabric of the building is able to demonstrate that. It is in relatively good condition, however once the timber foundation has degraded the restoration of the building will be problematic.

If the building receives regular maintenance and attention, it can be assumed that the building will have a reasonable lifespan. There are no major or debilitating problems at present. The poor drainage should be rectified immediately before it causes consequent damage. Repair to the bases of some timber posts is also required. This could be done by scarfing a new post base to those that are failing.

Veterans Description for Public

The Footscray Drill Hall and adjacent Officers' Mess were built as a result of the introduction of compulsory military service within Australia prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The Drill Hall/Officers' Mess group was one of nearly fifty such buildings erected between 1911 and 1918. Around one third of these buildings are still extant. While it cannot be claimed that the Footscray Drill Hall group is rare or unique, it is part of a diminishing number of buildings that reflect this aspect of history. The design of this drill hall type (one of two designs employed for the 1911-1918 buildings) was strongly influenced by the then Commonwealth architect, John Smith Murdoch.

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.

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