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# FORMER KENSINGTON GLUE WORKS

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## Location

1-39 HOBSONS ROAD KENSINGTON, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-0623

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - January 10, 2024

### What is significant?

The archaeological features and deposits that compose the remains of the former Kensington Glue Works factory complex from the 1870s until the late 20th century.

### How is it significant?

The site is historically, socially and archaeologically significant to the State of Victoria.

### Why is it significant?

The Former Kensington Glue Works is of social, historical, and potential archaeological significance to the state of Victoria because of its role in early manufacturing. The currently standing, interwar period buildings played a key role in the production of glue and gelatine from the early 20th century, the latter of which was internationally recognised through the exportation by the Davis Gelatine Company from the 1920s until the 1950s. Any original remains from the 19th century former Glue Works can also add to our understanding of early manufacturing practices in Melbourne.

Any archaeological remains of the former Kensington Glue Works could also provide knowledge of early manufacturing practices from the 19th and 20th centuries in Victoria. Associated themes, as set out in Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes, for the Glue Works include 'Processing raw materials' (5.1) and 'Developing a manufacturing capacity' (5.2).

Interpretation  
of Site

The site of the Former Kensington Glue Works has undergone numerous phases of construction from at least the 1870s. Early historical evidence of the site from the mid to late 19th century, in the form of historical news articles, directories, and parish plans, suggests extensive use of the original Allotment 22 (see Place History above). The 1902 MMBW plan shows main buildings, outbuildings, water closets/cesspits and a platform at the north of the site (Figure 3). The building and occupation phases related to the Glue Works on the site are shown on the VHI extent plan (Map 2). The first phase of occupation on the site (Phase 1) appears to have been by the 1880s, based on the 1887 representation of the riverbank (Figure 2). The long factory buildings constructed across the northern end of the site are shown in the 1902 MMBW plan (Figure 3). There were also numerous smaller structural features shown along the river bank, including two cesspits. Phase 2 saw the construction of many of the buildings still standing today in the southern half of the site in 1-39 Hobsons Road between 1928 and 1931, as well as a large factory building close to the riverbank in the 41-45 Hobsons Road property that appears to be still standing (Map 2). Many of the late 19th century Phase 1 buildings remained in use across the northern part of the site. Two of the buildings constructed c.1928 and that are visible on the 1931 aerial photo (Figure 7) have already been demolished in the centre of 1-39 Hobsons Road. In Phase 3, 1940s-1950s, the Glue Works factory appears to have been focused solely on the southern property parcel, 1-39 Hobsons Road, and possibly the northern two properties were subdivided around that time. The c. 1955 MMBW plan shows the description of the buildings constructed being connected to the production of glue and gelatine (Figure 10). Many of the Phase 2 buildings remained in use across the northern and western sides of 1-39 Hobsons Road, and a range of new factory buildings and features were constructed along the eastern and southern portions of this property. (Map 2; Figure 8; Figure 9; and Figure 10). More recently, some of the Phase 2 and Phase 3 buildings and structures have been demolished in 1-39 Hobsons Road, such as after the fire in 2007 (Figure 12; Figure 13). The remains of these structures from Phase 2 and Phase 3 would be over 75 years of age and could still be present below the current ground surface as the site has not been redeveloped. Although the successive phases of building construction from at least the 1880s covered virtually the entire site within the three property parcels, 1-39, 41-45 and 47-63 Hobsons Road, impact along the riverbank appears to be minimal based on historical plans and aerials. There is potential for archaeological features and deposits from the late 19th century (Phase 1) to be present. There is also potential for subsurface structural features and deposits associated with the Phase 1 and Phase 2 buildings to be present below the current buildings across the northern part of the VHI site extent. Many buildings from Phase 2 remain standing or partially standing, but if these were demolished, there is archaeological potential at ground level and below in the form of bluestone structure features and wall footings and possible artefact-bearing deposits (see bluestone feature in photograph Figure 15). The former chimney stack is still partially standing, and other features such as vats, bases, platforms and footings could all be present at ground level or below.

Other Names KENSINGTON BONE MILLS,

Hermes  
Number 13709

Property  
Number

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## History

The Former Kensington Glueworks is situated on what was originally Allotment 21 and 22 of the Parish of Doutta Galla. Allotment 21 was granted to John Watson and Edward Wight, in the late 1840s/early 1850s (Gibb 2001). Edward Wight was the first Mayor of the borough of Essendon and Flemington in 1862, and eventually became the sole owner of the allotment in the late 1850s. Allotment 22 was sold to Edmund Charles Hobson (a prominent medical doctor), consisting of 49 acres, in 1847 (Gibb 2001). Hobson passed away in 1848 and his property was leased by his estate throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Parish maps of the 1850s, shows Allotment 21 owned by Wight and Allotment 22 owned by Hobson, with the area to the north reserved for a racecourse (now Flemington

Racecourse) (Figure 1). As early as 1870, Glue Works along the Maribyrnong River (then Saltwater River) are present. The 1870 and 1880 Sands and McDougall directory has J. Vockler and C. Vockler operating a glue works on the banks of the Saltwater River (Sands & McDougall 1870; 1880), while an 1875 article notes the making of “gelatine glue” by Vockler (The Australasian 1875). In the early 1880s, the glue works on the site was operated by Charles Fitts and later Arthur Fitts. An advertisement for workers in 1882 lists the Kensington Glue Works and states that it was located on the Saltwater River (The Age 1882), while a Punch article in 1884 jokingly refers to a Glue Works factory conveniently located near the racecourse (Melbourne Punch 1884). Reports from the latter half of the 1880s confirm that the operators of the Glue Works were experiencing financial issues. For instance, an insolvency case against Mr. Fitts in 1885 details an accrual of debt (The Argus 1885). Financing by a Mr. Thomas Lloyd seems to then have occurred to assist in debt relief. However, by 1886 debts continued to be an issue, with Fitts reported to owe Lloyd 300 Pounds, which resulted in a physical altercation at the Kensington Glue Works (Weekly Times 1886) and an eventual fine to Fitts (Williamstown Chronicle 1886). The reporting incident does provide details of the Glue Works in the mid-1880s, which included “a factory and appurtenances, stables, and dwelling-house”. Articles from the late 1880s also report of Fitts’ non-compliance with the State. An 1887 article describes the factories located on the banks of the Saltwater River and mentions the Kensington Glue Works: “refuse hair, scraps and fat form a large heap on the adjoining allotment, in defiance of the Health Act, that limits even the stable manure to two yards on any premise. Of course, all the fluid refuse that will run in a drain is sent to the river” (Independent 1887) (Figure 2). Further, the Flemington and Kensington Council meeting of 1889 describes the addition of a large stone, wood and iron building, built at the Glue Works without consent (Essendon and Flemington Chronicle 1889) (Map 3). A Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) plan from 1902 provides detail of the Kensington Glue Works (MMBW 1902) (Figure 3). Numerous long rectangular buildings are positioned on the site, inclusive of a main building and outbuildings, a long platform, and two water closets/cesspits on the banks of the Saltwater River. The land to the south of the Glue Works empty. The road to the east is now also named Hobsons Road. In the 1920s, Davis Gelatine Pty. Ltd. acquired the site to build a large factory to produce Gelatine and Glue (Lovell Chen 2022). After lengthy opposition from the local community permission was eventually granted in 1928 and by 1930 the main factory was almost complete, with further construction works occurring over the next decade (The Age 1928; The Argus 1928; The Argus 1930). It was described as one of the largest factories of its type in the world by time of construction with buildings made of red brick with saw tooth, hipped roof forms and corrugated asbestos cement sheet roof cladding (Lovell Chen 2022). The parapet on the main office building along Hobsons Road displayed the new name of ‘GLUES & BY-PRODUCTS PTY. LTD.’ Although the site was operated by Davis Gelatine, separation between the Glue Works factory and the Gelatine production factory on the site was apparent in from a newspaper article that reported an incident in 1935 (The Argus 1935) (Figure 4). Aerial photographs (Figure 5; Map 4; Map 5; Map 6) and a c. 1955 MMBW plan (Figure 6) of the site show show the development of buildings and structures for the factory. The c.1955 plan indicates the activities the buildings were used for which included: storage, solvent extraction, bone crushing, conditioning, and washing, evaporation, boiling, glue pearling, oil refinery, and lime pits (Pratt c. 1940; MMBW c. 1955). The buildings within 1–39 Hobsons Road must have gone out of use by the end of the 20th century, as a review of available aerial imagery from the beginning of the 21st century does not show any industrial activities occurring at the site and indicates that the site had been abandoned (Google Earth Pro) (Figure 7). In 2007, a fire burnt many of the central buildings at the site, with individuals living in the abandoned buildings and organising parties (Oakes 2007). Aerial images from 2007 show the extent of the damage, and by 2009, the central buildings were demolished (Figure 8). Over the past decade, the site remained abandoned, with recent imagery showing the dilapidated state of the buildings (Figure 9; Figure 10). Meanwhile, buildings within 41–45 Hobsons Road and 47–63 Hobsons Road continued to be developed throughout the 20th century, with many currently still in use as factories and warehouses.

*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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