
GRIMWADE & FELTON/CHEETHAM SALTWORKS SITE, FRENCH ISLAND

Location

SALT MINE POINT ROAD FRENCH ISLAND, UNINCORPORATED

Municipality

UNINCORPORATED

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7921-0115

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Archaeological Significance	The archaeological significance of the French Island Salt Works Company is high. Investigations of the area is likely to uncover artefacts, features and relics which pertain to the manufacture of salt at the site, some of which will be intact. The archaeological significance of the site is further enhanced by the fact that this site is one of the few industries that developed on French Island. It is also among the earliest industries established in Victoria.
Interpretation of Site	Grimwade and Felton Saltworks Site possibly dates from the 1873. The speculation is that the site may have been associated with the storing, processing and transport of salt. If salt was extracted on the site it would have been with the use of heated vats. There is also a timber jetty located along the beach. Below the vegetation line (along the beach) there is possible evidence of lime burning.
Other Names	FRENCH ISLAND SALT COMPANY,

Hermes Number 166055

Property
Number

History

The history of the site is unclear. Very little is known and more work needs to be done.

The French Island Salt Company was registered in June 1873 by James Hart, a Melbourne-based engineer, and business partner Edward Keogh, a wholesale druggist.⁴ Hart had previously selected the larger, 319 acres [129.2 ha] allotment to the west (allotment 14B) in May 1872 for the expressed purpose of establishing a saltworks. By October 1872, he and his workmen had built several huts using handmade bricks and had prepared stone foundations for the furnaces. It was among the earliest attempts at large-scale salt manufacture in Victoria, with some of the other known examples having occurred in the Western Port district - at Bass River (1848) and Crib Point (1868-72).⁵

The French Island Salt Company must have been in financial difficulty for in June 1874 the Colonial Bank of Australia sought damages against the company as a *fiery-facias* (a legal writ empowering a sheriff to levy execution on the goods of a debtor) was issued by the Supreme Court.⁶ The matter was settled and the land was transferred from William Wright (sheriff) to Edmund Keogh and William Brookes on 7 September 1874. Less than a week later (12 September), the site passed to Richard Cheetham.⁷ During 1874, Hart relinquished his interests on French Island as his wife had died and he was in failing health.⁸

It seems that Hart's group of workmen remained to work for Cheetham but were dispersed by 1875 when operations of the saltworks lapsed for a few years while waiting for a feasible tariff to be settled. In 1881, Cheetham applied successfully to the Lands Department for approximately 3000 acres of land on the northern coast of French Island claiming that the site on the south east coast of French Island was not adequate, as the evaporation required for the manufacture of salt could only occur during the summer months. In 1882, he was in need of capital and so established the Australian Salt Manufacturing Company in partnership with Felton & Grimwade, Alfred Shaw & Co., and Hughes & Harvey.⁹ The subject site was subsequently transferred to the partners in March 1883. ¹⁰ Cheetham was forced out of the Australian Salt Manufacturing Company in 1885 but later established major salt works on Port Phillip Bay at Laverton and east of Geelong. (See a full history on the French Island Salt company Site in Hermes No:120259)

Together with R. Cheetham, Grimwade & Felton produced salt from sea water and later on they branched out into manufacturing oxygen from potassium chlorate and manganese oxide.

Viewed nationally the historic importance of Felton and Grimwade was in the foundation of major manufacturing enterprises and not in the chemical industry, not even in pharmaceutical manufacture. From their initiatives three major Australian companies grew, after a series of amalgamations and metamorphoses: Australian Consolidated Industries (ACI), Commonwealth Industrial Gases (CIG) with their subsidiary Carba Dry Ice and one pharmaceutical company. Drug Houses of Australia. Elliott Brothers, in due course, became part of Monsanto Australia and thus part of the chemical industry. R. Cheetham independently formed the Solar Star Salt Works, Australia's first solar energy process still in business today.

Alfred Felton contributed to Victoria's history in other ways. He created the Felton bequest (£400 000, about \$27 million in 1985 dollars) out of the wealth of his enterprise, which formed the core of the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia's finest and richest art collection.

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/>