
MALVERN TRAM DEPOT

Location

21 COLDBLO ROAD ARMADALE, STONNINGTON CITY

Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7922-0534

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 15, 2023

What is significant?

The Malvern Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench was identified in the 1945 aerial imagery of the Malvern Tramway Depot site. It comprises three roughly north south aligned zig-zag air raid slit trenches in what is now the Malvern Tramway Depot staff carpark. Aerial imagery dating from 1951-1968 suggest that this area was primarily used for stockpiling and was levelled off in 1968 by adding darker sediment. It was used as an unpaved carpark from 1978 to 1984, with evidence of bitumen having been added in 1987. As such, it is possible that the remains of the base of the zig-zag air raid slit trench are still extant in a subsurface context. Features may include sandbags, timbers, corrugated iron, iron rods, and drainage infrastructure, along with the potential for discarded items dating to the period the trench was in use.

How is it significant?

The Malvern Tramway Depot is of historic and archaeological importance to the State of Victoria. The Malvern Tramway Depot is of archaeological significance for its potential to contain archaeological evidence of the design, construction, use, and remediation of air raid precaution slit trenches constructed during World War II (1939-45). The trenches were probably built in 1942 after Japan's entry into the war in late 1941, to shelter staff who worked at the Malvern Tramway Depot. The slit trenches were constructed in response to the fear of air attack during World War II and represent precautionary measures taken in Victoria's urban public areas. The distinctive zig-zag pattern of the trenches was typical of those built in several Tramway Depots, city parks and gardens as the preferred shelter for protecting large numbers of people from bomb blasts. There has been some disturbance from introduced fill (identified in the aerial photographs) since the trenches were backfilled.

Why is it significant?

The three zig-zag trenches comprise a significant archaeological feature of Melbourne's history during World War II which are not commonly investigated archaeologically. Evidence found has the potential to provide information on the technology, construction, and use of the air raid slit trench in an urban context. This will provide information on how the people of Essendon responded to the possibility of war during, and after, World War II.

There is one area of archaeological potential within the Malvern Tramway Depot site, comprising three, parallel, Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trenches (Figure 4-1). The area east of the former school (Figure 1 1) does not seem to have been adversely impacted yet has been disturbed since the construction of the tram depot buildings in the southern section of the site. The area primarily appears to have been a dirt surface, into which three parallel zig-zag air raid slit trenches were excavated during World War II. Sometime before or in 1945 three zig-zag air raid trenches (slot/slit trenches) has been excavated in the northern portion of the Project area. Aerial imagery dating from 1951-1968 suggest that this area was primarily used for stockpiling and was levelled off in 1968 by adding darker sediment. It was used as an unpaved carpark from 1978 to 1984, with evidence of bitumen having been added in 1987. The ground would have been prepared for the formalised bitumen surface which probably required fill to create a flat and stable foundation (1968 aerial image – Appendix B). The carpark has remained in place since its construction and has provided protection for the underlying archaeological deposits. As such, it is likely that the historical ground surface, and the three zig-zag air raid slit trenches, may still be present under the introduced fill. The Malvern Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets the definition of archaeological site under the Heritage Act, as a site that is likely to contain artefacts, deposits or features 78 or more years old, that would provide information relation to the former use of the site, that requires archaeological methods to reveal such information. While there are no surface features, due to the asphalt of the extant carpark covering the site, there is aerial imagery showing that the three zig-zag air raid shelter trenches were extant in 1945. Photographic evidence of the Malvern Tramway Depot from the 1950s shows the zig-zag slit trench has been filled-in. The site has subsequently been levelled, possibly through the introduction of fill, and archaeological features associated with the slit trench are likely to still be in situ underneath the current carpark. The area has been used for carparking since approximately the 1960s and was formalised with a bitumen surface sometime before 1978 (Appendix B). This is likely to contribute to an understanding of how Malvern Tramway Depot staff, and possibly the wider Malvern community, responded to the threat of World War II. As such the Malvern Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets Threshold A (archaeology). As there is limited historical information about the three Malvern Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trenches, archaeological investigation and detailed recording could provide information not available elsewhere, particularly in relation to the construction and use of the slit trench. The limited historical information suggests that Malvern Tram Depot was one of the open areas around Melbourne utilised in this fashion, although, while it was built for the depot employees, it is currently unknown as to whether the Brunswick community would also have had access to these slit trenches in a time of crisis. Archaeological investigation could provide information about other slit trenches and their usage across suburban Melbourne. The site is significant in a local context under the 'defending Victoria and Australia' (Theme 7.4) in Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes (Heritage Council of Victoria 2010 (Heritage Council of Victoria 2010). As such, the three Malvern Tram Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trenches site meets Threshold B.

Interpretation
of Site

Hermes
Number 209654

Property
Number

History

Construction of the P&MTT depot in Coldblo Road at Armadale (which was called the Malvern Tram Depot) and of their electric tram lines began in 1909. By 1910 the P&MTT had built a line along High Street from Prahran to Tooronga Road, and a branch line south along Glenferrie Road to Wattletree Road, where it turned east to terminate at Burke Road. The depot with offices and a workshop were built on the south side of Coldblo Road, just off Glenferrie Road. The building was designed by the Trust's architect Leonard John Flannagan in conjunction with the Trust's electrical engineers, Noyes Bros Pty Ltd. It was built by W Sim and Co, who also laid the tracks. Malvern Tramway depot opened in 1910. It was the first and the largest of the depots constructed by Melbourne's municipal tramway trusts prior to the formation of the M&MTB. Electricity was supplied by the privately-operated Melbourne Electrical Supply Company in Richmond and transmitted to the substation on the west end of the Coldblo Road Depot, where it was converted to 600 volt DC current to operate the trams. With war breaking out in the Pacific in 1941, the Board of the M&MTB took action to protect its staff by constructing a series of air raid precautions. Slit trenches were dug at the Preston Workshops, Carlton substation, Victoria Parade and the Royal Park meal rooms, and within the yards of the Coburg, Brunswick, Essendon, Glenhuntly, Hawthorn and Malvern Tram Depots. Other preparations were made where it was not viable to excavate slit trenches, such as at the Hanna Street (South Melbourne), Kew, Camberwell and Footscray Tram Depots (Jones, 2004).

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/>