
Kinnears Rope Works



B7185 Kinnears Rope Works

Location

130 Ballarat Road,, FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011 - Property No B7185

Municipality

MARIBYRNONG CITY

Level of significance

State

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2067

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 3, 2005

What is significant? Kinnear's Ropeworks is a substantial early twentieth century factory complex with a range of one and two-story red-brick and corrugated-iron industrial buildings built densely on an island site between Ballarat road and Kinnear Street in Footscray. The factory was established by George Kinnear in 1902, and extensively rebuilt following a fire in 1907, then progressively added to. The long rope walk can still be discerned on the site by a sequence of low gable roofed structures and the remaining machinery and tramline inside.

How is it significant? Kinnear's Ropeworks is significant for aesthetic/architectural, historic, social and scientific (technical) reasons at a State level.

Why is it significant? Kinnear's Ropeworks is of historical significance as one of Victoria's three major ropeworks

(Millers in Brunswick and Donaghy's in Geelong), and the largest and longest continually operating in Melbourne (1902-2002). It is also significant for its association with George Kinnear - a dominant industry figure and technological pioneer in rope and fibre. It is significant for the association with the close-knit community of ropemakers including those in the Miller and Donaghy companies, for the connection with Footscray as the industrial hub of Victoria, for its role in the war effort and for its existing and continuing place in local community as a major employer. As one of a number of Melbourne rope walks, the site contributes to an understanding of the role of Melbourne's Ports in Australian Shipping, with few other comparable works being known from other states.

It is of technical significance for the survival of one of only two rope walks in Victoria, which retains any ropemaking machinery or the form of the ropewalk buildings. (Substantial demolition has recently occurred at the Geelong rope works). It retains the only known early twentieth century ropemaking machinery in Australia (the Geelong ropemaking machinery is generally of post 1950s date). It is also rare for the survival of specific components including the winding gear, top cart and galantine, and evidence of the rope laying troughs, wire control lines and other fittings. The rope walk and its machinery are of technical significance in terms of the size of rope that could be manufactured at this site. The few large ropeworks being the only places where very large diameter ships ropes could be made. The survival or related buildings and structures such as the boiler and engine house, chimney and some plant which reflect the original steam power supply for the rope works, adds to the understanding of the technology employed in early ropemaking in Victoria.

It is of aesthetic or architectural significance as a local landmark, particularly for its visual and streetscape qualities, principally of the expanses of red brick double-height perimeter walls, the dominant chimney, and the extensive signage along the parapet frieze, which was designed specifically for this purpose. Specific components of the works have architectural and aesthetic value including the Moderne or Art Deco elements of the Workers Hall and its stage, the timber lined and limed panelling of the drafting office and the curved brickworks on many of the building corners.

It is of Social significance as a local landmark and as a community focus and a workplace. The surviving workers hall, in part reflects this and also demonstrates the role of the company in the social life of its employees. It is quite unusual for such factory workers' amenities to survive today. Many local families have a strong association over several generations as Kinnear's was a key workplace particularly for women, Aboriginal people and post war migrants.

Classified: 08/09/2004

Hermes Number 66061

Property Number

Physical Description 1

The following description is derived from the Maribyrnong Heritage Review, (Butler et al)

Complex of factory buildings of predominantly saw-tooth roof form with brick walls. The external facade presents a unified tall parapeted red-brick wall with generally steel hopper sash windows and steel lintels (segmental arches to earliest parts). Internal structure is timber king-post truss and sawtooth truss, with some later sections in welded steel. Modern clear span stores have been added to the western end of the site.

The rope walk which was originally 1500 foot in length was contained within the long, low, pitched roof building along the northern boundary on the south side of Kinnear Street, which originally extended through to Gordon Street. This is a king-post truss, gable roof form structure of timber framing and corrugated iron cladding. The roof was reclad in new zincalume in about 1997, at which time the small towered structure that contained the rope tensioning equipment was removed. At last internal inspection in 1997, the rope walk retained original equipment including the belt driven rope twisting machinery and the traveller which ran on c30cm diam. steel flanged wheels on light gauge rails. It is believed that at least some of this has been removed. The original western extent of the rope walk is still identifiable by an undeveloped area at the corner of Kinnear and Gordon Streets which has a concrete slab, although the building structure stops well short of this point.

Distinctive early buildings are evident in the north east corner of the site. The sections with a double hipped roof containing clerestory lights and a roof lantern and the long gabled rope walk parallel to Kinnear Street are probably the earliest parts. Also in the north west corner of the site, the double timber doors in a segmentally-

arched carriage entrance may indicate the original loading out and stables.

One of the lantern roofed sections includes a timber panelled mezzanine/second storey, which indicates the former drafting office. The original boiler chimney survives although reduced in height, while the former coal fired boilers are partly intact.

The significance of Kinnear's Ropeworks is expressed in the physical fabric of the factory in several ways. Its size and scale reflects the importance of the company, while the landmark qualities reflect the social and cultural associations. Individual building forms reflect manufacturing processes or building function. Buildings within a rope works fall into the following categories:

- . manufacture
- . storage/dispatch
- . services - boiler house, engine room
- . administration/amenities

Manufacture

The ropewalk requires a long open space or more commonly a basic timber framed, corrugated iron clad shed, 5-10m wide and 400-1000m long. Winding machinery sometimes is housed in a larger section of building at one end, or adjacent factory space.

Fibre mills for carding, spinning, polishing etc. require functional spaces related to the machinery they contain. The scale of manufacture (in yards produced of a particular type textile) determines the size and shape of the building. The typical mill size at Kinnear's is about 5000 square metres (eg. the jute or hemp mills). This is small compared to clothing textile mills of the period, or modern textile plant. The size reflects the generally specialised nature of the manufacturing carried out by Kinnear's. The number of such separate mills also reflects the range of products - eg sewing thread, string, binder twine, carpet thread, hay band, sash cord, ropes of all sizes and strength, sacking, mesh, and the materials used - hemp, jute, sisal, coir, Manila, flax, linen, and from the 1930s a vast range of synthetic fibres. Different equipment and production methods were required for each although a major division was generally made between the hard and soft fibre mills.

The building form for the carding, spinning and laying processes were south-facing sawtooth roof (for good natural light), segmented into smaller production units with partitioning walls to prevent contamination of fibres between products.

Warehouses

The current warehouse areas are concentrated in the most modern buildings (with purpose-built racking) and oldest (redundant) buildings. Storage has generally been secondary to manufacture, and as the spaces needed are more flexible, spaces can be used on an as needs basis. Loading however, is constrained by vehicle access, which is why the internal roadway system and multiple access points were critical to the design. This allowed access to dispersed storage areas connected to each of the separate manufacturing units.

Ancillary buildings

Before 1920 using coal fired boilers and gas suction and/or steam engines were used for motive power. Steam was also used for heat shrinking and treating fibres and rope. Allied to the boiler and engine houses were the engineer's workshops and stores where machines were maintained and repaired. This formed the functional core of the works, its placement chosen for economic design of steam pipes and line shafting.

The administration and staff amenities are also concentrated in the core area, and at the major access to the site, giving the sense of management overseeing the works and the workers. The staff amenities are noteworthy for the dual purpose cafeteria/hall, with its Moderne stage setting. This reflects the strong social and community role of the works.

CONTEXT

Kinnear's Ropeworks is located on an almost island site on a prominent intersection of the main western highway. While originally on the fringe of the Footscray urban and industrial area, it was later joined by a number of other industries such as Mephan Ferguson on Gordon street. Residential development (some sponsored by Kinnear's such as the Workers housing estate to the north) has grown around the factory since its establishment.

Intactness

The main buildings of Kinnear's Ropeworks appears to be intact to the period 1909 to 1930 with some modern additions in the western end and south east corner which replaced former houses. With the recent removal of plant, some parts of the site have also lost internal structures. The chimney was truncated in the 1950s and the boilers replaced with high pressure gas fired boilers after this. Some entrances and windows have been blocked in, but are still recognisable, while only a few new openings have been made.

The rope walk has recently been reclad, and shortened, and original rope making machinery was in place at last inspection (1997 and 2002)

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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