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# MELBOURNE GLASS BOTTLE WORKS COMPANY

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## Location

1 SIMCOCK AVENUE SPOTSWOOD, HOBSONS BAY CITY

## Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2407

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 12, 2021

### What is significant?

In 1890, Fenton, Grimwalde and Co. purchased 12 acres of land on the Yarra at Spotswood and built a new manufacturing plant for the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works Company, which had been established in 1872 and previously operated from South Melbourne. The largest building in the complex was the mixing shed which was 120 feet long by 50 feet wide ('Glass and Glassmaking' Leader, Melbourne 2 February 1890, 5). Other structures included furnaces, a boiler room, engine room, batch house, mould room, mould making shop, blow pipe making department and closures shop (Harrop 2008: 36). The Bottle Works had its own railway siding so that coal could be directly delivered to the site. The Bottle Works was fenced off by a basalt wall, which was 115 metres long and 6 metres high, along the Yarra side of the complex, facing what is now Douglas Parade. The Company employed more than 220 men in 1890 ('Glass and Glassmaking' Leader, Melbourne 2 February 1890, 6).

By 1915 Spotswood became the headquarters of the business which had glassworks in Hobart and Sydney by the 1930s. Aerial photographs show the expansion and modernisation of the plant through the twentieth century. Daniel Pratt's oblique Airspy photograph taken in 1930 shows the factory with its brick furnaces and various factory sheds occupying much of the land between the railway line and the river frontage. A 1945 aerial shows that new buildings had been constructed, including a multi-level red brick building, and that some demolition had taken place (Melbourne\_848B4A 1945). By 1986, the factory site was almost completely covered in buildings. A series of photographs taken by Walter Sievers in the 1980s of AC1 shows the plant had been modernised and

expanded during Melbourne's manufacturing boom period following the end of World War Two.

**How is it significant?**

**Why is it significant?**

The Former Melbourne Glass Bottle Works is historically significant as it reflects the growth and development of Victoria's manufacturing capacity through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Glass was produced on the site of the Former Melbourne Glass Bottle Works at Spotswood for over a hundred years from 1890, and this was possibly the oldest continuously operating complex in the city and the metropolitan area. They had become the largest bottle producer in Victoria by 1908. The organisation adopted the most up-to-date manufacturing processes for glassmaking over its history and evolved to become a supplier of building materials by 1939. The factory produced a wide range of glass products that included beer, wine and spirit bottles; pickle, sauce, jam and condiment jars; medicine bottles and vials; as well as window glass and glass products used in industrial processes. These products were used domestically, nationally and in the food export industries.

The Melbourne Glass Bottle Works is also historically significant on account of its association with Victoria's early European transportation routes. The factory had its own railway siding when it first opened and was connected by tramway to the nearby jetty. The factory used water and rail to transport its raw materials onto the site, and to transport their final products out to markets, both domestic and overseas. Workers also used rail to commute to work from further suburbs.

The site is also of historical significance as it had an important role in transforming Spotswood into a major industrial suburb, particularly in the inter-war period. The factory was one of the first located in Spotswood and an industrial suburb grew around the new industries. Generations of local men and women worked at the factory and the distinctive basalt wall along Douglas Parade became a local landmark, referred to as the Great Wall of Spotswood.

Finally, it is significant for its association with Alfred Felton (1831-1904) who migrated to Victoria from Britain in 1853 and set up business carting provisions to the goldfields, and then established a wholesale druggist shop in Swanston Street in 1861. In 1872 Fenton, Grimwade and Co. established the Melbourne Glass Bottle Company which operated from Graham Street Emerald Hill (South Melbourne). The factory initially produced bottles for the company's pharmaceutical products but expanded into other types of bottles. Felton is celebrated in Victoria as the creator of the Felton Bequest, which helped build the National Gallery of Victoria art collection, as well as provided money to charities for women and children.

Interpretation  
of Site

Some of the earliest features of the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works dating from 1890 are still present. Most notably, the original basalt wall that fenced off the plant along the Yarra side of the complex is fully intact, facing Douglas Parade. The complex also had its own rail siding when it first opened, off the line from Spotswood to the Spotswood Pumping Station, and these tracks are still in place. The tracks run down the centre of the site and veer westwards towards Booker Street. Some early building footprints are also visible at the site. Along a small strip of exposed undeveloped ground on the eastern perimeter, sections of brick flooring lay exposed among the dense vegetation. These floorings align with the footprint of a large building shown in the 1898 MMBW plan of the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works. This building was likely the batch house where raw materials were stored, as Harrop (2008) describes that it was located between the furnaces to the north and the basalt wall parallel to the Yarra. The map also shows that the building was directly connected by tramline to the pier, which would have enabled the raw materials to be delivered directly to the building. Rubble including fragmented brick, tiles, and melted glass are also present on the surface in this area. Given the lack of developments along this strip, it is possible that further evidence of occupation is contained in subsurface deposits. Another early building made of bluestone is visible beneath a raised asphalted platform south of the museum storage building. The bluestone wall continues along the length of the platform. The top of the platform is sagging in places, which may indicate the presence of cavities beneath. These bluestone footings align with the footprint of another building shown on the 1898 MMBW plan, possibly the boiler or engine room described by Harrop (2008). The plant expanded in the early twentieth century and a 1930 Airspy photograph shows that a number of new brick furnaces and sheds were added. Many of these buildings were concentrated in the southeast and the northwest of the site, which are currently paved over with asphalt. Whilst no features from these early twentieth century expansions are still visible at the site, it is possible that associated footings and deposits are preserved beneath the asphalt. Further expansions occurred in the inter-war period. A 1945 aerial shows that a multi-level red brick building was added, likely in stages during the 1930s, and that some previous buildings were demolished. Sections of brick wall foundations from this red brick building have, in some places, been left in place. These are evident around the northern and western perimeters of the allotment, around some of the raised asphalted areas across the site, and directly beneath the Grazeland dining complex. This seems to suggest that the the footings of previous buildings have not been cleared away, and modern developments at the site have simply been built directly on top. After the plant was closed in 2012, all of the buildings were demolished and much of the area was paved over with asphalt, leaving the possibility that further footings and deposits have been preserved beneath. Moreover, where new facilities have been constructed, such as the Grazeland dining complex, it is evident that these have been built directly on top of the footings of previous buildings.

Hermes  
Number 208300

Property  
Number

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## History

In 1840, John Stewart Spotswood took possession of Allotment 16 in the Parish of Cut-paw-paw, which consisted of 119 acres of land. John Spotswood bought the land to establish a dairy farm but was also involved in selling sand and stone. Proeschel's 1860 map shows the area had no settlement or buildings. Spotswood became a popular location for manufacturing enterprises from the 1880s.

In 1890, Fenton, Grimwalde and Co. purchased 12 acres of land on the Yarra at Spotswood and built a new manufacturing plant for the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works Company, which had been established in 1872 and previously operated from South Melbourne. The largest building in the complex was the mixing shed which was 120 feet long by 50 feet wide ('Glass and Glassmaking' Leader, Melbourne 2 February 1890, 5). Other structures included furnaces, a boiler room, engine room, batch house, mould room, mould making shop, blow pipe making

department and closures shop (Harrop 2008: 36). The Bottle Works had its own railway siding so that coal could be directly delivered to the site. The Bottle Works was fenced off by a basalt wall, which was 115 metres long and 6 metres high, along the Yarra side of the complex, facing what is now Douglas Parade. The Company employed more than 220 men in 1890 ('Glass and Glassmaking' Leader, Melbourne 2 February 1890, 6).

By 1895, the company was producing patented and aerated water bottles; wine, beer and spirit bottles; pickle, sauce, jam and condiment jars; fruit and preserving jars; and medicine bottles and vials. Most were pale green or amber (Harrop 2008: 38). In the 1900s, the Argus newspaper ran a feature on the Spotswood factory which declared that practically all the beer bottles in Australia were made by the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works ('Our Industries Making Australia's Bottles' Argus, 30 May 1908, 7). The article goes on to describe the modern technology being introduced in the glass making process, including the machine that could produce 350 dozen 2 lb jars per 8-hour shifts. The company expanded in this time and five or six acres of buildings covered the site (Hobson Bay Heritage Study 2017: 35). The factory employed 500 people by 1908.

In 1915 the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works Company amalgamated with the Waterloo Glass Bottle Manufacturing Company from New South Wales and formed the Australian Glass Manufacturing Company (AGM). Spotswood became the headquarters of the business which had glassworks in Hobart and Sydney by the 1930s. AGM became Australian Consolidated Industries in 1939 when the company was diversifying into building materials. Aerial photographs show the expansion and modernisation of the plant through the twentieth century. Daniel Pratt's oblique Airspy photograph taken in 1930 shows the factory with its brick furnaces and various factory sheds occupying much of the land between the railway line and the river frontage. A 1945 aerial shows that new buildings had been constructed, including a multi-level red brick building, and that some demolition had taken place (Melbourne\_848B4A 1945). By 1986, the West Gate Freeway was constructed, and the area was heavily industrialised (Melbourne Inner Suburbs 1986). The factory site was almost completely covered in buildings. A series of photographs taken by Walter Sievers in the 1980s of AC1 shows the plant had been modernised and expanded during Melbourne's manufacturing boom period following the end of World War Two.

In 1998 the company was purchased by Owens Illinois (OI). The plant was closed in January 2012 due to a fall in the demand for wine and beer bottles (Deng 2012). The land was purchased by the Victorian Government and the buildings were demolished, aside from the basalt wall on Douglas Parade (Star Weekly 2012).

*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/>*