
ESSENDON TRAMWAY DEPOT

Location

318 MOUNT ALEXANDER ROAD TRAVANCORE, MOONEE VALLEY CITY

Municipality

MOONEE VALLEY CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2423

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 15, 2023

What is significant?

The Essendon Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench was identified in the 1945 aerial imagery of the Essendon Tramway Depot site. It comprises a zig-zag air raid slit trench in what is now the Essendon Tramway Depot car park. Aerial imagery dating from 1945-1951 suggest that this area was primarily used for stockpiling, and as an unpaved carpark from 1963 to 1972, with evidence of bitumen having been added in 1979, followed by the levelling of the carpark in 2016 through building up the ground surface to form a level surface prior to the addition of modern asphalt. 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 Essendon Tramway Depot is of historic and archaeological importance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The zig-zag trench comprises 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.

Interpretation
of Site

There is one area of archaeological potential within the Essendon Tramway Depot site, comprising the Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench. The area between the two northernmost buildings (Figure 3 2) does not seem to have been adversely impacted and disturbed since the construction of the buildings in the northern section of the site. The area primarily appears to have been a dirt surface, into which a zig-zag air raid slit trench was excavated during World War II. Sometime before or in 1945 a zig-zag air raid trench (slot trench) has been excavated in the northern portion of the Depot parcel. By 1951 however, the zig-zag air raid trench (slot trench) has been filled in and the layout of the buildings has not changed. The buildings in the northeast portion of the Depot parcel previously seen in the 1945 aerial appear to have been demolished. The buildings in the northern extent, including the powerhouse, have been demolished and replaced by a tram yard and carpark by 1963 and the ground surface appears to be entirely sealed with bitumen. Before 1979, formal car parking was established present adjacent to tram yard, overlying the location of the zig-zag air raid trench (slot trench). The ground would have been prepared for the formalised bitumen surface which probably required fill to create a flat and stable foundation. The carpark has remained in place since its construction and has provided protection for the underlying archaeological deposits. As part of the refurbishment of the depot in 2016 the tram yard appears to have been resurfaced. As such, it is likely that the historical ground surface, and the zig-zag air raid slit trench and the original asphalt tram shed surface, may still be present under the introduced fill. The Essendon Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slot 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 zig-zag air raid shelter trench was extant in 1945. Photographic evidence of the Essendon 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 1979. This is likely to contribute to an understanding of how Essendon Tramway Depot staff, and possibly the wider Essendon community, responded to the threat of World War II. As such the Essendon Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets Threshold A (archaeology). As there is limited historical information about the Essendon Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench, 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 Essendon Tramway 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 Essendon community would also have had access to this slit trench 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). As such, the Essendon Tramway Depot Zig-Zag Air Raid Slit Trench site meets Threshold B.

Hermes
Number

209651

Property
Number

History

A E Morgans, a private investor from Western Australia, proposed installing electric tramways from Flemington Bridge to Maribyrnong and North Essendon, and generating and distributing electricity. Government approval was obtained, and Morgans' rights were taken over by the North Melbourne Electric Tramway & Lighting Company

which had been formed in London. The tram depot and power generating station was constructed in Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale and the tramway opened on 11 October 1906. Prior to the tram services public transport through Essendon was provided by the main trunk railway from Melbourne to north-east Victoria, a service of horse drawn omnibuses from Flemington Bridge to Moonee Ponds, and horse drawn cabs. The Railways Department had earlier opposed construction of the Essendon tramways for fear that it would affect their revenue. In 1919 the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) was formed to take over and consolidate most of the various separate tramways then in existence. A zig-zag air raid shelter trench was excavated in the 318 Mount Alexander Road, Travancore sometime before the 1945 aerial photograph was taken. The trench was filled sometime prior to 1951 and has now been covered by a bitumen tram yard and carpark. Please see attachment for more detail.

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/>