

## FORMER ELSTERNWICK FIRE STATION



Selwyn Street (west-facing) facade



The horseshoe arch integrates limestone, trachyte and basalt with the brickwork



Anglo-Dutch gable and emblem incorporating 1891 MFB-designed corporate shield



View from Selwyn Street along un-named laneway, showing painted areas of face brickwork on south elevation



South elevation looking west towards Selwyn Street from un-named laneway



South elevation looking east towards St Georges Road from un-named laneway



Looking towards the west (Selwyn Street) at the 1896 building's roofscape



Looking west at the timber and glass doors to the former fire engine room



Looking west towards the fire engine room from the space formed by the mid-1950s roofing of the former yard



Timber-boarded ceiling junction with south and west walls inside the former fire engine room



Steel lintel supporting a remnant of the 1896 building's east wall in the north-east corner of the former fire engine room



c.1918: Selwyn Street elevation with Hotchkiss Fire Engine and crew. The Station's original roof materials are visible



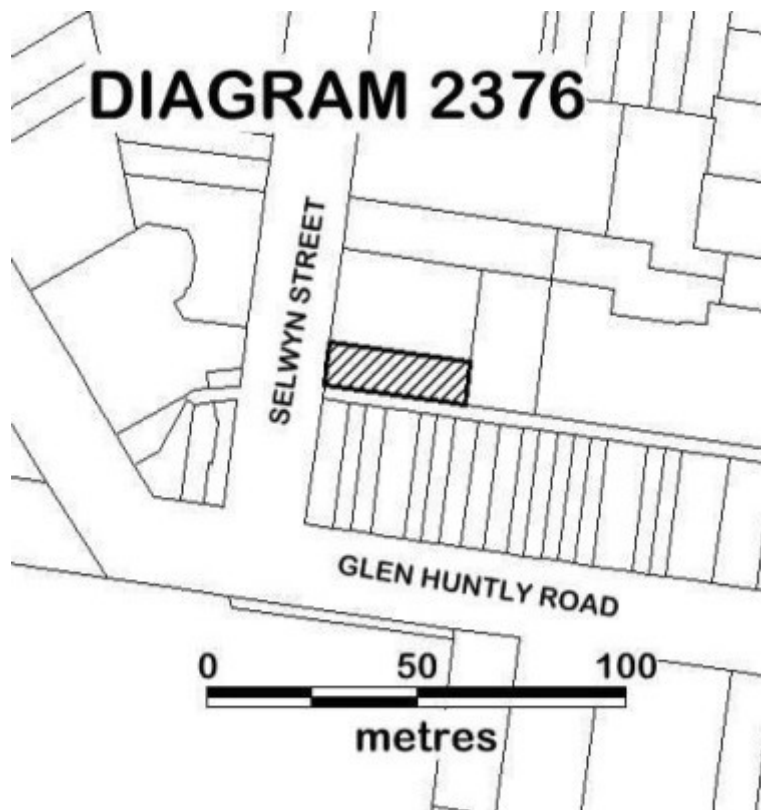
c.1918: Hotchkiss Fire Engine and crew at the horseshoe arch on Selwyn Street



1974: re-purposed as the Esquire Motors garage



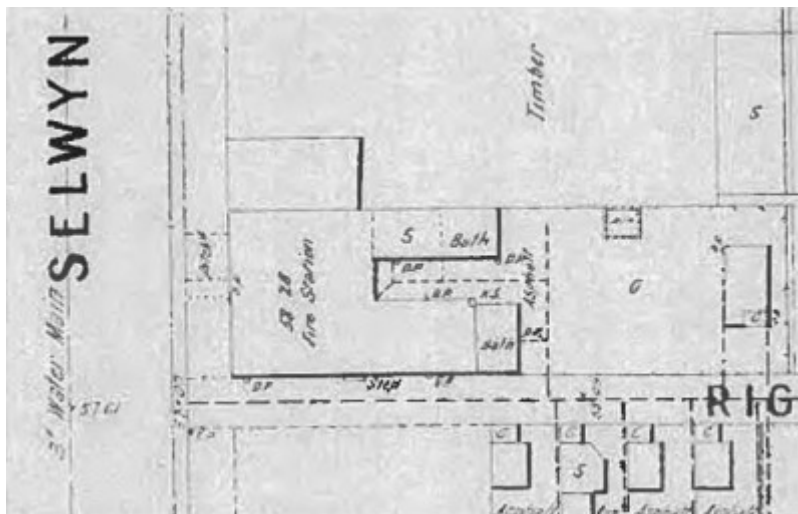
1990: at time of purchase by ABC, prior to removal of exterior paint



Former Elsternwick Fire Station EXTENT DIAGRAM 2376



Former Elsternwick Fire Station PERMIT POLICY AND EXEMPTIONS DIAGRAM 10 August 2017



1902: M.M.B.W plan diagram of Elsternwick Fire Station

## Location

2-4 SELWYN STREET ELSTERNWICK, GLEN EIRA CITY

## Municipality

GLEN EIRA CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2376

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO81

## VHR Registration

August 10, 2017

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 7, 2021

What is significant?

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station building and associated land.

### *History Summary*

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station was built and commenced operation in 1896. It was one of 32 new fire stations built between 1892 and 1896 by the newly formed Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade ('MFB') to form a comprehensive fire-fighting network across Melbourne. The MFB was established in 1891 as Victoria's government-run fire-fighting service in Melbourne and its growing suburbs. By 1918 motorised fire engine appliances had replaced horse-drawn fire vehicles across the metropolitan area, and the consequently larger areas that fire stations could protect meant the 1896 Elsternwick Fire Station was one of many which was becoming obsolete. The MFB continued to use the Elsternwick Fire Station up until the Station's closure in 1926. From 1927 the former Fire Station was leased by neighbouring timber merchants JJ Webster Pty Ltd who subsequently purchased the property from the MFB in 1934. From 1954 the 'Esquire Motors' car repair business traded at the site, and changes to the former Fire Station building including the complete enclosure of its yard by corrugated steel walls and roofing appear to have been completed in the mid-1950s. In 1990 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ('ABC') purchased the former Fire Station together with five other adjoining land parcels in Selwyn Street. From that time until 2017 the former Elsternwick Fire Station has been used by the ABC as office and storage space in its Selwyn Street television studio complex.

### *Description Summary*

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station consists of an 1896 building on Selwyn Street and adjoining 1950s-built additions under a group of skillion and flat roofs to the 1896 building's east/rear. The single-storey 1896 building has walls of brick and stone construction with an asymmetrical principal facade built to the Selwyn Street (west) site boundary. A stone-framed horseshoe arch entrance to the former Station's fire engine room is the dominant feature of this facade. The arch features a carefully-detailed composition of rusticated and smooth-faced limestone, trachyte and fine axed basalt, and frames the engine room's original bi-fold timber doors. This portion of the Selwyn Street facade is surmounted by an Anglo-Dutch gable with a central large heraldic emblem which contains what appears to be the 1891 MFB-designed corporate shield. Most of the original eastern masonry wall of the fire engine room has been removed to create a larger garage area, most probably in the mid-1950s. Several courses of this wall's original brickwork remain above a steel lintel. The garage area's floor is a concrete slab and is also likely to have been installed in the mid-1950s. The south elevation of the Former Elsternwick Fire

Station is built to the site boundary along an un-named lane. Conventional timber-framed pitched and hipped roofs above the original former Station building appear to have retained their original form, but the original roofing slates have been replaced by corrugated steel sheeting. A corrugated galvanised steel-clad external wall and skillion and flat roofs, which are likely to date from the mid-1950s, completely enclose the east/rear portion of the site. The area beneath these roofs is divided by timber-framed partition walls into four separate storage areas and a small lavatory/washroom area. Apart from ceramic tiles in these lavatories, the floors of the 1950s-built spaces are concrete floor slabs. The north and east boundaries of the Former Elsternwick Fire Station site abut the corrugated-steel sheeting clad walls of a large building containing production and storage areas in the ABC's Selwyn Street television studio complex.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Boonwurrung people.

How is it significant?

The former Elsternwick Fire Station is of architectural, cultural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

Why is it significant?

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station is historically significant as one of the 10 remaining fire stations of the original 32 built for the newly established Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade ('MFB') during the four-year period 1892 to 1896. These fire stations were constructed following the establishment in 1891 of the MFB, Victoria's government-run fire-fighting service for metropolitan Melbourne and its growing suburban population. These new stations formed a crucial part of the MFB's fire-fighting network across Melbourne. The Former Elsternwick Fire Station clearly demonstrates the historical development of fire-fighting services in Melbourne, especially the expansion of the newly-formed MFB throughout Melbourne's suburbs during the 1890s. [Criterion A]

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station is architecturally significant as a fine example of a late nineteenth century fire station. Constructed shortly after the establishment of the MFB, it displays characteristics of its class of place that remain mostly unchanged from the former Station's historically important period of development and use. A particularly strong element of the Former Elsternwick Fire Station is the large and strikingly-detailed stone horseshoe arch, designed for horse-drawn fire-fighting vehicles, at the street entrance to its fire-engine room. [Criterion D]

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act*

1987 and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

## **Specific Exemptions:**

### **General Condition 1**

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

### **General Condition 2**

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

### **General Condition 3**

All works should ideally be informed by Conservation Management Plans prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

### **General Condition 4**

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

### **General Condition 5**

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authority, where applicable.

## **Specific Permit Exemptions:**

### **1896 Building - Exterior**

- . Minor patching, repair and maintenance which replaces like with like.
- . Removal of non-original items such as pipe work, ducting, wiring and making good in a manner that does not have a detrimental effect on the heritage fabric.
- . Removal of non-original external fixtures and fittings such as hot water services and taps in a manner that does not have a detrimental effect on the heritage fabric.

### **1896 Building - Interior**

- . Painting of previously painted walls and ceilings provided that preparation or painting does not remove evidence of any original paint or other decorative scheme.
- . Installation, removal or replacement of non-original carpets and/or flexible floor coverings.



- . Installation, removal or replacement of non-original curtain tracks, rods and blinds.
- . Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of mirrors, paintings and other wall mounted art.
- . Demolition or removal of non-original wall linings (including plasterboard, laminate and Masonite), non-original flush panel or part-glazed laminated doors, kitchen wall tiling and equipment, lights and built-in cupboards.
- . Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation and/or plant in the roof space.

### 1950s and later extensions/additions

- . Works that do not increase the footprint of these structures.
- . Demolition of the 1950s and later additions subject to a permit being issued for the management of original fabric where it intersects with the later additions.

## Theme

### 6. Building towns cities and the garden state

Construction dates	1895, 1950,
Architect/Designer	Kelleher, John Thomas,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	METROPOLITAN FIRE BRIGADE STATION (FORMER), 2-4 SELWYN STREET, FORMER MFB STATION NO.31, FORMER ESQUIRE MOTORS, FORMER ELSTERNWICK FIRE STATION, 2-4 SELWYN STREET, ELSTERNWICK, ELSTERNWICK FIRE STATION, FIRE STATION,
Hermes Number	2645
Property Number	

## History

### *Fire fighting in Melbourne before 1891*

Until 1891, fire fighting in Victoria was generally undertaken by brigades of volunteers. The brigades were funded by insurance companies, private companies, municipal councils and private funds. Melbourne had (from 1839) a series of insurance-company financed brigades in the City centre, and (from 1854) a collection of volunteer fire brigades in its suburban areas. In 1854 a group of insurance companies co-operated to organise the combined 'Insurance Companies' Brigade'. Volunteers were paid a stipend and a bonus for every fire attended. However without any central control of the various fire brigades, any number could and often did arrive to fight fires which often led to disputes over control and water access.

By the 1880s there was a proliferation of suburban brigades, and a community and fire-fighter-driven campaign arose seeking an association of volunteer fire brigades, the passage of legislation to regulate fire fighting in Victoria, the use of modern equipment such as steam fire engines, the use of electric fire alarms as in San Francisco and the appointment of paid fire fighters. Captain James Kelly, leader of the Prahran City Brigade, convened a meeting of fire fighters in May 1883 where the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Association was formed. The objectives of the Association were to represent the interests of volunteer fire brigades (and volunteers) and to work for the passing of a *Fire Brigades Act*.

### *Formation of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB)*

Toward the end of the 1880s the escalating conflicts between the various volunteer brigades and the Insurance Companies Brigade gave additional impetus to the *Fire Brigades Act* being passed through Parliament. In 1890 this *Act* created two organisations in the colony: the Metropolitan Fire Brigade ('MFB'), which became a full-time professional force; and the Country Fires Brigade Board ('CFBB'), which evolved to become the Country Fire Authority ('CFA') in 1945. The MFB initially took over the Insurance Companies' Fire Brigade station at 447 Little Bourke Street. It operated from there until its new East Melbourne headquarters, the Eastern Hill Fire Station in Gisborne Street, was completed in November 1893.

In 1892 the MFB implemented a plan to establish a wide network of fire stations throughout the Melbourne metropolitan area. Some would be refurbished existing station buildings, but thirty-two of the fire stations in the new MFB network were to be constructed from scratch. Between 1892 and 1896 these MFB fire stations were duly built at a total cost to Victoria of £77,750. This four year period thus saw the realisation of the MFB's initial plan to put in place a new government-run fire-fighting service for metropolitan Melbourne and its growing suburban population. Several architects were engaged to design the new MFB fire stations during this period, resulting in a wide range of styles and forms.

### *Establishment of MFB Station No 31 at 2-4 Selwyn Street, Elsternwick*

A volunteer fire brigade had been formed in Elsternwick in early 1890, 'principally through the financial support of a number of leading residents', and operated out of basic premises opposite the Post Office. This volunteer corps was abolished in 1891 following the establishment of the MFB in 1891, and its plant and equipment were surrendered to the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board.

Caulfield Shire Council approached the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board in 1893 and again in 1894, dissatisfied at the Board's delay in providing a fire station in the district. The MFB Plant & Buildings Committee initially proposed to construct a simple weatherboard station at Elsternwick. The Caulfield Shire Council wrote to the Board in April 1895 advocating instead the construction of a substantial structure at Elsternwick, and also to request that the old Caulfield fire station in Glenferrie Road be allowed to remain open as an 'auxiliary'. In late April, the Chief Officer of the MFB reported to the Plant & Buildings Committee that a building similar to the newly-built station at East Prahran would be suitable for the districts of Elsternwick and Yarraville. In May, the Committee resolved to purchase the site for Elsternwick fire station and the transfer of the land to the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board was registered on 17 June 1895.

The MFB appointed architect John Thomas Kelleher to design the new fire station for Elsternwick, and the contract for its construction was signed on 4 August 1895 by contractor Peter Rodger. The Elsternwick Fire Station was built for a total cost of £769 (of which £125 was paid for the land), and it was completed and fully operational in 1896.

When it commenced operations in 1896 the Elsternwick Fire Station building contained an office, accommodation for a fire crew and a horse-drawn vehicle, a kitchen and dining area, and an annex on the site's north boundary containing a bathroom and lavatories (see the 1902 M.M.B.W Drainage Plan in the 'Additional Images' section of this Report). Until 1950 the MFB Board's policy of 'continuous duty' for fire-fighting personnel meant that fire stations were fire fighters' homes as well as places of work. To the rear (east) of the Station building was an open yard which also contained a stable for the Station's fire horses.

### *John Thomas Kelleher (1844-1928): architect of the Elsternwick Fire Station*

J T Kelleher began at the Victorian Public Works Department ('PWD') in October 1863 as a Class 5 Draftsman and continued to work within the Department for 31 years. In 1887, Kelleher was appointed Architect Grade II in sub-charge of the newly created Buildings Division of the PWD, and was then Architect grade I in charge of this Division from 1893 onwards. During his time in the Eastern District of the Buildings Division, Kelleher was assisted in architectural design by several experienced architects including Alexander James Macdonald (b 1864) and John Russell Brown (b. 1857). Kelleher's signature as the senior architect appears on architectural drawings produced by the Division, but architectural historians have argued that Macdonald is more likely to have been responsible for the designs produced therein.

Kelleher resigned from the Victorian Public Service in 1894. Soon after, he was commissioned by the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board to design three new small suburban fire station buildings: at Kensington (also known during its working life as Newmarket and Flemington), Yarraville and Elsternwick.



### *1911 onward: motorisation of the MFB*

During the years 1898 to 1907 the MFB had established an additional eleven suburban fire stations. Then in 1911, as motorised fire engines began to be introduced in Melbourne, the MFB began to sell its horses. Motorisation was accompanied by a major building programme across the network of fire stations. At its simplest this was a matter of removing stables and feed stores and altering the width of engine room doorways.

But motorisation also meant that fire fighters could travel further and more quickly than had previously been possible. The increased radius of operation of suburban fire stations' led to large-scale changes. Some stations closed, other new ones opened, and the distribution of Melbourne's fire stations was affected across the whole network. In 1914 the MFB secured a £100,000 loan for its building and motorisation programme.

At Elsternwick in 1916 the horse stable building was converted into additional dormitory accommodation for fire fighters. By 1918 motorised vehicles had replaced horse-drawn vehicles across Melbourne and the Elsternwick Fire Station was one of many which was becoming obsolete.

The Elsternwick Fire Station was used by the MFB up until the Station's closure in 1926. Its functions were then transferred to a newly-constructed district fire station nearby, at the north-west corner of the intersection of Brighton Road and Scott Street (in what is now Elwood).

### *1927 to 1989: JJ Webster and Esquire Motors era*

In 1927 the Elsternwick Fire Station Service ceased operation at Selwyn Street, and its personnel and equipment moved to new premises. The MFB Board subsequently leased the redundant Selwyn Street Elsternwick Fire Station to timber merchants JJ Webster Pty Ltd, who at that time were operating a timber yard on the neighbouring property at 6-12 Selwyn Street.

In November 1934 the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board sold the Former Elsternwick Fire Station (2-4 Selwyn Street) to JJ Webster Pty Ltd for the sum of £1100. It is not known to what use JJ Webster then put the former Station building. In 1954 JJ Webster in turn leased out the former Fire Station, and the property was then converted into a car repair business which traded for many years as 'Esquire Motors'. Physical and documentary evidence indicates that modifications made to the former Elsternwick Fire Station following the commencement of this arrangement include:

- removal of the original roofing slates and their replacement with corrugated iron;
- removal of fireplaces;
- replacement of timber floors with concrete slabs in the building's southern rooms;
- painting of the building's whole Selwyn Street (west) and part south facades;
- near-complete removal of the fire engine bay's original east wall and installation of a steel beam lintel to support some remnant brickwork over the opening; and
- construction of substantial timber-framed additions over the whole open yard area to the eastern side of the former Station building.

### *1990-2017: ABC ownership*

In 1990, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ('ABC') purchased property in Elsternwick (adjoining the subject site) to provide additional accommodation in its Selwyn Street television studio complex. The ABC purchased the 2-4 Selwyn Street former Fire Station from JJ Webster Pty Ltd (in liquidation) together with five other adjoining land parcels in Selwyn Street. Since that time the Former Elsternwick Fire Station has been used by the ABC as office and storage space, with the ABC undertaking minor works and alterations to the building including:

- c.1995: installation of smoke detectors and illuminated exit signs to meet statutory requirements;
- c.1995: removal of paint from exterior wall surfaces; and
- c.2000: installation of an external cupboard recessed into the external face of the south wall at its Selwyn Street end for a fire hydrant booster assembly.

## KEY REFERENCES

Fire Services Museum Victoria: communication March to May 2017 with archivist Ian Munro.

Goad, Philip, *Fire Stations*, pp.249-251 in eds Goad, Philip, & Willis, Julie, 'The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture' (2012), Cambridge University Press: Port Melbourne.

*Group History*, on 2nd Prahran Scout Group website, <http://www.prahranscouts.org.au/history.htm>

*Heritage Management Plan: former Elsternwick Fire Station [Draft]*, NBRIS & Partners, 18 November 2016.

*History timeline*, on CFA website, <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about/history-timeline/>

Mauger, Samuel, 1934, *The rise and progress of the Metropolitan fire brigade, Victoria, Australia*, Melbourne.

*Metropolitan Fire Brigade Station (former), 2-4 Selwyn Street, Elsternwick, VIC, Australia*, in 'Australian Heritage Database', via Department of the Environment and Energy website,

[https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-](https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;search=state%3DVIC%3Blist_code%3DCHL%3Blegal_status%3D35%3Bkeywor)

[bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place\\_detail;search=state%3DVIC%3Blist\\_code%3DCHL%3Blegal\\_status%3D35%3Bkeywor](https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;search=state%3DVIC%3Blist_code%3DCHL%3Blegal_status%3D35%3Bkeywor)

*Our History*, on MFB website, <http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Our-History.html>

Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directories, 1893.

Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directories, 1897, especially p.1407 '*Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board, Stations*'.

Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directories, 1910, especially p.2586 '*Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board, Stations*'.

*When was the Malvern Town Hall built?* via F.A.Q. page on Malvern Historical Society Inc website, [http://home.vicnet.net.au/~malvern/more\\_faq.htm](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~malvern/more_faq.htm)

Wilde, Sally, 1991, *Life Under The Bells: A History of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Melbourne 1891-1991*, Longman Cheshire: Melbourne.

## Plaque Citation

The Former Elsternwick Fire Station commenced operation in 1896 as one of 32 new fire stations built in the establishment of a new network across Melbourne for the recently-formed Metropolitan Fire Brigade, at a total cost to Victoria of £77,750.

## Assessment Against Criteria

### Criterion

The former Elsternwick Fire Station is of architectural, cultural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

### Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

## Extent of Registration

## NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the following places and objects in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2376

Category: Heritage Place

Name: Former Elsternwick Fire Station

Location: 2-4 Selwyn Street, Elsternwick

Glen Eira City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2376 encompassing all of Lot 23 on Lodged Plan 2360.

Dated 10 August 2017

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 32 10 August 2017 pp.1712-1713]

---

*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/>*