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# TRUBY KING BABY HEALTH CENTRE



Truby King Baby Health Centre, 270 Gower Street

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## Location

270 GOWER STREET, PRESTON, DAREBIN CITY

## Municipality

DAREBIN CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO215

## Heritage Listing

Darebin City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

### *What is significant?*

In 1919 the Victorian Baby Health Centres' Association urged Northcote Council to provide health advice to mothers of babies. Discussions with Preston Council followed. Northcote Council opened a Baby Health Centre at the Town Hall in 1921. It seems that Preston Council followed suit - it is believed that Cr. G.E. (Gilbert) Robertson inspected the Coburg Truby King Baby Health centre soon after it opened in 1919 and was 'so impressed' that he brought the matter before Preston Council. When Preston's first Baby Health Centre (which was based on the Truby King method) commenced in the Rechabite Hall in 1921 there was an attendance of 48

babies per month.

In 1926 the Victorian Department of Public Health established its Infant Welfare Division, making possible the expansion of services, and enabling the provision of purpose-built centres. With the support of Cr. Gilbert Robertson the new Preston Truby King Baby Health Centre was constructed on the Town Hall Reserve and opened on 14 December 1929. It was the second purpose-built Truby King Centre in Victoria (after Coburg, built in 1926) and is notable as the first centre built exclusively for baby health centre use (Coburg was and continues to be shared with the Coburg City Band). In March 1930 Dr Sir Truby King and Dr Springthorpe visited the centre. Such was Preston's growth, that the new Centre was soon seeing a thousand babies a month. Later a free dental clinic for pre-school children was held at the Centre, with the dentists provided by the Dental Hospital

The 1929 Baby Health Centre and the original and early landscaping are significant.

Later alterations and additions to the building are not significant.

*How is it significant?*

The Truby King Baby Health Centre at 270 Gower Street, Preston is of local historic, architectural and social significance to Darebin City.

*Why is it significant?*

The Truby King Baby Health is historically significant as a place that is associated with the beginnings of the baby health movement in Victoria and one that pioneered the introduction of these services to Preston at a time when it was experiencing significant growth. It is believed to be the second baby health centre based on the Truby King method to have been established in Victoria and the significance of the place is enhanced by its rarity value as the only centre to be within a building e used exclusively for this purpose. The Truby King Centre is also significant for its association with Dr Sir Frederick Truby King of New Zealand, who became famous worldwide for his promotion of the 'Plunket Nursing system' which advocated a complicated feeding formula and a strict routine for babies. His methods were largely ignored by the Victorian Baby Health Care Association who chose to promote other expert opinions. King is known to have visited this centre early in its operation and provided advice to employees and mothers. (AHC criteria A.4, B.2, H.1)

The Truby King Baby Health Centre is architecturally significant as a representative example of the type of baby health centre erected in Melbourne during the first half of the twentieth century. The design is of note, particularly its domestic scale and character, which was a deliberate intention in order to make the centre inviting to women and children and demonstrates the philosophic association between early baby health centres and domestic housing design (AHC criterion D.2).

The Truby King Baby Health Centre is socially significant as a facility that is known, used and valued by the Darebin community for eighty years. As a baby health centre, the building is socially and culturally important for marking phases in the lives of mothers and infants. Designed to resemble a typical middleclass suburban house, the purpose-built centre was a symbol of domesticity. It was also symbolic of a culturally progressive caring society, a place associated with new scientific ideas, and professionally designed programs designed to improve the health education of women raising families in the developing suburbs. (AHC criterion G.1)

Heritage Study/Consultant Darebin - Darebin Heritage Study, Context P/L, 2011;

Construction dates 1929,

Hermes Number 27283

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

A brick Inter-war baby health centre designed in a domestic style and of a domestic scale, situated on the northwest corner of Gower Street and Kelvin Grove. The building is set back from its street boundaries behind a mature garden. The building has a hipped roof clad in terracotta tiles. The roof extends down at its southeast corner to form a verandah on the south elevation and deep eaves on part of the east elevation. The roof above the verandah is supported by brick piers with timber posts with brackets at their tops. The windows on the building are timber frame double-hung sashes of a domestic character. Some wall openings on the south elevation are new, or are original openings that have been altered.

A cream brick public toilet block has been built in Kelvin Grove that abuts the centre, which has compromised the integrity of the building's east elevation.

*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/>*