

FITZROY GASWORKS
DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA
REVIEW & HERITAGE APPRAISAL
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REVIEW & HERITAGE APPRAISAL

BACKGROUND

PURPOSE

This report has been prepared for Development Victoria. It provides a review of the existing documentation related to the former Fitzroy Gasworks, and an assessment of the heritage merit of the Gas Store within the context of the site. In particular, it seeks to clarify the relative significance of the Gas Store, to assist with and guide the proposed masterplanning of the site.

The former Fitzroy Gasworks is located on an approximately 2.8 hectare allotment in Fitzroy North. The site is Crown Land and comprises a number of remnant gasworks structures, an iron shed and a series of twentieth century buildings. Part of the site is in use as the Yarra Council Municipal Depot, with the remainder leased to individual tenants. The site is bounded by George Street, Alexandra Parade, Smith Street and Queens Parade.

STATUTORY CONTROLS

Victorian Heritage Register

An individual building, known as the Porter Prefabricated Iron Store is included as an object in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR), H2243. The building was moved to the site c.1920 and has no known association with the former Gasworks. Located on the northern part of the site, within the Yarra Council Municipal Depot, the registration extent is limited to the 'object known as the Porter Prefabricated Iron Store.' It is noted that the Porter Prefabricated Iron Store is included on the, now defunct, Register of the National Estate (ID #15539).

Victorian Heritage Inventory

No part of the former Fitzroy Gasworks is included on the Victorian Heritage Inventory (VHI). However, all non-Indigenous archaeological sites in Victoria over 50 years old are protected under the Heritage Act, whether they are recorded on the VHI or not.

City of Yarra

The heritage place known as "Valve House & Store" is subject to a site-specific Heritage Overlay (HO211) under Clause 43.01 of the Yarra Planning Scheme. The City of Yarra Review of Heritage Overlay Areas 2007 – Appendix 8 (Revised 2015) is an Incorporated Document in the Yarra Planning Scheme and identifies the gradings of all heritage places subject to the Heritage Overlay in the municipality. It identifies "Fitzroy Gas Works Valve House and Store, Former" as "Individually Significant". Individually Significant places are defined under Clause 22.02 of the Yarra Planning Scheme as "The place is a heritage place in its own right".

Notwithstanding the description of the heritage place in both the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay and Appendix 8, only the Valve House is mapped as comprising the heritage place. This is an inconsistency in the planning scheme relating to the overlay. The reference to the 'Store' clearly relates to the Gas Store, which was identified in the 1992 *Northern Suburbs Factory Study* (Gary Vines and Matthew Churchward, see Appendix A), yet not included in the introduced Heritage Overlay (Amendment L78, 1999) nor included in the supporting documentation, the *City of Yarra Heritage Review* (Allom Lovell & Associates 1998). The *City of Yarra Heritage Review* titles the citation for the Gasworks: "Former Fitzroy Gasworks Valve House" and covers the Valve House only, as per Figure 1. Council adopted Amendment L78 at its meeting on the 9

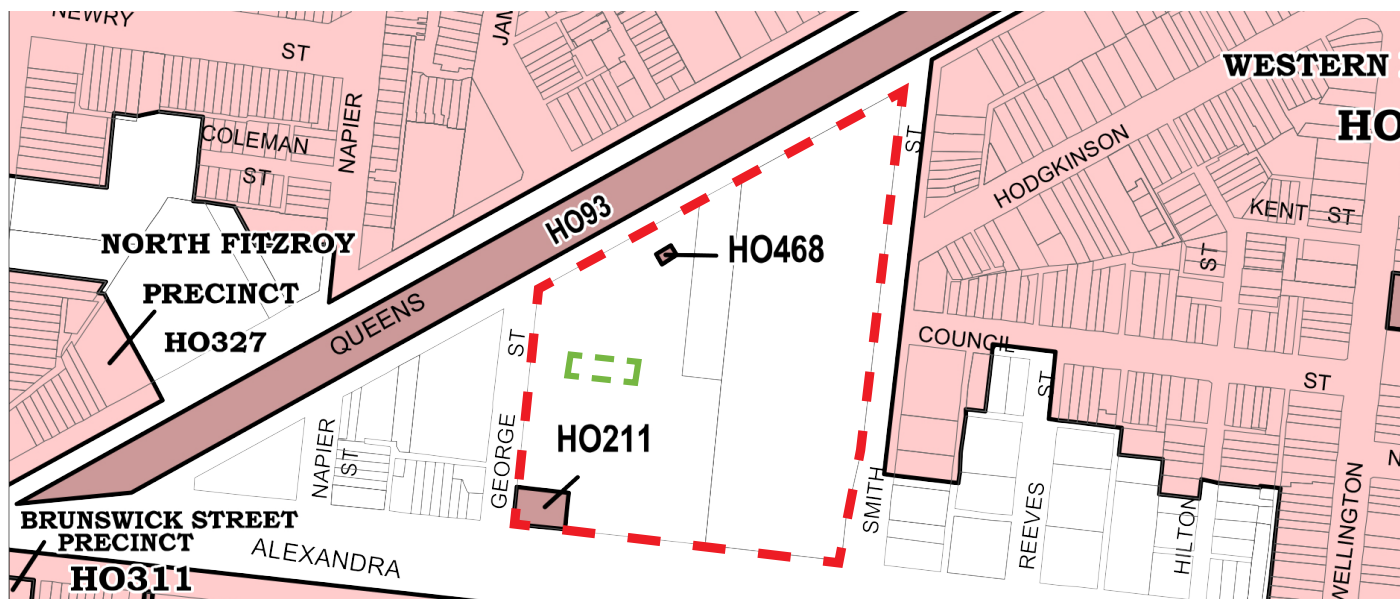


Figure 1 Excerpt from Map 2HO showing the Valve House (HO211) and Porter Prefabricated Iron Store (HO468). The approximate location of the Gas Store is highlighted in green, and the subject site is outlined in red.

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March 1999. The minutes of the meeting show that a number of changes to the amendment were considered and adopted by Council as a result of the exhibition and Planning Panel process; however there was no comment on the extent of the Fitzroy Gasworks overlay or potential inclusion of the Store.⁰¹ It can therefore be concluded that Allom Lovell only recommended inclusion of the Valve House as part of Planning Scheme Amendment L78 - despite the Store's inclusion under the *Northern Suburbs Factory Study* which is referenced in the *City of Yarra Heritage Review* - and that this is what was ultimately included in the Heritage Overlay. The naming of the place as the "Fitzroy Gas Works Valve House and Store, Former" in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay, has therefore been done in error.

The *Cultural Heritage Management Strategy* (Lovell Chen 2011) prepared for the site included a number of recommendations one of which was the correction of the current inconsistency in the Heritage Overlay mapping. The report noted that "the *Heritage Overlay should cover the Gas Store and this should be reflected in the Overlay map*". This has not occurred at the time of writing.

It is noted that the Porter Prefabricated Iron Store is also included in an Individual Overlay under the Yarra Planning Scheme, and is identified as HO468.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Former Fitzroy Gas Works Valve House and Store has the following Statement of Significance:

*The former Fitzroy Gas Valve House is of local historical significance and local architectural interest. Historically, the buildings are the only surviving remnants of the once extensive Fitzroy Gasworks, which played an integral part in the supply of gas to Melbourne from the mid-19th century until the 1970s. Architecturally, the buildings are typical and substantially intact examples of simple late 19th century industrial buildings.*⁰²

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Construction of the Fitzroy Gasworks site commenced in 1860 and the first fires were lit in April 1861, under the management of the Collingwood, Fitzroy and District Gas and Coke Company. The site operated under the Collingwood, Fitzroy and District Gas and Coke Company until 1878 when it was merged with the South Melbourne Gas Company and the City of Melbourne Gas and Coke Company, creating the Metropolitan Gas Company. The newly created company utilised the existing site as their Fitzroy Station. The Metropolitan Gas Company was the major gas supplier of Victoria until 1951, when it was transformed into the Gas & Fuel Corporation of Victoria. Part of the site was also used as the local Council Yards (then the City of Fitzroy) from 1895. The Yarra Council continues to use the site as a Municipal Depot.⁰³

The Gas Store building has been dated to approximately c.1880s. By the early 1960s, the structures that previously occupied the western property boundary were demolished and the existing red brick building constructed. This building extends across the southern face of the c1880s Gas Store. Further alterations and additions were made to the northern side Gas Store by 1975. By contrast, the Valve House has remained largely unaltered since its c.1890 construction.

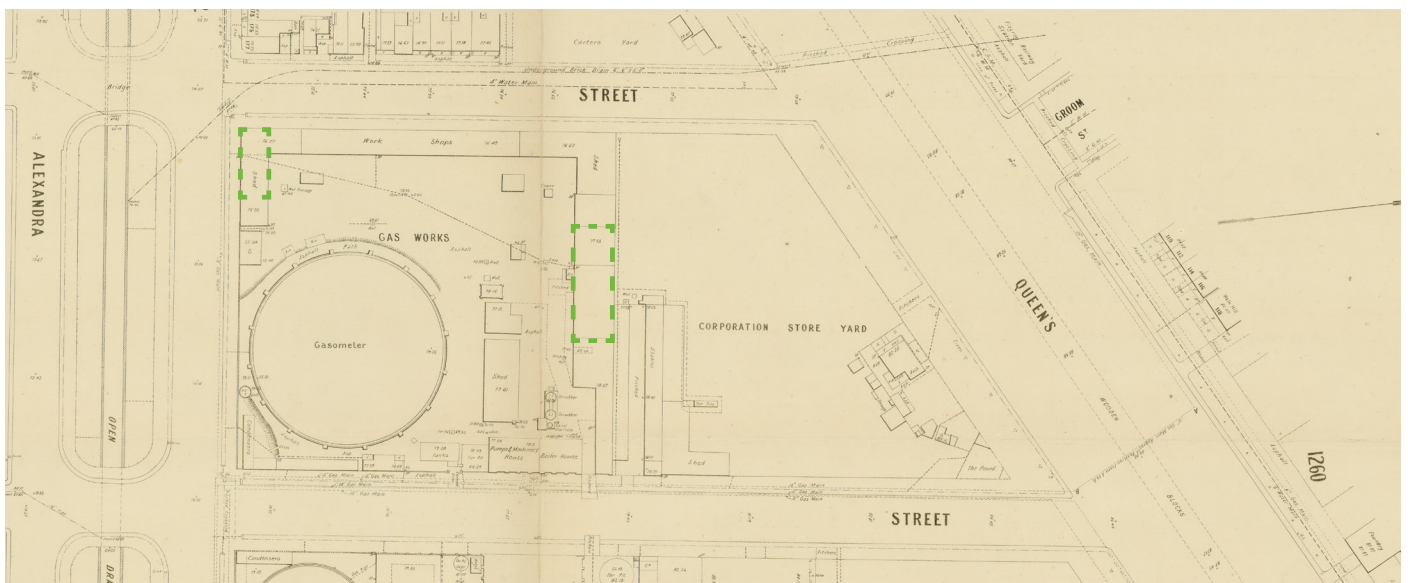


Figure 2 MMBW Detail Plan No.1213 dated 1900 showing the Fitzroy Gasworks and associated structures. The approximate location of the Valve House and Gas Store are indicated in green. Source: State Library of Victoria Maps Collection.

⁰¹ City of Yarra Ordinary Meeting of Council, Minutes No.3, 9 March 1999.

⁰² Allom Lovell & Associates, *City of Yarra Heritage Review 1998, Volume 2 Part I*, p. 19.

⁰³ History generally adapted from Lovell Chen, *Heritage Review Former Fitzroy Gasworks*, July 2016. pp. 10-11.

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EXISTING CONDITIONS

DESCRIPTION

The former Fitzroy Gasworks site as a whole is described in the *Heritage Review, Former Fitzroy Gasworks* (Lovell Chen 2016). This description focuses solely on the Gas Store building.

The Gas Store is located north of the Valve House, on the boundary between the Municipal Depot and the remainder of the site. It abuts a series of red brick buildings, to the west and south, constructed in the 1960s that front George Street. As a result, the building is near to entirely concealed from the public realm. The northern elevation is visible from the Municipal Depot site, and it abuts a concrete retaining wall and several open storage structures. Abutting the building to the south is a 1970s addition, that partly encloses the formerly open wall. The Gas Store has been deliberately designed to respond to its immediate site context. The east, south and to a degree, the west are visible from within the Gasworks site and are more decorative, with a degree of architectural pretence as a result. The north facade on the other hand, only visible from the Municipal Depot, is utilitarian and lacks architectural detail.

The Gas Store is a c.1880s red brick building, with a corrugated iron gable roof and a number of remnant metal vents. The building presents a large, visible gable end to the east, with a central high level window and roller door with a substantial steel lintel, both of which are later alterations. The gable end has corbelled cream brick eaves, and decorative cream brick and cement render coping to the parapet. The western gable end is not readily visible from the public realm due to the later additions, although some remnant detailing is visible internally including two remnant arched openings, with expressed decorative cream brick archivolts and string course. The openings have been infilled.

The southern elevation has been conceived as one of the 'visible' elevations of the building. The design, whilst still utilitarian in nature, features decorative eaves brackets with expressed cream brick decoration and banding to the corbelled eaves. A number of openings are located on this facade, however most have undergone alteration including brick infill and the introduction of substantial concrete lintels. Original arched openings, with decorative brick archivolts, are visible internally although the openings have been infilled.

The additions to the south and west are red brick, with a variety of openings and a flat roof.



Figure 3 View of the eastern gable end from within the site. Note the extensive alterations creating the current roller door arrangement.



Figure 4 Detail of the eastern gable end. Note the decorative brick detailing on both the east and southern elevations.



Figure 5 View of the western gable end and 1960s buildings from George Street.



Figure 6 Internal view of the western elevation showing remnant arched opening which have been infilled.

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EXISTING CONDITIONS

The northern elevation is utilitarian in nature, with no architectural detail except a simple cream brick cornice. This elevation has been partially over-painted, and tie rods are visible. In general, it appears to be in a poor condition, due to the concrete retaining wall and storage of wet substances (such as mulch) at the base

Internally, the building is a simple open storage building with a wooden truss roof structure supplemented by later steel columns and trusses, and a modern concrete slab floor. Modern ventilation and mechanical equipment, as well as lighting, have been installed within the space which is currently used for vehicle warehousing.



Figure 7 South facade, showing 1960s building abutting the Gas Store.



Figure 8 Detail of southern facade, note the alteration of existing openings.



Figure 9 Detail of the remnant arched openings on the southern facade.



Figure 10 General view of the northern facade. Note the new open structures.



Figure 11 Detail of the northern facade.



Figure 12 Interior space with later ventilation and lighting.

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ANALYSIS

REVIEW OF EXISTING DOCUMENTATION

The former Fitzroy Gasworks has been documented in a number of previous heritage studies, from the 1992 *Northern Suburbs Factory Study*, (Gary Vines and Matthew Churchward) through to site specific studies, including the *Former Fitzroy Gas Works Heritage Appraisal* (Lovell Chen 2010) and subsequent *Heritage Review* (2016). Within most of these studies, both the Valve House and Gas Store appear to have been documented as Significant buildings.

The most recent reviews, conducted by Lovell Chen in 2010 and 2016 concluded that the Gas Store is:

*"Of local historical, technological and architectural significance. While the context of the surviving building is limited, and represents only a fragment of the original site development, it is significant as one of the only surviving building remnants of the once extensive Fitzroy Gasworks. Architecturally, the building is a largely externally intact example of a gasworks building. It is also a surviving example of once more prolific nineteenth century suburban gasworks buildings."*⁰⁴

The assessment determined that the significance of the site is most legible today through the two buildings; the Valve House and Gas Store, and through documentary material. It was further noted that, in the context of redevelopment, the primary objective should be to "ensure that an appreciation of the site's industrial heritage is retained at the place for the benefit of future users and visitors". The authors also acknowledged the issue of contamination, and that demolition of the structures (Valve House and possibly the Gas Store) to allow remediation was unlikely to be supported unless no feasible alternative existed.

HERITAGE ANALYSIS

To best measure the relative significance of the building within the context of the site, it is necessary to understand the key points relating to its significance and compare it directly with the established values of the Valve House.

While the context of the surviving building is limited, and represents only a fragment of the original site development, it is significant as one of the only surviving building remnants of the once extensive Fitzroy Gasworks.

The Gas Store is one of the only remaining buildings that display the former use of the site, and does represent a fragment of the original development. It is historically significant as a remnant of what was a large and important complex, though its historical associations could be explored equally well with a considered interpretation scheme or through the retention of the built form.

Architecturally, the building is a largely externally intact example of a gasworks building. It is also a surviving example of once more prolific nineteenth century suburban gasworks buildings

Both the Gas Store and the Valve House have visual similarities, and architecturally, the building is a surviving example of a gasworks building. However, compared to the largely intact Valve House, the Gas Store has been considerably altered externally. The Gas Store has had extensive additions on the north, south and west, that have compromised the understanding of the building and impacted its appearance and presentation. The south, west and east facade have lost much of their integrity through alterations to most (if not all) of the former openings which have further compromised the buildings intactness and significance. Where remnant detail survives, it has generally been subject to damage, further reducing its integrity. The northern facade has likewise been compromised with a later addition, although it is noted that this (considerably plainer facade) has not been subject to the same degree of alteration.

Therefore, the Gas Store building cannot be considered to be 'largely externally intact' as stated in the *Heritage Review, Former Fitzroy Gasworks* (Lovell Chen 2016). The alterations and additions are extensive, and many of them are not readily reversible which limits future restoration potential. This has directly impacted the cultural heritage significance of the Gas Store. The integrity of the building has been substantially compromised, reducing its heritage value within the context of the site as a result.

⁰⁴ Lovell Chen, *Heritage Review Former Fitzroy Gasworks*, July 2016, p.20.

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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The Gas Store is historically important as one of only two structures remaining to illustrate what was an important industrial site, the Former Fitzroy Gasworks. However, our research has concluded that the building is technically not included in the Heritage Overlay. The mapping for HO211 only includes the Valve House, yet the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay at Clause 43.01 describes HO211 as the Former Fitzroy Gas Works Valve House and Store. The reference to the 'Store' is believed to relate to the Gas Store. While the Store was identified in the *Northern Suburbs Factory Study*, it was not specifically identified, assessed or recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay through Amendment L78 documentation.

Despite this, the Gas Store is a surviving remnant of the nineteenth century gasworks complex and would normally warrant inclusion in the Heritage Overlay. However, it has been heavily altered externally and lacks the intactness and integrity of the Valve House. The Gas Store is minimally visible from the public realm and has undergone considerable alteration, including the construction of additions on three sides, that have impacted its heritage significance. The Valve House, by contrast remains highly intact and with its remnant equipment, readily communicates its role as part of a nineteenth century gasworks.

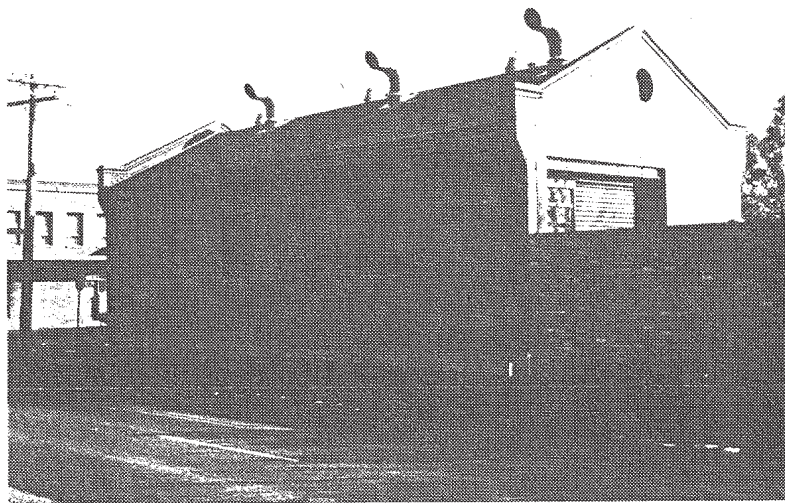
While it would be desirable to retain the Gas Store as one of few remaining structures from the former Fitzroy Gasworks, the issue of site remediation is acknowledged. If site remediation meant that this was not possible, its demolition could be supported due to its lack of integrity and intactness comparative to the Valve House. Support for demolition would be subject to retention and conservation of the Valve House, and the development of high quality interpretation of the Gasworks site as a whole.

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APPENDIX A - CITATION FROM NORTHERN SUBURBS FACTORY STUDY

NORTHERN FACTORY STUDY 1992

Name: Fitzroy Gas Works valve house and store
Location: Alexandra Parade and George St. Fitzroy.



Date of Construction: c1890
Original and Subsequent Owners: Collingwood, Fitzroy and District Gas & Coke Co., Metropolitan Gas Co.
Present Owner/Occupant: Gas & Fuel Corporation/City of Fitzroy
Architect:
Builder:

History: The Collingwood, Fitzroy and District Gas & Coke Co. was formed in January 1859 to provide competition in the northern suburbs to the City of Melbourne Gas & Coke Co. Like many of the nineteenth century gasworks, it was a joint venture between the local council and private investors, promoted by the main gas engineer of the time, Coates & Co. In the 1878 the Collingwood, South Melbourne and Melbourne Gas companies amalgamated, ending the period of intense rivalry which had resulted in duplication of gas mains down most inner suburban streets where each company vied for clients. The Fitzroy Gasworks always had the inherent disadvantage of being situated further from the port than either the South of West Melbourne works which added considerably to coal handling costs. This led eventually to the closure of the Fitzroy works in 1927, but the site continued to be used by the Metropolitan Gas Co. as both a workshop and gas storage point, with three large gasholders which survived as impressive local landmarks until conversion to natural gas in the 1970s. They even gave the local Gasometer Hotel its name. The first of these gasholders, built in 1930, gained world prominence among engineers, for being the first large all-welded steel structure in the world.

The amalgamated firm took the name of the Metropolitan Gas Co. and was subsequently acquired by the State Government owned Gas & Fuel Corporation in December 1950, as part of a rationalization and modernization of Victoria's gas supply.

Description: Only two buildings survive of the once extensive Fitzroy Gas Works. One is a brick valve house on the corner of Alexandra Parade and George St, the other is what is believed to have been a store, located between the present Fitzroy Council depot and the Gas & Fuel Corporation depot. The first is a smaller building constructed in red brick with arched window openings, bluestone sills and trabeated facade on the north side. The roof is timber framed in slate (modern imitation?) supported on corbelled eaves which are reflected in the corbelled gable ends. A brick cornice follows the top of the gables which have oculus vents. Modern roof vents and piping related to the present use as a natural gas regulator, are painted a bright blue.

The second, larger building is similar in style with arched openings, trabeated facades, corbelled eaves and gable ends. It has had modern structures built against it.

Context: The Fitzroy Gasworks was the most prominent industrial feature of Melbourne's northern suburbs with its towering gasometres and chimney stacks. The nearby Gasometer Hotel, recalls the impact of the works on the local area and the present Fitzroy Council depot and Gas & Fuel Corporation facility cover the area of the gasworks.

Condition and Integrity: The two surviving buildings are themselves in good condition, although modifications have been made to openings and they are only a fragment of the original works. However, they are some of very few 19th century gasworks buildings left in Melbourne.

Comparative analysis: Few nineteenth century gasworks remain in Melbourne or Victoria since the conversion of the supply to Bass Strait Natural Gas. The remnants of the Fitzroy gasworks compare with similar fragments at Port Melbourne and Footscray, although none of these are as extensive as the surviving elements of the Brunswick gasworks. The earliest gasworks in Victoria, The West Melbourne Works of the Metropolitan Gas & Coke Co. was completely obliterated in the 1970s. Only the comparatively small Bendigo gasworks, mostly reconstructed in the 1940s, is known to survive relatively intact.

Significance: Of regional significance as one of the few relics of the inner suburban gasworks of the nineteenth century and one of the earliest gasworks built in Melbourne.

Recommendations: PS

References: Sand & McDougall Melbourne Directories; Ray Proudley, *Circle of Influence*,

Date of assessment: September 1991

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APPENDIX A - CITATION FROM NORTHERN SUBURBS FACTORY STUDY

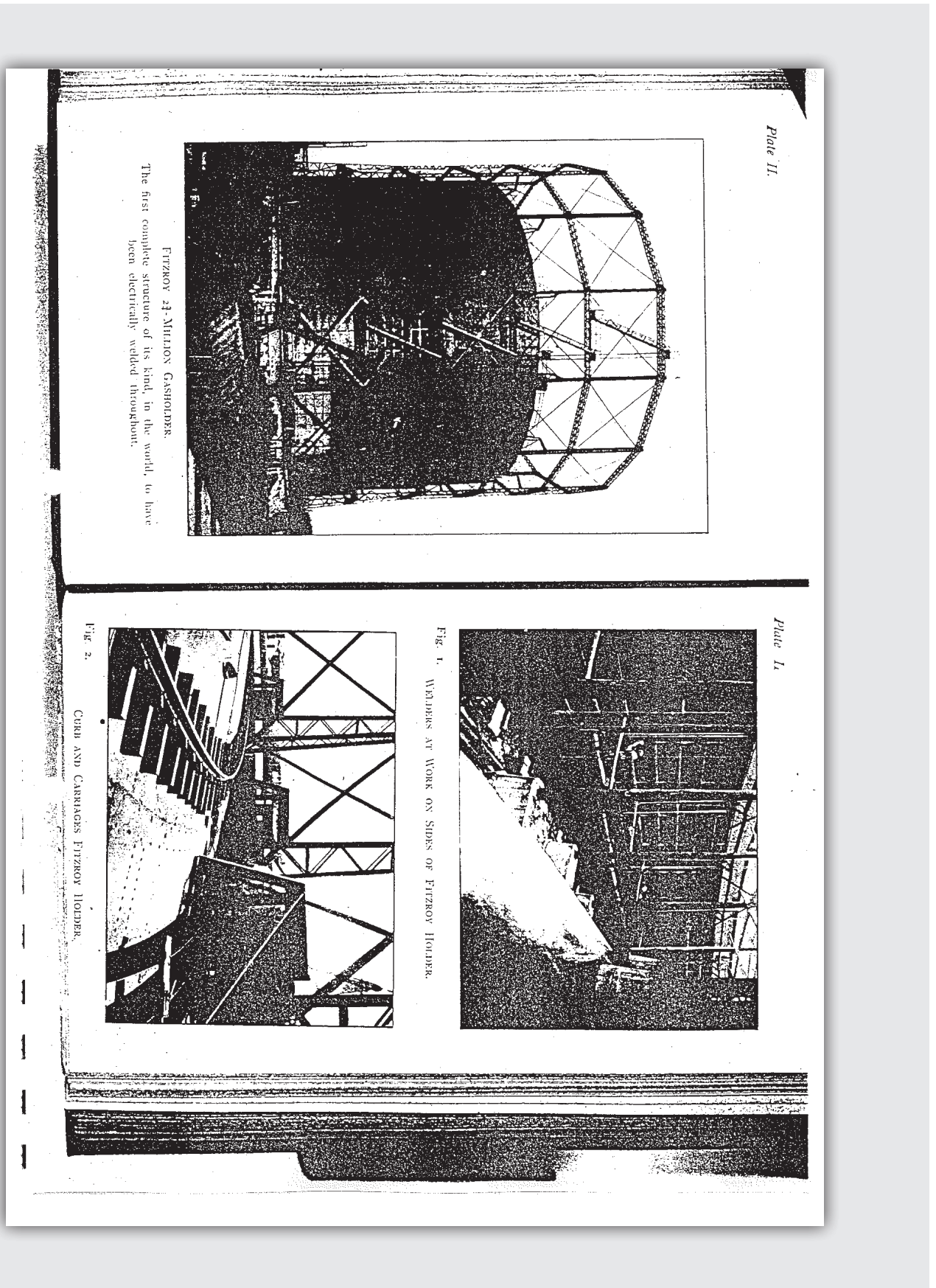


Plate II.

FITZROY 21-MILLION GASHOLDER.
The first complete structure of its kind, in the world, to have
been electrically welded throughout.

Plate I.

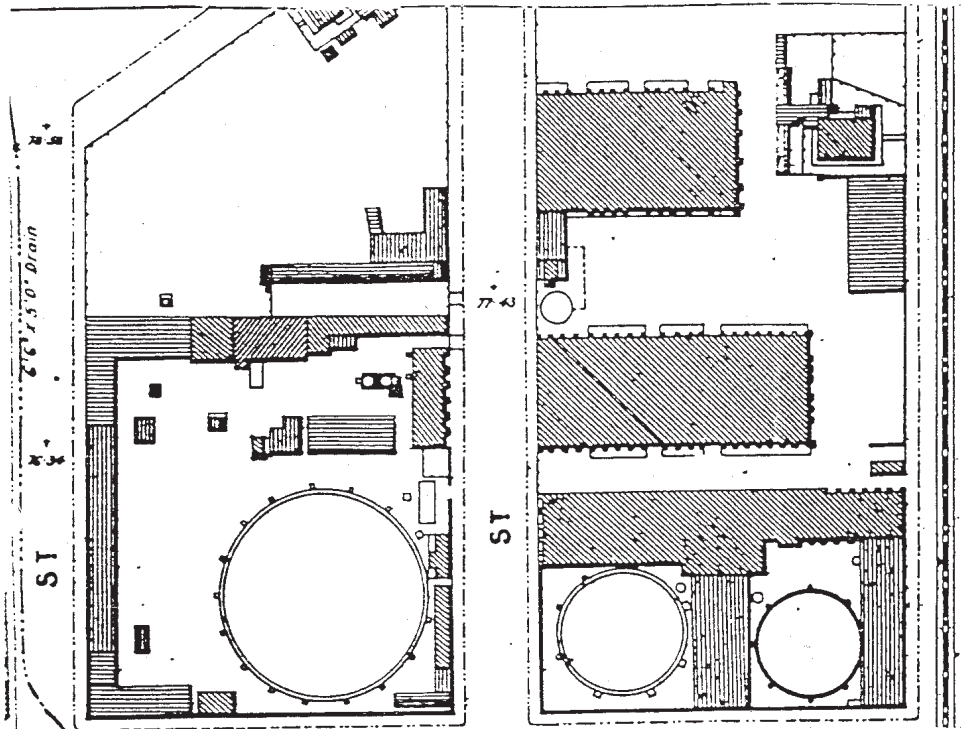
Fig. 1. WELDERS AT WORK ON SIDES OF FITZROY HOLDER.

Fig. 2.

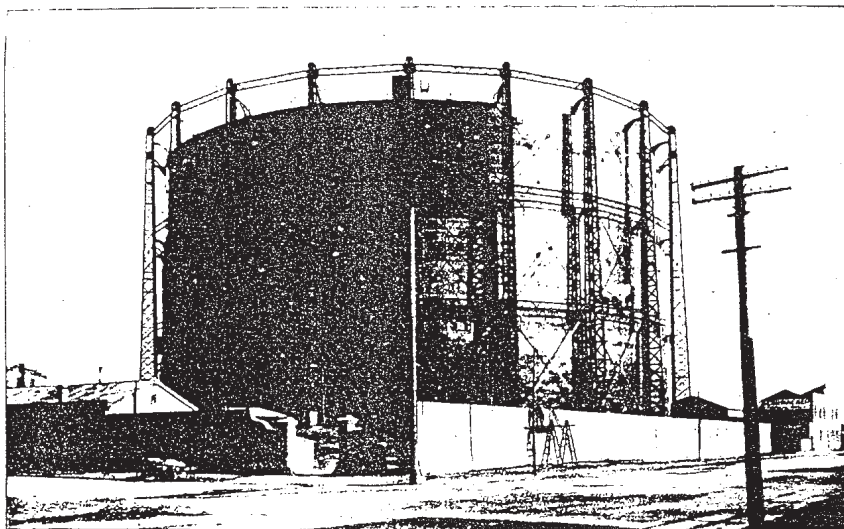
GIRD AND CARRIAGES FITZROY HOLDER.

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APPENDIX A - CITATION FROM NORTHERN SUBURBS FACTORY STUDY



MMBW 160: 1" Sewerage Plan, No.38, c1897.



Victorian Institute of Engineers Journal, 8.8.1923, pp.51-5

Northern Suburbs Factory Study

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Gary Vines

