

Building:	Former Wunderlich Terracotta Tile Works	Significance:	A
Address:	656 Mitcham Road, Vermont	Melway Map Ref:	62 K1
Building Type:	Factory	Construction Date:	1932 onwards
Architect:	Unknown	Builder:	Unknown



Intactness:		Condition:	
G[] F[] P[x]		G[] F[] P[x]	
Existing Heritage Listings:		Recommended Heritage Listings:	
Victorian Heritage Register	[x]	Victorian Heritage Register	[x]
Register of the National Estate	[]	Register of the National Estate	[x]
National Trust	[]	Heritage Overlay Controls	[x]

History

British emigrant Ernest Wunderlich arrived in Sydney in 1885 and established himself as a manufacturing agent. He dealt in many products, but it was the zinc building materials which he imported that became most popular. In 1887, Ernest's brother Alfred joined him in Sydney, and together they formed the Wunderlich company.¹ Initially, they dealt solely in ornamental metalwork, but by 1892 had begun to import terracotta roofing tiles from France. The so-called Marseilles tiles became very popular, and Wunderlich's lucrative import business continued until the outbreak of World War One prevented any further import from France. Unfazed, the Wunderlich company simply began to manufacture their own local version of the Marseilles tile.

In the early 1910s, Wunderlich established tile factories at Rosehill in Sydney, and at Brunswick in Victoria.² Because of the availability of clay, Brunswick had been a centre for Melbourne's brick and pottery industry for many years. The Wunderlich factory, located in Weston Street, Brunswick, used local clay until 1925, when the company opened a clay pit in Vermont. The site, situated on what is now Mitcham Road, was formerly an orchard. More land was acquired in 1928, and four years later, in 1932, Wunderlich decided to establish a new tile works at Vermont, and some of the buildings and machinery were relocated from Brunswick.

The new tileworks at Vermont ceased operations between 1942 and 1945 due to World War Two, but was re-opened, and expanded significantly in the years that followed. Mechanised equipment was introduced, and seven additional kilns were built between 1947 and 1965.³ Originally coal-fired, the kilns later used fuel oil before being converted to natural gas in the early 1970s.

Description

The original Wunderlich building is a large single-storey timber-framed building.

Latticed timber Belfast roof trusses form an unusual curved roof. There is a single remaining tapered circular brick chimney stack rising from a small brick kiln close to the centre of the building. Beneath the main timber structure are five metal portal frames.

The only external wall cladding remaining is part of the sheet metal gable-ends, and a low brick wall on the inside face of the north-west corner of the building. No roof cladding remains.

Comparative Examples

Australian Tessellated Tile Company works, Mitcham (1886 onwards; demolished).

Vitclay Pipes, Springfield Road, Nunawading (1873 onwards; demolished 1990s)

Bendigo Pottery works, Midland Highway, Epsom (three intermittent solid fuel kilns, 1930s)

Northcote Tile Company works, Clyde Street, Northcote (one intermittent solid fuel kiln, 1930s)

Significance

The following Statement of Significance is primarily derived from the Heritage Victoria citation for the Former Wunderlich Terracotta Tile Works (H1008):

The Wunderlich tileworks is of outstanding historical and aesthetic significance. The works derive historical significance from their association with the Wunderlich company, the principal importer of terracotta roofing tiles in Australia from 1892 to the outbreak of World War I. Wunderlich became the largest Australian manufacturer of terracotta tiles, a material which literally changed the appearance of southern Australian suburbs, and which continued to remain popular one hundred years after its introduction. The Vermont manufacturing plant is the largest and most intact pre-War tile works in Victoria, and the down draught kiln is the earliest known survivor of its type.

The works derive aesthetic (and technological significance) from the use of lattice (Belfast) timber roof trusses in the curved roof structure which houses the kilns. This structure is a rare industrial roof form, and the only known extant example of this type of roof truss in Victoria.

Source

Context Pty Ltd. *City of Nunawading Heritage Survey Project*. 1994. (Graded A)

- 1 Susan Bures. *The House of Wunderlich*. Kenthurst, NSW, 1987. p 21.
- 2 Miles Lewis. 'The Marseilles Tile in Australia.' *Australian Institute of Building Papers*, 1 (1986), p 73.
- 3 M I Bloom. 'Brief History of Wunderlich Terracotta Tiles.' Unpublished typescript, March 1981.
Nunawading Historical Society.

