

IDENTIFIER	GURDWARA (Sikh Temple)	Citation No	E022
Other name/s	E G Greenway Pty Ltd pottery factory; PMG mail sorting centre	Melway ref	48 J9
Address	127 Whitehorse Road BLACKBURN	Date/s	1947-1949
Designer/s	Arnold E Bridge & Associates	Builder/s	T R & L Cockram Pty Ltd



Photograph by Built Heritage, 13 February 2014

Heritage Group	Manufacturing and processing	Condition	Good (appears well maintained)
Heritage Category	Factory/plant	Intactness	Good (some additions)
Theme/s	5.2 Developing a manufacturing capacity [subtheme: <i>Industrial expansion after 1945</i>]		
Recommendation	Include on heritage overlay schedule as individual heritage place		

History

This building was erected in 1947-49 as a factory for E G Greenway Pty Ltd, art pottery manufacturers. The business traced its origins back to a modest venture started in 1930 by a former nurse, Ellen Grant Greenway (1894-1946). Working from her home in Northcote, she obtained unglazed ceramic objects from the nearby Hoffmans pottery works, which she hand-painted, glazed and then sold under the trademark of Lesley Art Pottery. Within a few years, her work was already being sold interstate in Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. Although best known for her floral designs, Greenway also produced items in the fashionable Art Deco idiom, such as octagonal plates with abstract geometrical patterns. Her style has been compared to that of well-known English counterpart Clarice Cliff (1899-1972).

Around 1940, Ellen and her husband, leather manufacturer Herbert Thomas Greenway (1893-1971), relocated to 98 St David Street, Fitzroy. This factory encapsulated Herbert's firm, the Suedette Manufacturing Company, and his wife's venture, then known as the Mayfair Pottery Salon. By that time, the couple had expanded the business to make the ceramics themselves. While some were hand-painted by Ellen, others were produced and sold as plain slip-moulded objects such as vases and *jardinières*. In December 1944, the couple decided to consolidate their two ventures (including 'the manufacture of art pottery and milled products') as a limited liability company, E G Greenway Pty Ltd.

The company's main intent was to provide a new purpose-built factory, conceived as 'a handsomely designed pottery in a garden setting'. However, Ellen died in January 1946 before a site was chosen. Her husband resolved to proceed regardless, and, acquiring 4.5 acres at Blackburn, declared that the complex would be a memorial to his late wife: 'It must be lovely. Everything about it must be expressive of the inspiring life of Ellen Grant Greenway – a beautiful building in a beautiful setting with ideal conditions for the workpeople'. He duly instructed his architect, Arnold E Bridge, to 'produce something different'. Bridge's scheme proposed a factory with production area of 27,000 square feet, offices and 'spacious dining rooms in pastel tints, lockers, showers and a first aid room isolated from all factory and traffic noise'. In accordance with Greenway's vision, it was to be modern in every regard. The open-planned factory floor had a continuous sawtooth roof, providing south-facing anti-glare natural light through mechanically-operated windows. Press reports made much of these modern touches, which included drinking fountains for staff and a buff colour scheme 'reputed to have better psychological effect than the dark walls, which are depressing, and white walls, which tire the eyes'. The landscaped setting was conceived as public parkland on a grand scale, as Greenway negotiated with the Council and a neighbour to acquire a further 5.5 acres around the factory site. Externally, the building itself was described as being 'of unusual design', with a stark block-like expression dominated by a massive vertical tower (which was later omitted). Any resemblance to the award-winning and much-published Heidelberg Town Hall (Leith & Bartlett with Peck & Kemter, 1937) may not be coincidental, given that the Greenway's daughter, Eunice, had held her wedding reception there a few years before, in 1941. Eunice and her husband Ronald Charles Rowe (1918-2004) were both appointed directors of E G Greenway Pty Ltd in December 1947, just after the building permit for the new factory was issued.

Arnold Ernest Bridge (1904-1980) was articled to H V Gillespie and studied at the Workingmen's College (1919-21) Swinburne Technical College (1922), Footscray Technical School (1922-23) and the Melbourne University Architectural Atelier (1924-27). With his father and two brothers trained as engineers, Bridge also undertook studies in structural mechanics, thus qualifying as both an engineer and an architect. He worked for a time in the drawing office of Victorian Railways before being elected an associate of the RVIA in 1939 and starting his own practice. Although a block of flats that he designed appeared on the front cover of the *Australian Home Beautiful* in 1945, he was best known for factories, including premises for Morris & Walker at Heidelberg (1950), Warburton Franki at 140 Burwood Road, Burwood (1952; demolished) and the Spicer Shoe Company in Fitzroy North (1954). This trend continued after 1954 when Bridge elevated employee Tony Hayden (1921-1984), into partnership of the firm thereafter known as Bridge, Hayden & Associates.

A building permit for Greenway's factory, to cost £23,500, was issued on 17 November 1947 and construction started by Melbourne's oldest building firm, T R & L Cockram Pty Ltd. With so little building activity during and just after the War, the Blackburn factory was a notable project for the Cockrams, and helped re-establish them as major players in the subsequent post-war building boom. The complex was reportedly 'nearing completion' in April 1949 and, four months later, the registered office of E G Greenway Pty Ltd officially transferred there from Fitzroy. As noted in one report, the firm was 'almost inundated with applications for employment in Australia's most modern plant in the realm of clay products'. Under Greenway's managing directorship, it continued to produce art pottery. With Ellen obviously no longer available for hand-painting, its emphasis shifted to mass-produced slip-moulded ceramics. Popular items included vases in the form of fans, seashells and logs, glazed in fashionable pastel tones. In 1953, they produced pint tankards to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's Coronation. Changing tastes saw the demand decline in the 1960s and the company was voluntarily wound up in 1975, four years after Greenway's death. Nevertheless, art pottery by E G Greenway Pty Ltd (and its forerunners Lesley Art Pottery and Mayfair Pottery Studio) still remain keenly sought-after by today's collectors.

E G Greenway Pty Ltd had actually ceased production some years before the company was wound up. By that time, the factory's street frontage had already been partly subdivided for other buildings, including a petrol station. In the early 1970s, the factory was taken over by the Postmaster General's Department for use as a mail sorting centre. This continued until a new purpose-built mail sorting centre opened in Rooks Road, Nunawading, in 1993. The former factory then became the new Gurdwara (Temple) for a Sikh community founded in Melbourne back in 1981, which had occupied buildings in Carlton, Ferntree Gully and elsewhere before moving to Blackburn. Building permit records indicate that various works have been undertaken to the building since then, including kitchen renovations (2000), other alterations (2001), new garages and storerooms (2003) and other internal changes (2009, 2011 and 2012).

Description

The former E G Greenway factory is a large brick building comprising a sprawling sawtooth-roofed production area to the rear (north) and a flat-roofed office block to the front (south). External walls are predominately of cream brick (typical of the late 1940s) with contrasting red brick to the plinth courses and some window spandrels, and rendered parapet coping. Some parts of the building, to the rear, have been rendered. The principal facade of the office block, divided into three bays, is balanced without being symmetrical. The central bay, with a flat-roofed porch on slender columns and red brick planter box at one end, has a large central window, a larger projecting corner window and a recessed entry with glazed doors, sidelights and highlights. This entry is marked by a squat tower with a canted face achieved by toothed brickwork. The central bay is flanked to the left side by a narrower recessed bay with tall rectilinear windows and to the right side by a wider projecting bay with smaller windows with red brick spandrels above and below. All of these windows have multi-paned metal-framed sashes. The front wall of the production area, visible above and beyond the office block, has alternating bays of windows (with rendered spandrels above, projecting concrete lintels and multi-paned sashes) and solid walling (which repeat the distinctive canted profile, with toothed brickwork, seen on the front tower).

The main frontage of the factory, somewhat concealed from the street by later buildings, remains mostly intact. A small single-storey addition to the far east of the facade end, with curved plan and glass blocks, is sensitively designed and not considered intrusive. The rear of the complex, not visible from Whitehorse Road, is more utilitarian in treatment, with delivery docks and flat-roofed vehicle bays, some of which presumably date from the 1973 PMG conversion.

Comparative Analysis

In the early post-war years, the part of Whitehorse Road through Blackburn, Nunawading and Mitcham was still defined by relatively sparse residential settlement with scattered shops, public buildings and remnant agricultural activity such as poultry farms. Industrial development was limited to a handful of pre-war businesses that included Stephenson Case Makers Pty Ltd, Variety Manufacturing Company, Insulwool Products Pty Ltd and F J Thatcher & Company, engineers. With large tracts of vacant land available, the thoroughfare soon began to attract more manufacturers, often intending to decentralize from long-held inner-suburban sites. However, with wartime restrictions on private building construction still in place after the war itself had ended, it is not surprising that few new factories were actually built in the area in the second half of the 1940s, although a few companies did express interest in doing so. The British United Shoe Machinery Company, of Fitzroy, obtained a permit for a new factory on Whitehorse Road, Mitcham as early as July 1947, but construction did not proceed. A month later, Box Hill-based agricultural implement makers Daniel Harvey Ltd was also granted a permit for a factory at 384 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading, designed by Bernard Sutton & Associates. While allusions to the project were reported by the press on several occasions in 1948, it, too, failed to materialize at that time. It was not until the later 1950s that the company finally built a new factory at 286-292 Whitehorse Road.

With a permit granted in October 1947, the new E G Greenway factory at Blackburn was the first major post-war industrial complex to actually be erected in what is now the City of Whitehorse. As construction continued, several others followed. In August 1948, a permit was granted for the Turner Manufacturing Company to erect its new factory and bulk store at 494 Whitehorse Road, designed by the firm's in-house engineer, E T Lees. Also in 1948, work started on the new Holeproof factory in Box Hill, which opened in early 1949. Others to follow included the premises of Cottee's Passiona Ltd in Blackburn (160 Whitehorse Road) and the Boma Manufacturing Company in Mitcham (570 Whitehorse Road), both of which were in operation by 1950.

Today, virtually nothing remains of the earliest burst of post-war industrial development along Whitehorse Road. The Turner factory in Nunawading, which was enlarged on several occasions (in 1949 and again in 1957 to the design by Robin Boyd) was entirely demolished in the 1990s. The Cottee's factory in Blackburn (latterly occupied by Leader newspapers) has also been razed and its site redeveloped. The only surviving comparator to the E G Greenway factory is the former Holeproof factory in Box Hill, which is slightly later in date and has been much altered, both externally and internally, as part of Box Hill TAFE. By comparison, the E G Greenway factory is not only earlier (having been commenced in late 1947) and more externally intact, but also more architecturally distinguished.

Architecturally, the E G Greenway factory is in a distinctive hybrid style typical of the late 1940s and early 1950s where the influence of the pre-war Moderne idiom was freely combined with the emerging modernist movement. The use of cream brickwork, rendered trim and porches with narrow white-painted columns, creating a stark and almost Neo-Classical sensibility, can be seen in such contemporaneous buildings as the Babel Building at Melbourne University (Godfrey Spowers, Hughes Mewton & Lobb, 1946-47) and the W G Apps & Sons funeral parlour in Carlisle Street, St Kilda (Muir & Shepherd, 1952-53). There do not appear to be any public buildings of comparable style in the City of Whitehorse, although a similar aesthetic is apparent in contemporaneous houses such as the Green Residence in Burwood (c.1948), with its block-like form, cream brickwork and rendered trim. The most distinctive feature of the E G Greenway factory, namely the canted facade bays with toothed brickwork, is a motif that is rare in Melbourne's Moderne architecture (eg BYFAS factory in Abbotsford, 1937) and most likely unique in the City of Whitehorse.

Significance

What is Significant?

The former E G Greenway factory at 127 Whitehorse Road, Blackburn is a large cream brick factory, comprising a sawtooth-roofed production area and a flat-roofed front office block with a façade that incorporates a narrow colonnaded porch and canted bays with toothed brickwork. Designed by specialist industrial architect Arnold E Bridge, the factory was built between 1947 and 1949 for one of Melbourne's leading art pottery manufacturers, conceived as a monument to the client's wife, pottery artist Ellen Greenway (1894-1946), who died during the very early stages of the project.

How is it Significant?

The factory is of historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Whitehorse.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the former factory is significant for its ability to provide rare evidence of the earliest phase of post-war industrial development along Whitehorse Road (*Criterion A*). During the 1950s and '60s, the thoroughfare was entirely transformed by a proliferation of new factories, creating a major industrial precinct in the eastern suburbs. With so many of these factories since demolished by more recent retail development, little evidence now remains of this significant phase (*Criterion B*). The former E G Greenway factory, commenced in late 1947, is the earliest surviving post-war factory along Whitehorse Road. It is also of historic interest for its associations with E G Greenway Pty Ltd, a leading producer of art pottery in Melbourne in the mid-twentieth century.

Architecturally and aesthetically, the former factory is significant as one of the more outstanding industrial buildings to be erected in the municipality in the post-war period (*Criterion F*). In accordance with the client's personal conviction that the building be a memorial to his recently-deceased wife Ellen, it was conceived to be attractive and modern in every respect. This was not only evident in its external form, which exhibits a level of architectural finesse rarely seen in the early post-war period, but also in its cutting-edge appointments (in regard to staff amenities, natural lighting and ventilation, etc) and the proposed (if only partially realised) parkland setting. Although the tall tower, shown in an early perspective drawing, was omitted from the design, the factory remains as a striking example of modern industrial architecture, distinguished by its stark volumetric massing, its light porch with slender columns and highly unusual canted bays with toothed brickwork (*Criterion E*).

References

Clay Products Journal of Australia, March 1949.

Age, 20 April 1949.

Geoff Ford, *Encyclopedia of Australian Potter's Marks* (2002), pp 111-112.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, 'Bridge, Hayden & Associates', *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, www.builtheritage.com.au

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