

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT ABC TV STUDIOS, 8 GORDON STREET, RIPPONLEA

for
GLEN EIRA CITY COUNCIL

JUNE, 2018

*It's hard not to feel sentimental about it.
This place was built as a factory of entertainment.*

Actor, Charlie Pickering



ABV 2 offices from Gordon Street, circa.1961. Source, www.ABV2.net.au



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Background:

Heritage ALLIANCE was engaged to assess the heritage values of the ABC Gordon Street studios by Glen Eira City Council in April 2018, with a view to possible listing on the heritage schedule of the Glen Eira Planning Scheme. This was in response to the preparation and public consultation of a Structure Plan for Elsternwick which includes the subject site. In April 2017, the ABC sold its Selwyn Street, Elsternwick facility and the relocation of the last ABC staff from Gordon Street occurred in late 2017. The building is now decommissioned and all ABC services and functions have been relocated to Southbank studios. ABC management have made public statements about the sale of the Gordon Street site and this has prompted an assessment of its values.

Glen Eira City Council has developed Structure Plans for Bentleigh, Carnegie and Elsternwick. Development and future land use, transport and parking, types and height of buildings, employment, open spaces, infrastructure and the preservation and protection of neighbourhood character are included in the plans. Public comment on the plans was invited during November and December 2017.

The adopted *Elsternwick Structure Plan*, February 2018 shows the ABC Gordon Street site as a Strategic Site of 6-8 storeys with a 3 storey podium, with a triangle of new open space to the north where the car park is situated now. In section 4 of the Structure Plan, the site is discussed as follows:

Reuse the former studio site for employment purposes, particularly associated with the creative industries, and public open space. Key elements of this project include:

- a) Establishing future use and development of the site that makes a positive contribution to the Elsternwick community.
- b) Investigation of the heritage value of the buildings on the site.
- c) Exploration of opportunities to create a local park on the site, focused on using the existing car park and hard surface areas.

The consultants made a brief, accompanied site visit in May 2018 courtesy of ABC property management and Glen Eira City Council staff. Many parts of the building were visited and photographed, including service areas.

The primary author of this document was Sera-Jane Peters, assisting author was David Wixted, both of heritage ALLIANCE. Both authors were assisted by Julia Wilson and Jacqui Brasher of Glen Eira City Council and current and former staff of ABC TV.

Executive Summary:

1. This assessment of ABC Gordon Street studios has determined that the property has cultural heritage values at National, State and Local levels.
2. The site should be listed on the Glen Eira Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay Schedule and Council should begin the process of preparing an amendment to the planning scheme without delay.
3. The values identified in this assessment should be brought to the attention of the ABC, so that it can prepare a response and assess its obligations under the EPBC Act and its own strategies.
4. The ABC has a *Heritage Strategy 2014-2017*, which sets out the obligations of the ABC in regard to its heritage assets. Section 2 deals with Disposal and states;
Prior to leasing to others or disposal of a property with Commonwealth Heritage Values, the ABC will:
 - identify all Commonwealth Heritage values of the property
 - identify any constraints on future use that may influence the leasing or disposal options
 - refer the proposed lease or disposal under the EPBC Act
 - take all responsible action to secure ongoing protection of the Commonwealth Heritage values of the place, for eg. by covenant or protection under State law.

5. The ABC also maintains a Heritage Register which is a requirement under Section 341ZB of the EPBC Act. The ABC Gordon Street studios should be listed in that register.
6. Further assessment of the Commonwealth values of the property are up to the ABC as the managers of the Commonwealth asset, not Council. Council can however make a recommendation for State listing to the Victorian Heritage Register.

Statement of Significance

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the National, State and Local level as a place associated with public broadcasting by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation since 1956. The site is the earliest extant ABC television studio in Australia. The site reflects technological developments in television from the nascent technology of 16mm film production, telecine, videotape, colour broadcasting and then digital broadcasting, from 1956 until 2017. The studios are associated with a medium which had far-reaching effects on Australian culture, ideas, identity and society from 1956 until 2017.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the National, State and Local level as a place associated with influential television programming over a broad range of subjects including natural history, drama, comedy, news and current affairs, but particularly for culturally influential drama productions such as *Bellbird* and *Sea Change* and live-audience music productions such as *Countdown*, which greatly influenced an entire generation of Australian youth in the 1970s and 1980s.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the State and Local level as the site of the first ABC television broadcast in Victoria, commencing with the broadcasting of the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956. The site was the first purpose-built television studio in Victoria and is the earliest extant television studio in Victoria.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the Local level as a place associated with Rippon Lea Estate and Louisa Jones, the last owner of the Estate, who fought to keep more of the Estate from being compulsorily acquired by the ABC in the 1960s. This contributed to the development of a nascent heritage conservation and advocacy movement and is associated with the beginnings of the National Trust in Victoria.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the Local level as one of the few industrial buildings in the City of Glen Eira with an aesthetic presence, and is a rare, early example of a Post-War International style building featuring exterior curtain walling.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the National, State and Local level as a place with significance to those who worked in the building between 1956 and 2017. This includes both ABC staff as well as entertainment industry professionals who worked in the building on different productions. The site is also significant for its association with the development of a nascent entertainment and broadcasting industry, which went on to develop Australian talent in music, film, video, journalism, acting, direction, design and production and has directly contributed to the development and dissemination of a distinctive Australian culture through the medium of film and television.

Areas of significance

The ABC Gordon Street site is a large complex of buildings built between 1956 and 1965, and modified numerous times to accommodate technological changes to the medium of television, and the changing needs of the occupants. The following areas have been identified as having different levels of significance. A plan of the site identifies this graphically on page 37 of the report.

This grading of significance is a preliminary guide to the management of values. It is not an assessment of the relative value of the fabric of the site. A conservation management plan should be undertaken by the owner/manager to determine better how to manage and conserve values and fabric prior to change, development or adaptation of the site.

Primary significance:

- The facade and front elevation of Stage 2 (1958) and Stage 3 (1961).
The important elements are the spandrel glass curtain walling, the masonry brickwork and the recessed podium, the flat roof, projecting masonry and the overall forming of flat areas of glazing intersecting with solid cuboid forms, both horizontal and vertical.
- The broadcasting tower (1956) and the elements that illustrate how broadcasting occurred.
- The television studios 31, 32, 33A and 33B (1958)
The important elements of the studios are the soundproofing, the design of lighting and electrical, the relationship between the studio floor and the master control rooms above, the relationship between the scenery runway and all the studios. Along with this are the technical factors of the construction itself which illustrates the relationship between filming, editing, production and broadcast via the tower.

Contributory Significance:

- The scenery runway.
- The service areas surrounding the studios which houses makeup, wardrobe, dressing rooms, toilets and green room and technical crew spaces with an intervening corridor.
- The facades of Stage 1 (1956) facing the courtyard of the engineering workshops and the external facades of the former OB garage, and workshops, to Gordon Street and adjoining property.
- The open space provided by the current carpark along Gordon Street and trees older than 50 years. Car parking infrastructure (fencing, kerbing, asphaltting, booms etc) is of no significance. This area should maintain a landscaped setback in which to view the full façade of stage 1 and stage 3 from Gordon Street and the Rippon Lea boundary.

Non-contributory Significance:

- Stage 3 (1961) interior.
- Stage 4 (1965) all areas.
- Saw-tooth scenery workshop along the railway line.
- OB garage and workshop areas of Stage 1(1956) excepting the facades.

Description of the site:

When you go into those other commercial studios, they have these big posters of their stars. You go into the foyer of Ripponlea, which was kind of like a building that was designed by a Communist refugee from World War II, that was painted by surplus military paint. It was a completely different experience because [there was] no ego.

Actor, Simon Westaway¹

Form and function

The site can be viewed in two parts – 1) *the southern end* consists of a one to three storied engineered structure of 1956 which is the earliest part of the site and 2) *to the north and west* the combined production block and four storey administration building dating from 1958 and 1965.

The earliest triangular part of the site, which fronts Gordon Street at the south, was constructed for the outside broadcast van garages, as an electrical sub-station and for the transmission equipment which fed to the repeater tower at the rear of the central portion of the site.

The main production studios numbered 31, 32, 33A and 33B are arranged like a jewellery box. Inside the building the large central volume of the space is taken up by these box-shaped sound stages, surrounded by small scale functional rooms for actors, wardrobe, makeup, toilets, props, editing and production, all of which have easy access to the studio floors. Control rooms are situated above the studio spaces and are accessible from the floor of the studio and the first floor. The large studios 31 and 32 were the core of the building above which were large air conditioning units and electrical rooms.

Whilst the studios are the reason for the scale and arrangement of the central building, the administration building in the north west corner, contains open plan offices on four levels above the workshops for management, production staff, journalists, programme specialists, technicians, meeting rooms, common rooms, finance and human resources.

Technical staff were also spread throughout the complex. The facility housed electrical and lighting technicians, camera crews, outdoor broadcast crews, graphic designers, and scenery workshop staff – the workshop itself was the large saw-tooth roofed space along the railway boundary, joined to the studio space with a wide scenery runway to allow sets and audience seating to be moved in and out. Also occupying large areas (or perhaps volume) were storage areas for props, moveable auditorium seating, wardrobe, scenery and sets at the north end below the administration building, adjoining large loading bay areas.

The facility also included technical areas for the finishing stages through taping, editing and then sending out the finalized production via the on-site repeater tower where it was microwaved (a line of sight transmission) to the ABC's Dandenong tower and then broadcast to homes via an omni-directional low frequency transmission.

The site has been witness to a number of technological changes which required alterations to the building and production facilities. When constructed in 1956, cameras filmed productions and live-to-air on acetate film which then entailed developing and rescanning images for transmission. During the 1960s magnetic tapes were being developed but matching sound and image quality was a problem. By the early 1970s and into the mid 1970s methods of recording and playback dramatically improved through further technological advances made in recording equipment including the introduction of publicly available colour TV. In 2010, television production systems moved from analogue to digital technology.

¹ Simon Westaway quote from Natasha Johnson, 23 November 2017 "Dream Factory" farewelled as 60 years of TV production at Ripponlea studios comes to an end." <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-30/abc-ripponlea-studio-farewelled-end-of-an-era-in-australian-tv/9052728>

Design

The building design was undertaken by the Commonwealth Department of Works which produced a facility specifically designed for the new technology of television, using the expertise developed building television production facilities in Canada and Britain. During 1956, CBC staff were training ABC staff in television production and BBC 'expert' Royston Morley was being loaned to the ABC so he could assist with technical advice.²

In 1949 the BBC had commissioned a massive, purpose built television complex, Television Centre at White City, West London³. Before this, the BBC had used remodelled studios at Alexandra Palace, Lime Grove, and Hammersmith. It was 1953 before they moved their first staff into the new building which was not completed, due to post-war restrictions, until 1960. The BBC had already had two decades of experience filming and broadcasting for television and it is most likely that the technical expertise of the BBC was crucial to the design of the Gordon Street facility.

Unlike the BBC's grand, architect designed Television Centre, the Gordon Street building reflects a functional approach with minimal touches toward either comfort or aesthetics. As noted in the Simon Westaway quote, the building is more an engineered structure, particularly in areas related to air handling, electrical equipment and cabling zones, sound attenuation and sound dampening.

Some ten drawings are available at the National Archives of Australia in Sydney but were not sighted for this assessment. These are probably stage 1 drawings. The bulk of drawings after stage 1 have not been sighted and are probably still in the hands of the ABC. The Clements Langford collection at University of Melbourne Archives does not contain drawings. Clements Langford were the builders of stages 1 & 2 (pre-1960) and the archives hold day-books, minute books, invoices, receipts, specifications and contracts. Clements Landford also completed other substantive Commonwealth contracts in Melbourne.

Stage 1 - 1953-1956

Upon acquisition of the triangle of land to the south of *Rippon Lea*, work commenced on a dogleg shaped building at the site's southern end with a future plan for extension into the northern area. The dog-leg was created by the land boundary with a more southern triangle of land acquired from the *Rippon Lea* Estate for a new Elsternwick Courthouse and Police Station, which was in construction shortly after 1953.

The first building constructed (and from the photographs and onsite observation) – an engineered structure both in fabric and design, was the Outside Broadcast (OB) garages and transmission building. At the same time a tall metal tower (extant) was constructed in a cleared area along the rail tracks and partway into the future development site. Later, the scenery workshop was constructed around the tower.

The new building allowed the OB vans to be housed and serviced and their film to be developed, scanned and uploaded, voiced and edited for final transmission. The building also provided camera servicing and storage, a small studio (20 x 30 foot) and a master control area, which allowed for the initial broadcast of live footage for the Melbourne Olympics. The building was used as an interim studio space during the Olympics, as were a number of other temporary spaces rented by the ABC around the city.

At ground level along the Gordon Street frontage, the building had a substation, electrical backup in the form of a generator atop a small three storey tower which also housed transmission equipment which relayed to the tower micro-wave dishes. In parallel with this construction was the ABC's broadcast tower and station at Mount Dandenong from where the transmission signal was able to cover a vast area of Melbourne and its surrounding fringes. The main fabric of the Stage 1 building is silica brick walls with metal windows and steel deck roof hidden by a low parapet.

² The ABC Weekly, September 1956 p.3

³ AKA BBC Shepherds Bush.

Stage 2 - 1958

During 1958 the second phase of building was completed using steel frame construction and masonry walls with the same silica brick through-out, but a modicum of architectural styling was added to the public facade fronting the car park through a curtain walled element using aluminium frames and a red spandrel glass. The builder's file held by University of Melbourne Archives, indicate that the manufacture and erection of the curtain wall façade required a number of iterations and requotes.⁴

Despite the very plain brickwork the building displays elements of the Post -War International style, at least on its public facades, and in the style of geometric massing, using strong vertical and horizontal elements. Internally the plain brickwork persists on every floor but in some areas it has been painted either through design or just to relieve its drab appearance.

Originally the public entrance to the studios was through a pair of polished metal double doors into a small foyer on the north- eastern facade. The entrance was marked by the polished metal work on the doors and polished floor to ceiling metal window mullions. Prior to 1979 this entry area has been expanded outward, sliding doors have replaced swing doors and a wing canopy has been created externally over a broad concrete landing and ramp for all-abilities access.

From the foyer one proceeds inside along one of the ground floor corridors surrounding studios 31 and 32. These corridors have functional rooms arranged along the side, consisting of wardrobe, laundry, dressing rooms, make up, toilets and so on and collectively they provide a sound buffer to the studios, whilst also allowing rapid access to the floor of the studio. Further sound abatement is provided by the method of construction which provided independent foundations on which thick brick (independent) walls were constructed. In 1974 more sound abatement was created with the introduction of secondary flooring in the studios as a method of excluding sound transmission from the railway line. The studios were provided with a layer of internal sound abatement using sound proofing batts (possibly *Rockwool*) on the walls and then an overlay of timber battens which trap reverberation. This sound attenuation is more intense in the lower level than in the upper half of the high volume space.

Studio 31 and 32 were constructed to the same dimensions of 80 x 60 x 25 feet alongside a small presentation studio of 20 x 30 feet – now divided into two studios. On the upper levels of studios 31 and 32 are control rooms and studios for vision and sound editing. The electrical rooms adjacent to the control rooms contain banks of fuse boards for the thousands of electrical cables coming in from the studios below. One of the abiding visual images of studios 31 and 32 are the mass of numbered lighting bars which drop from the ceilings, each with numbered electrical outlets, facing the control room and with control panels along the walls. The control rooms, above the floor of the studio monitor the studio floor from large angled windows to the studio as well as via banks of monitors.

⁴ Clements Langford Pty Ltd, 1868-1960, Collection - University of Melbourne Archives.



Interiors of studio with a mass of lighting and monitors hanging from the lighting bars above, in 2017. Source, Google images, 2017



The scenery runway, in 2017. Source, Google images, 2017

Stage 2 of the building included the factory zone containing the scenery workshop, an industrial space for manufacturing sets, along with ad-hoc painting and welding booths. This linear space running along the train-track boundary is covered by a saw tooth roof and encloses the base of the 1956 tower. The walls are masonry and the space is unrelieved by any form of architectural detail. Between the workshop and studios 31 and 32 is the vast scenery runway where sets were shifted around between studios and auditorium seating was stored. Between them, studios 31 and 32, plus the runway and the scenery workshop take up approximately 75% of the volume of stages 1 and 2

Stage 3 - 1961

Stage 3, constructed in 1961 created three storeys of office space at the north end of the main studio building, coming within metres of the fence separating the *Rippon Lea* garden. The building's appearance from Gordon Street conformed to the architectural arrangement set up in 1958 i.e. a curtain wall and brick surround. The construction at ground level at the rear added more storage space for props plus a new delivery area with a loading leveller. Later ad-hoc work added a ground level staff facility on the rear.

Stage 4 - 1965 -1968

This was the final building phase, which saw a square tower of four storeys built above the north west corner of the scenery workshop. This brick building continues the basic form of stages 1 and 3, with long horizontal banks of glazing and masonry walls, but with no effort to adorn or enlighten the facades. On the western side, facing Rippon Grove and the railway line the glazing is covered with sun screens and was an unprepossessing grey box. A five storey service tower sits to one side of the block and provides lifts and stairs.

The administration building added a substantial amount of floor area for a variety of offices and meeting rooms for management, producers, journalists, graphics, finance and human resources. The (metal decked) roof is home to a large satellite dish. This building was constructed almost as an afterthought, as its location on top of the factory areas attests. The building was commissioned between two High Court challenges to the right of the ABC to expand the ground footprint of the site and was a functional response to squeezed conditions on site and acceptance that further expansion into the *Rippon Lea* gardens might not be possible.

The carpark areas were laid out with a concrete area at the entrance and the parking areas to the north, as gravel with garden beds and trees, by 1963. The cypress and other older trees in the carpark are possibly left over from Rippon Lea's gardens. The larger trees shown in the photo below are most probably remnants from before the site was owned by the ABC.



The ABCV2 building and car park fronting the studios in 1963, Herald and Weekly Times Limited Collection. Note some of these trees may survive from the original Rippon Lea site (to RHS) as they are too tall for 1958 plantings. Source, SLV



Four storey administration building in course of being finalised in 1968, view to north-east along rail line.



Exterior of administration block from Gordon Street carpark area of the office block.

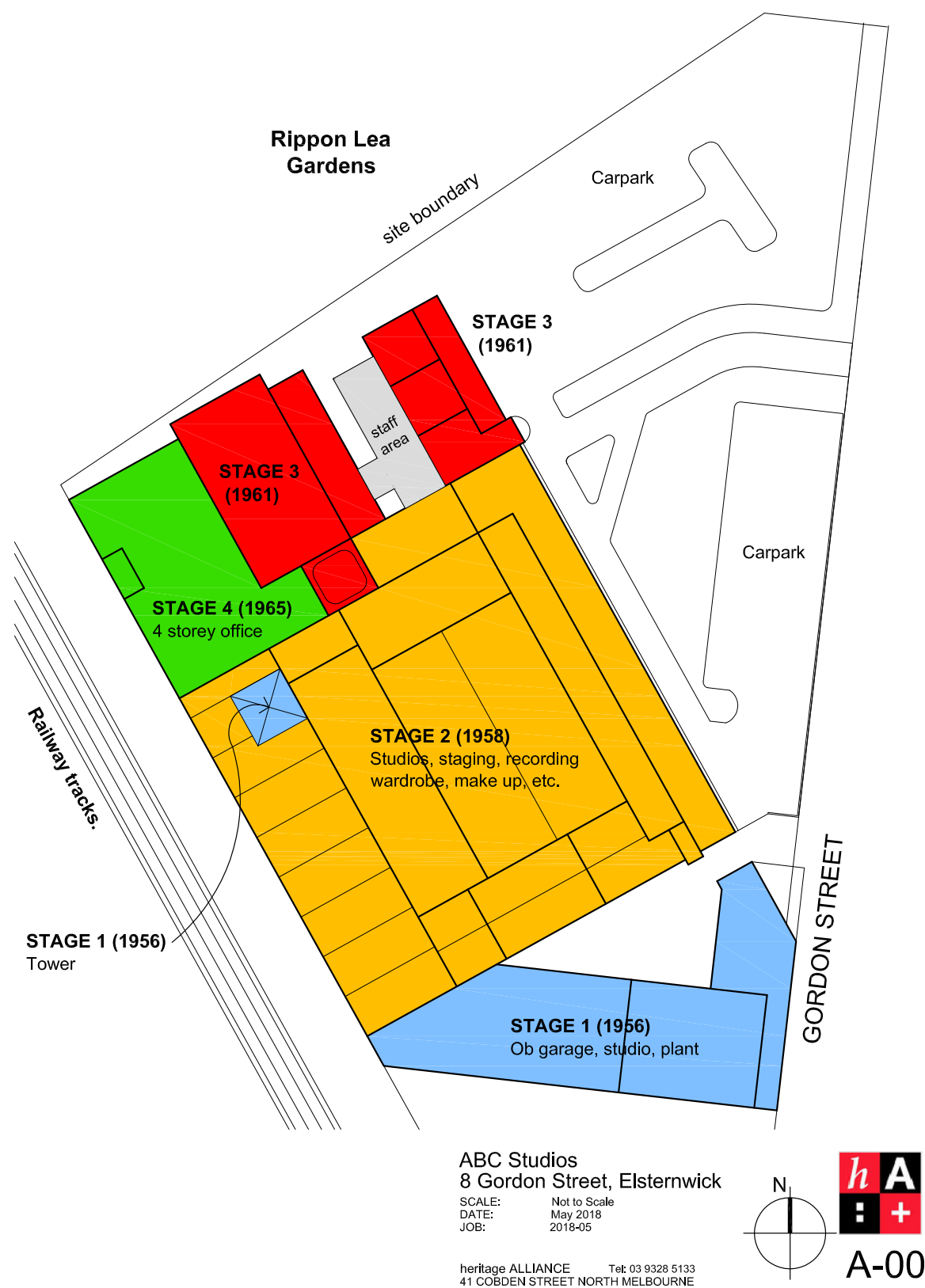


Interior of stage 4 administration building with gridded drop ceilings, concrete encased columns, strip windows, vinyl floor finish over concrete.



Interior of stage 4 administration building

All photographs sourced from National Archives of Australia.



STAGING OF THE WORKS DIAGRAM A-00

History:

History of Rippon Lea

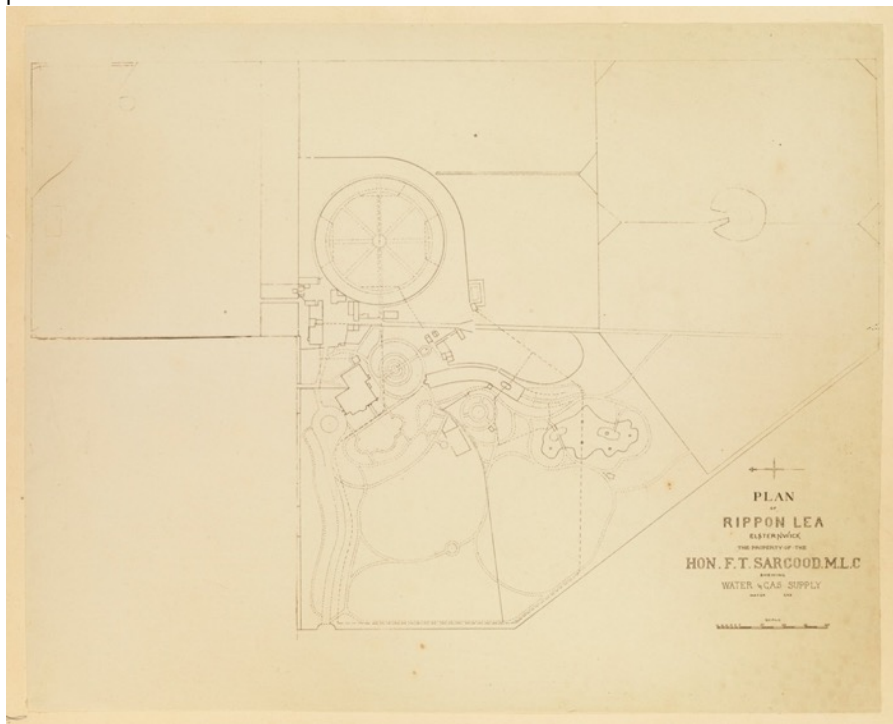
The property, *Rippon Lea* was created by Frederick Sargood, who in 1850, at fifteen years of age, had arrived in Melbourne from England with his family. Sargood made a fortune, became a leader of Melbourne society, a notable political figure and Victoria's first Minister of Defence, and after Federation was elected to Australia's first Senate. He was knighted in 1890.

Frederick Sargood acquired 27 hectares of land in Elsternwick and began to establish grounds and house. He named the property after his mother, Emma Rippon. In 1868-9 he built a two-storey fifteen-room house, designed by Joseph Reed of Reed & Barnes, Melbourne's most important architect of the time, who designed many of Melbourne's public and private buildings.

From 1868 Sargood began to develop magnificent gardens around the house, both ornamental and practical, and by 1903 *Rippon Lea* had one of the largest private gardens in Australia, equaled in size only by the Melbourne Government House garden. Along with its well-known owner, it received considerable attention from the press in the nineteenth century, and this focus on the gardens was continued with its subsequent owners.

Before the property was subdivided, the garden was renowned for its stylistic variety, sophistication and large scale, as well as the broad range of recreational facilities it provided, such as archery, tennis (it had one of the first tennis courts in Melbourne), boating on the lake and a rifle range. *Rippon Lea* and its garden was the scene of entertaining on a large scale by the Sargood family.

The garden at *Rippon Lea* included: a large area of lawn; shrubberies; flower gardens; a lake with a grotto, a bridge, a boathouse, and a lookout mound with a four-level tower, which is a notable example of nineteenth century garden architecture; a fernery which was probably the largest in Australia, and reflected the contemporary enthusiasm for ferns; a croquet lawn; a tennis court; a rifle and archery range; and aviaries. More practical areas were a very extensive, but still visually decorative, kitchen garden and orchard, as well as farm paddocks.



Plan of Rippon Lea, Elsternwick, the property of Hon. F.T Sargood M.L.C. Water and gas supply, 1880. This plan indicates the full extent of the 27 hectares originally acquired by Sargood. Source, SLV

After Sargood's death in 1903 the property was owned by Sir Thomas Bent, then Premier of Victoria, who subdivided and sold part of the property to the north. From 1911-35, the owner was Benjamin Nathan, the founder of Maples' furniture stores, who added a gate lodge at the entrance and a large glasshouse for the propagation of orchids (now demolished). Nathan was an avid gardener and a collector of rare orchids.

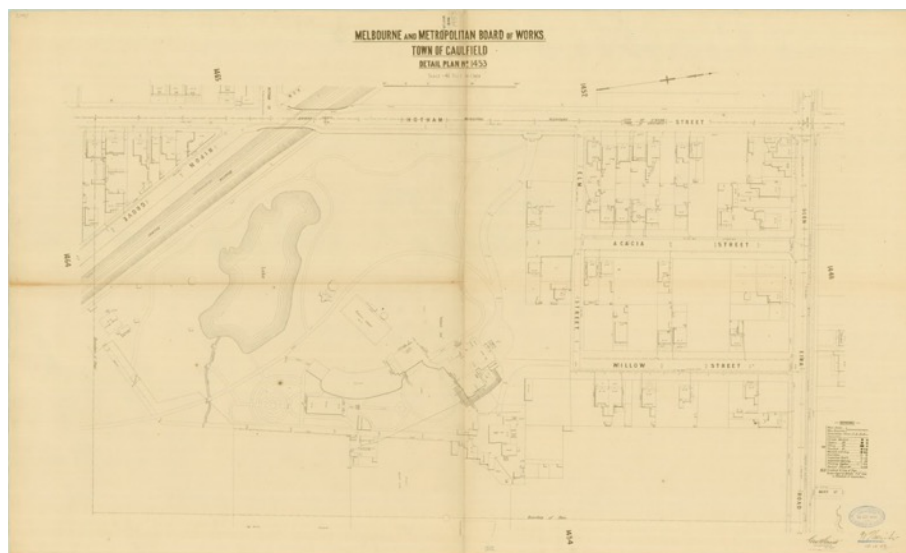
The property was inherited in 1935 by his daughter, Mrs Louisa Jones, who in 1939 altered the house, added a pool complex and also subdivided and sold some of the property. In 1954 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation purchased about a hectare of the grounds to the south, and in 1963 attempted to compulsorily acquire another hectare, including the lake and much of the ornamental garden. After fighting the government for ten years, against acquisition, Jones then bequeathed it to the National Trust. Jones lived there until her death in 1972.

The original property of 27 hectares had been reduced by subdivision to about 5.7 hectares. Most of the original ornamental gardens and garden structures are on these 5.7 hectares, and most of what was lost were the unusually extensive service areas of the garden and the paddocks. The original garden scheme, including the irrigation system remains largely intact from the nineteenth century.⁵

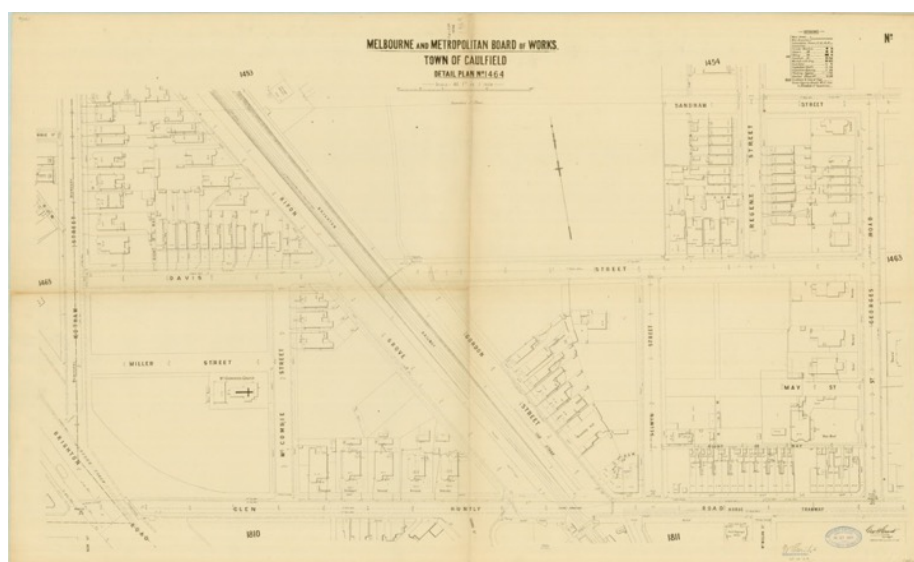


View from Railway Path, looking back toward Rippon Lea, 1903 (in the paddock area where the ABC building was later developed). Source, Johnstone, O'Shannessy & Co. photographers, SLV

⁵ National Heritage List citation for *Rippon Lea* from Australian Heritage Database. http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;place_id=105763



Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan 1453, dated 1902. Source SLV



Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan 1464, dated 1902. Source SLV



Part of Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plan 49, Municipality of Caulfield, dated 1933. The area marked in blue was subdivided prior to 1902. The areas outlined in red were subdivided from the estate between 1904-1909, when Gordon Street was extended into the grounds and Elizabeth Street was created. Changes to the alignment of Gordon Street occurred at some later date. Source, SLV



This subdivision plan indicates that there were early plans to subdivide the southernmost triangle of land from Ripponlea, shown south of the Proposed new street, joining Bent Street. This plan is probably wrongly dated and forms part of the subdivision by Sir James Bent between 1904-1909. Newspapers reported that lots on the corner of Bent and Gordon Street were still selling in September 1949. Source, SLV

“Few people have worked so hard to give so much away.”

An elderly widow challenged today the Commonwealth Government's right to slice up her inherited land estate at Elsternwick. Mrs Louisa Jones asked seven High Court judges to stop acquisition of 4.1 acres of the 10-acre property known as Rippon Lea. The Commonwealth wants the slice for extensions to adjoining Australian Broadcasting Commission premises. Mrs Jones, however, had offered the old landmark, including the Georgian Mansion, to the National Trust for preservation for “the people of Victoria”. Now she is pressing a legal claim to hand over the entire property without any acquisition claims...Mrs Jones claims, and it is admitted by the Commonwealth, that legally the Government cannot compulsorily acquire land which, under State laws, is dedicated or reserved for a public park or recreation.

The Canberra Times, Friday 11 October, 1963. p.6.

Rippon Lea occupies a special position in Australian conservation history as a property saved specifically for its historic gardens. The owner of the property, Louisa Jones fought the full might of the Commonwealth government, after it had compulsorily purchased 4.1 acres to extend the broadcasting facilities of the ABC in the 1960s. Having lost two court cases, she bequeathed the property to the fledgling National Trust of Victoria to successfully save the property for the people of Victoria. She received this news shortly before she died in 1972, aged seventy-eight. As Henry Bolte, Victorian Premier of the time remarked, ‘Few people have worked so hard to give so much away.’⁶

⁶ Louisa Jones, Culture Victoria website <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/built-environment/ripon-lea-estate/louisa-jones/>



Deeds to Rippon Lea, Melbourne 1963, Frith, John E. John Frith collection of cartoons, 1960-1969. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-153020386>

The development of the ABC facility and the Rippon Lea site

Prior to the epic court battles to save *Rippon Lea*, the Jones family had started to sell off parts of the estate. In circa 1954 the conservatories and glass houses were dismantled, the huge circular vegetable garden was subdivided for suburban housing, extending Gordon Street from Bent Street to Glen Eira Road. Then in April 1956, Charles Moses, manager of the ABC and Timothy Jones, husband of Louisa Jones, came to an agreement for the ABC to purchase 2.75 acres of the estate for the first television studios for the ABC to broadcast the Olympic Games. The ABC also sought the first right of refusal to purchase additional land from the estate and an informal agreement was reached.

Stage 1 of the ABC facility was constructed in 1956 in the triangle of paddocks between the Rippon Lea lake, the railway line and Gordon Street. It consisted of the plant rooms, the outside broadcast garage which was used as a temporary master control and telecine, the tower and a small presentation studio.

In 1958, Stage 2 of the facility opened on 21 May, consisting of studios, master control, telecine, telerecord and the staging workshop. In 1959 the ABC successfully negotiated to buy another 2 acres of *Rippon Lea* but the purchase was not completed because of objections by Caulfield City Council. Negotiations with Mrs Jones were later resumed but she rescinded the agreement to sell more land on the basis that the agreement was made by her late husband, not her.

In 1961, Stage 3 of the facility opened at the western end of the triangle. It included loading bays, large scenery and prop storage and the videotape department. The northern end of the Stage 3 building was constructed to allow for eventual expansion into *Rippon Lea*'s gardens.

In 1963, the government compulsorily acquired 4.1 acres of the estate to extend the ABC facility. 10,000 people protested the acquisition in the grounds of *Rippon Lea*. Louisa Jones took her battle all the way to the High Court, who denied the acquisition on a technical detail.



Rippon Lea protestors, Elsternwick, April 21, 1963, John T Collins. Source, SLV

In 1964 the ABC reapplied for the acquisition and again it went all the way to the High Court, who upheld the right of the Commonwealth to acquire the land. Louisa Jones still did not give up, and in 1966 she issued a writ against the Commonwealth for 355,000 pounds.⁷

On the 27 July 1972 Louisa Jones died, leaving *Rippon Lea* estate to the National Trust(Vic), a community advocacy body and thus curtailing the ability of the Commonwealth to acquire the Estate. The Commonwealth is not able to compulsorily acquire land which is entailed for public purposes. In saving the Estate from being broken up any further, she relinquished the right to bequeath the property to her family. The National Trust (Victoria) had been established in 1956. Modelled on the *National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty* in the UK and inspired by local campaigns to conserve native bushland and preserve old buildings, the first National Trust was formed in New South Wales in 1945. The Estate measured 14 acres.

In 1974 the ABC studios and some of the production areas were upgraded for colour TV. Several different schemes to prevent the vibration of the train line disturbing filming were investigated and new floors created under the studios. In 1977 the western boundary of the studio site was found to be in the wrong position and so a narrow strip was rented to the National Trust for a nominal fee. In 2017 the ABC opens its new TV studios at Southbank and the site was closed.⁸

⁷ The Canberra Times, ACT, Thursday 4 February 1965, p.13

⁸ Timeline compiled by former ABC staff. Culture Victoria website <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/built-environment/ripon-lea-estate/solid-joys-and-lasting-treasure/>



Protests Swept Under the Rug, Frith, John E. John Frith collection of cartoons, 1960-1969. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-153020386>



Louisa Jones c.late-1960s from Ben Jones' photograph collection. National Trust of Australia(Vic) Rippon Lea Collection.

The introduction of Television to Australia

Television began in Australia just in time for the Melbourne Olympics of 1956. A 1953 Federal Royal Commission Inquiry into Television, had recommended that it be introduced gradually under government supervision, with an ABC station and two commercial channels in both Sydney and Melbourne.

The ABC began planning for the introduction of television once the findings of the Inquiry were presented. In 1956, the *ABC Weekly* was telling its readers not to expect too much at the beginning as “we shall only have limited studio accommodation which will restrict considerably the number and type of locally produced studio sessions until our full studio accommodation is completed early in the New Year.”⁹ Throughout 1956, international experts were flown into Melbourne to prepare staff, train 300 technicians and presumably to provide expertise on how to design studios and production facilities for television.

Test transmissions took place in Melbourne for HSV7 and GTV9 in the months leading up to the Olympic Games and, along with ABV2, the stations were on air by the time the Olympics began in November. All three stations televised the Olympics, using outside broadcast vans linked by radio to their main studios and a 16mm film of daily events sent to Sydney each evening for television broadcast.¹⁰

The first transmission of Channel ABV2 in Melbourne was on November 17, 1956. The opening programmes were presented from a converted radio studio at Broadcast House, using the Outside Broadcast unit as a production booth. Programmes were presented from the small studio at Gordon Street with the master control equipment being housed in the Garage building.

Just three days after its official opening ABV2 staff were off to the Melbourne Olympic Games, providing live coverage via a single outside broadcast van over the course of competition. Filmed coverage was then flown up to Sydney for broadcast on ABN2. It was May 1958 before ABV2 formally opened the studio space at Gordon Street. An undated memo from ABV2 staff collected on an ABV2 archive website provides some details about the building. “The requirements for the studio building were prepared by officers of the Australian Broadcasting Commission based on the latest experience of television authorities overseas. The plans were prepared and the building construction supervised by the Commonwealth Department of Works. The building contractors are Clements Langford Pty Ltd.”¹¹

The following summary of the history of the Ripponlea studio is taken from a typescript on the website, abv2.net.au, titled *A.B.C's new television studio opening on May 21*. The typescript was probably written in 1958, in preparation for the opening of the building.

The official opening of the Ripponlea studios will take place on Wednesday May 21 at 7.55pm on ABV Channel 2 when the chairman of the ABC, Sir Richard Boyer and the Post Master General the Hon CW Davidson will be the speakers...The new building of brick, which is being opened on May 21, is two-storied, and contains two studios each 80ft x 60ft and 25 ft high, which is about the size of four average sized two storied homes, and a presentation studio 20' x 30'.(twice the size of the average living room)

The presentation studio is the same size as the temporary studio which has been in use since transmission began. The second large studio will come into operation in about three months. When both are in operation one large studio will be used for plays and the more complex type of productions....(not legible)

⁹ The ABC Weekly, September 1, 1956, p.3

¹⁰ Parliament of Victoria website, 1956 Olympics; www.parliament.vic.gov.au/component/jdownloads/download/36-research-papers/13610-2016-3-olympics-hn

¹¹ Office memo, ABC former staff online archive at <http://www.abv2.net.au/office.php>

On the ground floor are the studios with access from the ground level or top floor; a theatrette for screening films and dubbing sound adding commentaries or changing sound on films. A canteen leads off the large entrance foyer. The studios are surrounded with a ring of offices including wardrobe, make-up and dressing rooms (eight), showers etc small studio and control rooms, the scenery runway and scenery manufacturing area. This ring assists in insulating the studio against outside noises. To aid this soundproofing further, each studio stands on its own foundations and is isolated from the main structure so that it will not be disturbed unduly by construction and other noises within the building.

On the first floor are located Master Control, Telecine, Telerecording units, Film and News sections, Graphics and Design staff and general offices. To the left of the main studio building is the outside broadcast Division, the Engineering workshop, Power and Air conditioning plants. The control rooms for the large studios are located on the first floor over the dressing rooms. Each control room is divided into three sections partly segregated from each other...

In the new building there will be direct access from the scenery area and also into both the main studios having a clear height of 16ft. This means it will be possible to fabricate sections of scenery up to 14 ft high in the scenery area and to trolley them into the studio.

When the construction work is completed the site will be laid out and the garden areas close to the studios will be used for open-air TV settings.¹²



Emergency generator area (within 3 storey building) and outside broadcast garage from the transmission tower, circa 1956. This is Stage 1 of the Ripponlea facility. Source www.abv2.net.au

¹² From undated typescript, accessed at <http://www.abv2.net.au/office.php>



Site excavation of studio building circa 1956. This is construction of stage 2 of the Ripponlea facility with the scenery workshop wall along the railway in the course of construction at the rear. Source www.abv2.net.au



Studio building excavations for Stage 2, (footings of major studios) with scenery workshop wall in place at rear, circa 1956. Source, <http://www.abv2.net.au/>



Stage 2 of the Ripponlea facility completed, circa 1958. Source, <http://www.abv2.net.au/> Note the formal entry is on the right end of the lower glazed area. Stage 3 was added to the right hand side (north)

The Gordon Street studios continued to house ABC TV production in Melbourne for decades to follow — making programs such as *Bellbird*, *Adventure Island*, *Countdown*, *Power Without Glory*, *The Saturday Show*, *Australia – You’re Standing In It*, *The Factory*, *Countdown Revolution*, *The Big Gig*, *The Late Show*, *Phoenix*, *Seachange*, *Shaun Micallef’s Mad As Hell*, *Spicks And Specks*, schools programs and thousands of ABC News and current affairs programs.¹³

In June 2011, the Managing Director of the ABC, Mark Scott announced that they would build a new TV studio at Southbank. “Recently unions have raised concerns about the ongoing production output by the public broadcaster. But while Scott says Melbourne will remain a major hub for ABC television it isn’t clear what, if any, role will be played by the Elsternwick studios. ‘The Gordon Street facilities date back to the origins of television in Australia and have been home to many of the ABC’s most memorable productions, from *Countdown* and *Seachange* to *Spicks and Specks* and *Adam Hills* in Gordon Street, whose live show made the location famous.’¹⁴

The Gordon Street studios were closed in November 2017.

¹³ <http://www.televisionau.com/>

¹⁴ June 9 2011, David Knox <https://tvtonight.com.au/2011/06/abc-promises-new-melbourne-tv-studio.html>

Social significance:

One of the values which may be ascribed to a place is social value or social significance. Social value is defined by the *Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter 2013*, as the associations that a place has for a particular community or cultural group and the social or cultural meanings that it holds for the community. The DELWP Planning Practice Note 1 has Criterion G, which is defined as "Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance)."

This community can include professional communities such as the entertainment industry. The ABC studios have had a lasting impact on the entertainment industry in Australia, as a workplace for actors, directors, producers, editors, cameramen and other trades, from 1956 until 2017. The first generation of television technicians and creators was trained in the Gordon Street facility and then passed that knowledge onto the next generations of television actors, producers and technicians.

The sporadic and cyclical nature of television production has meant that many people would have worked on productions for one or two episodes or might have worked on long series on a regular basis, over many decades. Over 300 staff were permanently employed at the site at different times, in roles from creative production, technical trades and administration. Their attachment to the facility and the workplace culture of the place has created a lasting attachment evidenced in the interviews conducted by the ABC with their staff.

The Gordon Street studio building is an unprepossessing structure but one which is greatly beloved by those who worked in it. To celebrate the end of an era and the closure of the building, the ABC filmed a segment with staff talking about their memories of the building and Natasha Johnson interviewed staff about their feelings on its closure. The following interviews and comments came from this piece and the accompanying videos.¹⁵

Andrew Best, set buyer/dresser and unofficial historian of Ripponlea studios worked at Ripponlea for 36 years and occasionally conducted public tours of the site. "Its time to move on, but I'm very sad actually. I think after nearly 36 years here – that's over half the time that TV has been in Australia – you feel very attached to somewhere you come to every day and have made so many wonderful friends and helped create so many fantastic things, it is very difficult to leave."

The article states that "Attachment to the old brick building, known affectionately by staff as Rippers, stems from its place in the history of television production." Andrew goes on to say that; "In the 1960s this was called the 'dream factory' because it was the beginning of TV and really anything you could dream up was new and exciting and you could create it here." "It does really have that feeling that just anything could happen here and so many wonderful shows have come out of here."

Not only permanent ABC staff but also actors, directors and producers have attachment to the buildings and the programs produced within them. Paul Drane, former *Countdown* director said; "It's almost like a mini-Hollywood. So many programs have gone through here over the years and the development of so much innovation, [there was a] preparedness to try new things. The ABC would do that."

Actors such as Deborra-Lee Furness who worked at the Ripponlea studios felt there was something magical about the culture of the place that gave rise to such great program content. "There's a bit of magic in Ripponlea. It allowed people ... to be more creative, to have more artistic leeway." Myf Warhurst felt the same way; "It was so important in our lives, it was the window to the rest of the world. This kind of mythical dream factory, where all the greatest ideas occurred and people were having the most amount of fun."

Shaun Micallef learned what he calls the Ripponlea Method from Television director, Ted Emery. "The ABC Gordon St method is the only method I know how to make a program. You make a little family together then everybody gets involved," he said. "In fact if you watch the Micallef Program ... you think they are actors, but they are actually just members of the crew who have been dragooned into a sketch." Micallef said anything was

¹⁵ Natasha Johnson, 23 November 2017 "Dream Factory" farewelled as 60 years of TV production at Ripponlea studios comes to an end." <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-30/abc-ripponlea-studio-farewelled-end-of-an-era-in-australian-tv/9052728>

possible at Ripponlea. "You would come up with an idea and you would expect it to be turned around in a couple of days," he said.

Charlie Pickering, host of *The Weekly*, felt lucky to be "that little bookend on history", filming one of the last programs in the famed Studio 31. "It's hard not to feel sentimental about it. This place was built as a factory of entertainment," he said. "Walking into this studio made you feel like you were stepping into history. You can see, almost feel, the history on the walls. You can get enough of an audience in here to get a really good response, but it's not so big that it doesn't feel intimate."

Belinda Hawkins started at the ABC in 1985. She believes that having everyone together in one building — including news, the drama department, technical crews, set designers, the natural history department and the costume department — created a unique environment. "Having so many people in the one building, I think it created a culture. It's a culture that is this broadcast that we are all proud of. We are proud that we're a public broadcaster," Hawkins said. "When you start disassembling a building like this, my fear is that you risk tearing at that fabric of that culture. I think it's the culture that many of us will miss." ¹⁶

The ABC produced television programs from the Gordon Street studios, which have had a lasting effect on a broad sector of Australian society and culture. The list of programs created at the studios crosses generations and communities and some, such as *Countdown*, had a lasting impact on the culture, music and taste of a whole generation and an enormous cohort of music, video, fashion and design practitioners in the 1970s and 80s. Those who went to the live *Countdown* shows, count them as some of the most memorable experiences of their youth. The front façade and closed courtyard of the Gordon Street studios was regularly shown in fan magazines and music news as one or more bands ran the gauntlet of teenage fans amassed outside the building as they went in to tape *Countdown* episodes.

To celebrate its 80th birthday, the ABC created a website called *80 Days That Changed Our Lives* to showcase audio visual treasures from the ABC's 80-year-old-archives. 80 events were documented from radio or television because they made an impact at the time. The public were then asked to vote on which days/events changed their lives the most. The response from the public sorted the events into order of priority and the debut of *Countdown* on TV in 1974, came in at Number 4, after September 11, the Whitlam Dismissal, and the Internet arriving. When the votes are analysed, it indicates that with females, it was actually rated as number 3 overall and with the 40+ age group it was rated as number 2 overall. Many Australians who grew up in the 1970s and 80s would agree with Simon Tatz:

*BC (before Countdown) we had little idea what was going on around Australia, let alone the USA or the UK, unless it was a hit and played on AM radio. Double Jay started life in the mid-70s as a Sydney based station and by the time it become Triple J and national, Countdown was in decline. So when Countdown aired in late 1974 and Molly Meldrum began his legendary "Humdrum" segment introducing us to new music and showing snippets of overseas video clips, this was more than ground-breaking. It was a cultural revolution.*¹⁷

Other series such as *Bellbird* (1967-1977) and *Sea Change* (1998-2000) had a lasting impact on a generation of Australians and are remembered as marking a particular time in Australian family life and home-based entertainment. Seachange is noted in the Australian National Dictionary as a noun directly related to the ABC TV series, *Sea Change* and follows up with seachange (verb) as a move from city to coastal living. *Sea Change* was and is still the only program produced by the ABC to win a Gold Logie for Most Popular Australian Program. (2000 and 2001) The ABC produced and created numerous telemovies, current affairs and natural history programs at Gordon Street, and two Logie Awards for Most Popular Entertainment Program attests to the popularity of *Kath and Kim* and *Spicks and Specks* produced and created at Gordon Street.

The ABC Gordon Street studios might also have social value for local residents of Elsternwick and Ripponlea but this has not been tested or canvassed during the course of this assessment. In looking at the community workshops held for the Elsternwick Structure Plan, there was limited comment about the values held by the

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ Simon Tatz, *The Drum* 2 January 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-14/tatz-countdown/5891852>

community for the site. However, given the context of the discussion/engagement, most of the comments might reflect fear of change or over-development occurring on the site rather than social value.



"Molly" Meldrum on the Countdown set



Bellbird production set



Shirley from the band Skyhooks, whose career benefitted from exposure in Countdown, at Studio 31. Source, ABC archives

Comparative buildings/sites:

The Bauhaus studios in Dessau, Germany – Walter Gropius circa 1925 . Described as the most influential building of the 20th Century it cemented in real form the idea of modernism. This building faced the road showing off its lightbox like qualities when illuminated at night.



ABC studios frontage from the north (1958-61), here it is possible to recognise the influence of the Dessau studios construction particularly the use of the flat cuboid shapes and the glazed wall floating above a plinth and intersecting with the more solid cuboid shapes.

Design

In our comparative analysis, it is not our intention to overstate the architectural link between one of the most influential buildings of the 20th century (the Bauhaus studios) and the ABC studios in Gordon Street, but it would be remiss not to recognise the influences generated by the Bauhaus design. The mission of Bauhaus was to provide a new, affordable, plain and utilitarian design that could be used by every kind of person and in every area. These ideas were not only brought back by many Australian architects who toured the continent in the post-war years but also through publications and books.

The design of the Gordon Street facility is functional and modern, its purpose was to provide a facility and its presentation was industrial. It features an early curtain wall with red spandrel glass and an arrangement of clean lines and rectangular shapes. The design is *International Style*, which was evident in Australia between 1940 and 1960. It was a direct response to the end of the Second World War and a new desire for functional, rational

architecture and a desire to make the world a better place through design.¹⁸ New buildings, even by Government departments began to reflect European concepts of modernism, such as the Russell Street telephone exchange (1948 - 1954) which was the first large building constructed in Melbourne post-World War Two.¹⁹

The influence of modernism started to become apparent in commercial and institutional architecture in Victoria, in the 1950s and the first sleek curtain-walled office buildings signalled the start of a new age of architecture. The Commonwealth Offices, which was the offices of the Commonwealth Department of Works, La Trobe Street, Melbourne (1956) was an International style building, with brick and spandrel glass and a recessed podium at ground level. Being designed by the same government office in the same year as the Gordon Street facility and also built by Clements Langford Pty Ltd, it is interesting to note the similarities in the materials and design of the two buildings. In a comparative analysis of modern architecture in Melbourne by the National Trust, they discuss the International style;

When curtain-walled office buildings first began to appear in central Melbourne from the early 1950s, some architects wholly embraced and exploited the new technology while others, almost if hedging their bets, combined curtain walling with more conventional masonry-based construction...The new telephone exchange at 376 Flinders Lane (Commonwealth Department of Works, 1956-7) was almost retardataire in its amalgamation of a stark cream brick facade, evocative of pre-war government architecture, with a slightly projecting curtain walled bay.²⁰

The Commonwealth Offices (1956), now demolished and the Batman Telephone Exchange (1956-7), still extant, at 376 Flinders Lane were both designed by the Commonwealth Department of Works. The two buildings plus the Gordon Street facility demonstrate a particular design intent by the Commonwealth architects and an experimentation with a new style, new materials, such as spandrel glass curtain walling and a willingness to apply this new design to different functions.



Commonwealth Offices 1956 onward (including Commonwealth Department of Works) La Trobe Street Melbourne since demolished. The first block completed was on Spring Street (LHS of image). This building design also has some similar

¹⁸ Apperly, Irving, Reynolds, 1989, A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture, Angus & Robertson, p. 214

¹⁹ Victorian Heritage Database, citation for Russell Street Telephone Exchange,

²⁰ Melbourne's Marvellous Modernism, A comparative analysis of Post-War Modern Architecture in Melbourne's CBD 1955-1975, September 2014. National Trust (Vic), p. 22

design elements to Gordon Street studios, with curtain walling with spandrel glass extended over a recessed podium area. Builder: Clements Langford.



The Russell Street Telephone Exchange building at 376-382 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Works and built by Clements Langford in 1956-7. National Archives Australia: B6295, 260C

Other television facilities

A comparison between Gordon Street and other television facilities around Australia highlight a number of functional and design similarities, most particularly with Gore Hill which is contemporaneous, and similar in the functional layout of spaces in particular. An architectural comparison can be made between ABC Ripponlea and ABC TV & Radio studios in Perth. The similarities in design are quite striking. These are now no longer used by the ABC but the front elevation to Adelaide Terrace has been retained.



ABC TV & Radio studios (1960) at Adelaide Terrace Perth. The horizontals and the cuboid shapes are more expressed in this design. Substantially altered to the rear. Source, Library of Western Australia



ABN2 Gore Hill 1956, Source www.abctvgorehill.com.au

The ABN2 studios at Gore Hill were of a different style and even more stark in design than Gordon Street. They have similarities in design to the telephone exchange in Melbourne and the Commonwealth Offices, but the use of curtain walling, albeit vertical rather than horizontal and masonry walls with a flat roof, indicate the same functional approach as shown at Gordon Street.

Many of the ABC TV studios in the capitals have been demolished in recent decades. ABC TV Brisbane at Toowong and the Sydney studios at Gore Hill have been demolished. The Perth building is extant but no longer used for television production. The SA studios which were built at Collinswood in 1959, were closed for production in 2014.

In 2008 a survey of Post- War heritage in Victoria statistically identified historically and architecturally important structures of which television services were identified as an important twentieth century theme. These sites occur in four locations; ABV2 Ripponlea, GLV10 Traralgon, GMV6 Shepparton and Channel 10 Forest Hill. Gordon Street was identified in that survey as historically and architecturally important as an early television studio, Victoria's first TV studio and one of the oldest television complexes in Australia²¹.

²¹ heritage ALLIANCE, Survey of Built Heritage in Victoria, Stage One Vol. 2 Citations, for Heritage Victoria, Melbourne 2008.



GLV10 Traralgon opened December 1961. Source, SLV



GMV 6 Shepparton opened December 1961 by architects John & Phyllis Murphy. (source Adam Dimech). Now WIN-News.



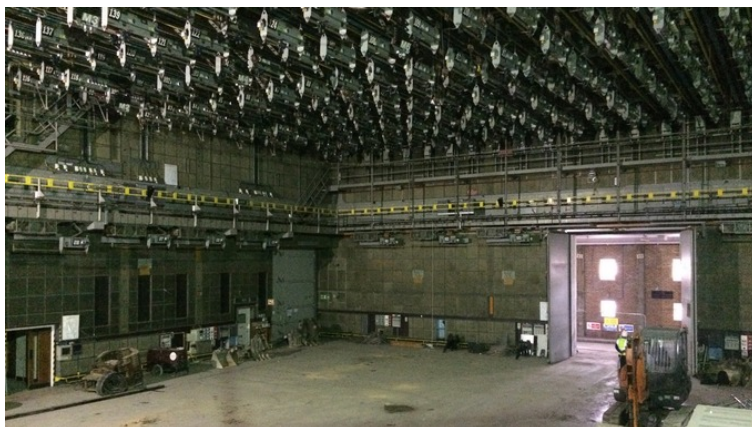
ATV 0/10 at Nunawading 1965 by architects Hassell, McConnell & Partners. The building provides a very clear functional layout and is the only other surviving metropolitan Television Station building. Note the forward landscape area on the right hand side which was also used for a helicopter landing area. ABV2 is more complex in its layout on a smaller tighter site. Source, www.tvtonight.com.au

Internationally, there are comparisons to be made with television studio and television facilities built in the period immediately prior to 1956. In particular, the influence which advice provided by the BBC had on the technical design of the facility and studios.

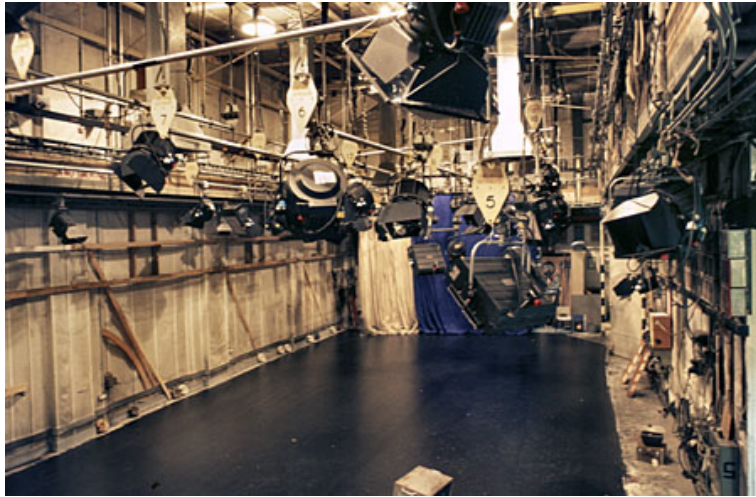
In 1949 the BBC had commissioned a massive, purpose built television complex, Television Centre at White City, West London. During 1956 the BBC lent experts to the ABC and it is most likely that the technical expertise of the BBC was crucial to the design of the Gordon Street facility. Images of the studio spaces (below) lend credence to the idea that there was a lot of technical exchange between the BBC and the ABC.



BBC Television Centre, White City, West London, prior to demolition and conversion into apartments. Source, www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk



Studio 8 at Television Centre prior to demolition in December 2015. Note the massed lighting bars at the ceiling and style of the soundproofing walls. Source <http://www.itv.com/news/london/2015-12-15/bbcs-iconic-television-centre-reduced-to-a-carcass/>



Studio A, Alexandra Palace, July 1981 on the last day of production. Studio A was used between 1936 and 1981.
Source, <http://www.itv.com/news/london/2015-12-15/bbcs-iconic-television-centre-reduced-to-a-carcass/>

Assessment:

The act of determining whether a place is of cultural heritage significance is one that is guided by the principles of *The Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (2013)* and demonstrated by eight criteria.

Criteria are a collection of principles, characteristics and categories used to help decide if a place has heritage value. Usually there are a number of criteria relevant to a heritage list, and one or more of these must be applied to a place being considered for listing. In addition to criteria, there is also a question of the threshold for heritage listing. The threshold is the level of heritage value that a place must demonstrate in order to be included in a particular heritage list. The heritage lists at each level differ in the threshold used to decide what places to include.

For example; Criterion A could be demonstrated at either a National, State or Local level, depending on why the place is historically important and the extent to which the place meets the criteria. A finding of 'outstanding importance to the Nation' would lead to an assessment of National Heritage values.

Each list has its own criteria; the National Heritage List criteria, the Victorian Heritage Register criteria and the DELWP Heritage Overlay criteria. Each of these criteria relate to different lists administered by different government agencies under different Acts.

As the property is owned by the Commonwealth, the site could also be assessed against the Commonwealth Heritage List criteria. For the purposes of this report the primary criteria to be used for the assessment of cultural heritage values, will be the following HERCON criteria taken from the DELWP Planning Practice Note 1:

Criterion A: Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

Criterion B: Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

Criterion C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).

Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

Different levels of significance will be identified in the assessment and the statement of significance.

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the National, State and Local level as a place associated with public broadcasting by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation since 1956. The site is the earliest ABC television studio in Australia. The site reflects technological developments in television from the nascent technology of 16mm film production to telecine, videotape, colour broadcasting and then digital broadcasting, from 1956 until 2017. The studios are associated with a medium which had far-reaching effects on Australian culture, ideas, identity and society from 1956 until 2017.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the National, State and Local level as a place associated with influential television programming over a broad range of subjects including natural history, drama, comedy, news and current affairs, but particularly for culturally influential drama productions such as *Bellbird* and *Sea Change* and live-audience music productions such as *Countdown*, which greatly influenced an entire generation of Australian youth in the 1970s and 1980s.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the State and Local level as the site of the first ABC television broadcast in Victoria, commencing with the broadcasting of the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956. The site was the first purpose-built television studio in Victoria and is the earliest extant television studio in Victoria.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the Local level as a place associated with Rippon Lea Estate and Louisa Jones the last owner of the Estate, who fought to keep more of the Estate from being compulsorily acquired by the ABC in the 1960s. This contributed to the development of a nascent heritage conservation and advocacy movement and is associated with the beginnings of the National Trust in Victoria.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the Local level as one of the few industrial buildings in the City of Glen Eira with an aesthetic presence, and is a rare, early example of a Post-War International style building featuring exterior curtain walling.

The ABC Gordon Street studios are of cultural significance at the National, State and Local level as a place with significance to those who worked in the building between 1956 and 2017. This includes both ABC staff as well as industry professionals who worked in the building on different productions. The site is also significant for its association with the development of a nascent entertainment and broadcasting industry, which went on to develop Victorian talent in music, film, video, journalism, acting, direction, design and production and has directly contributed to the development and dissemination of a distinctive Australian culture through the medium of film and television.

How is it significant?

The ABC studios located at 8 Gordon Street Elsternwick are significant at National, State and Local level for historical, architectural, cultural, social and technological reasons.

Why is it significant?

Criterion A: Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

- Association with the beginnings of television in Australia, with public broadcasting by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation since 1956 and one of the earliest ABC television studios in Australia. (Commonwealth)
- Association with a medium which had far-reaching effects on Australian, culture, ideas, identity and society in the late twentieth century. (National)
- First purpose built television facility and the site of the first public television broadcast in Victoria. (State)
- Association with the first Olympic Games held in Australia (Melbourne 1956). (State)
- Association with the development of a heritage conservation and advocacy movement and the nascent National Trust in Victoria. (Local)
- Association with Rippon Lea Estate and the Jones family. (Local)

Criterion B: Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

- Earliest extant public broadcasting studio in Australia. (National)
- Last remaining twentieth century ABC television studio in Victoria. (State)
- One of only a few industrial buildings in City of Glen Eira with an aesthetic presence. (Local)
- Rare Post-War International style building in Glen Eira. (Local)

Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

- Creation of the building in the International modernist style, a style in vogue within the Commonwealth Public Works Department at the time of its construction and one of the few buildings in the City of Glen Eira in this style and at a substantially large scale. (Local)

Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

- Demonstrates the development of technological design and innovation in the nascent television industry of the 1950s and the influence of overseas experts on Australian technicians, designers and engineers. (National)
- Demonstrates changing technology in television production and broadcasting from film to video to digital broadcasting, between 1956 until 2017. (National)

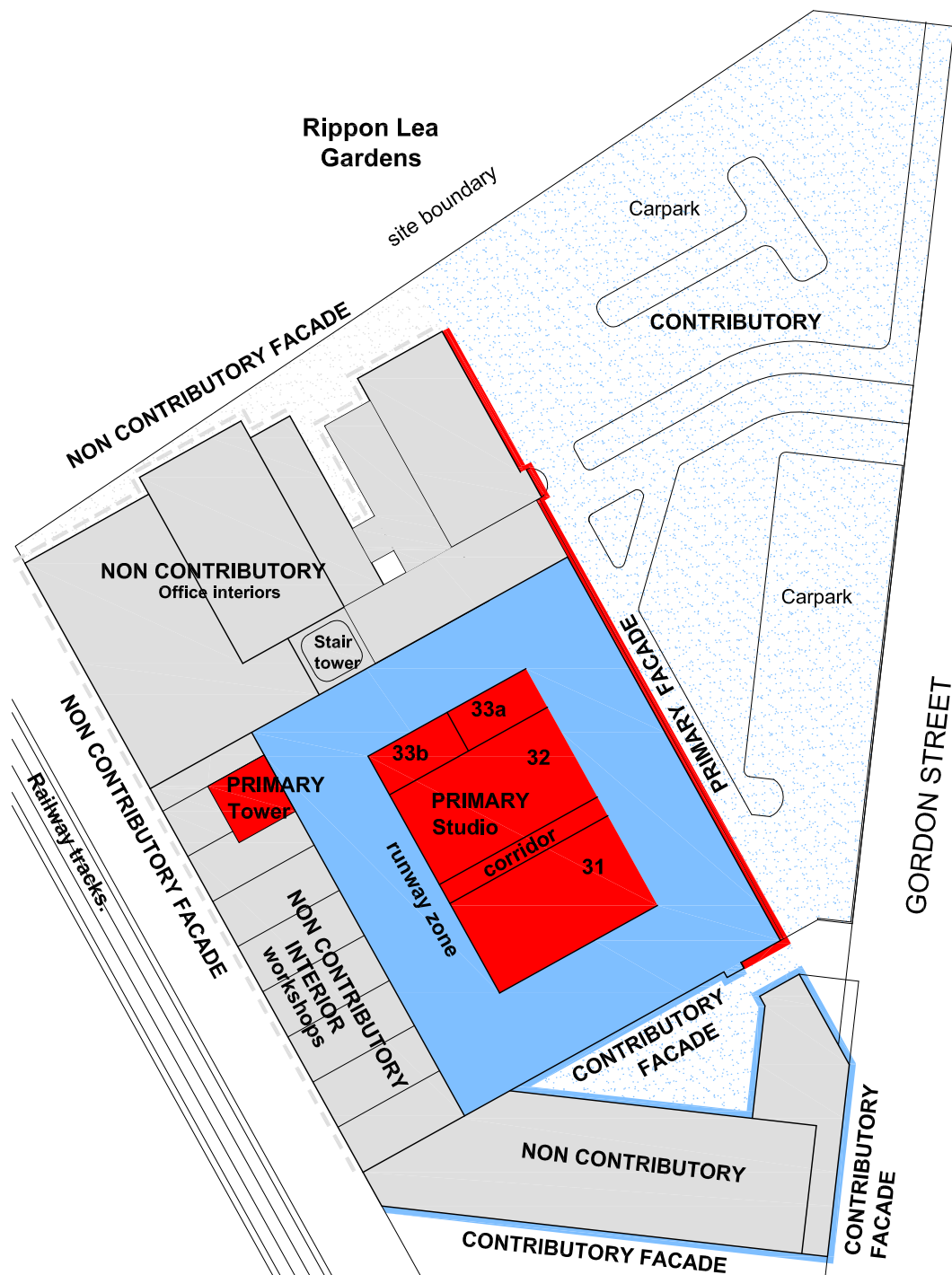
Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

- Special association with generations of Australians who were influenced by ABC Television programmes and in particular the series *Bellbird*, *Countdown*, and *Sea Change*, current affairs and news programmes and the enormous cultural influence these programmes have had on Australian society. (State)
- Special association with staff of the ABC who worked in the building. (Local)

Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

- Special association with the development of a nascent entertainment and broadcasting industry, which went on to develop Victorian talent in music, film, video, journalism, acting, direction, design and production and has directly contributed to the development and dissemination of a distinctive Australian culture. (National and State)

Areas of significance:



PRIMARY (red)



CONTRIBUTORY (blue)

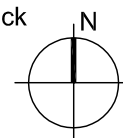


NON CONTRIBUTORY (grey)



ABC Studios
8 Gordon Street, Elsternwick
SITE SIGNIFICANCE

SCALE: Not to Scale
DATE: May 2018
JOB: 2018-05
heritage ALLIANCE Tel: 03 9328 5133
41 COBDEN STREET NORTH MELBOURNE



A-01

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE DIAGRAM A-01

The drawing above shows the areas of the site which are considered to be of primary, contributory and non-contributory significance in light of the statement of significance above.

This grading of significance is a preliminary guide to the management of values. It is not an assessment of the relative values of the fabric of the site. A conservation management plan should be undertaken by the owner/manager to determine better how to manage and conserve values and fabric prior to change, development or adaptation of the site.

Three levels of significance have been assigned to the various components of the place; primary, contributory and non-contributory. These are broadly defined as:

1. Elements of **primary significance** are those which contribute in a fundamental way to an understanding of the cultural significance of the place and must be retained, maintained and then restored as finance permits.
2. Elements and areas of **contributory significance** are those which were originally of a secondary or supportive nature in the understanding of the place, or may have been considerably altered or associated with a phase of development which is of lesser importance. These elements and areas must be retained and restored where possible and should only have minor changes made to them.
3. Elements and areas of **non-contributory significance** are those which had functions which were originally of a supportive or perfunctory nature and may have been altered or from a less significant phase of development of the place. These elements may be maintained, or removed and replaced provided that the replacement work does not negatively affect the overall significance of the place.

Primary significance:

- The facade and front elevation of Stage 2 (1958) and Stage 3 (1961).
The important elements are the spandrel glass curtain walling, the masonry brickwork and the recessed podium, the flat roof, projecting masonry and the overall forming of flat areas of glazing intersecting with solid cuboid forms, both horizontal and vertical.
- The broadcasting tower (1956) and the elements that illustrate how broadcasting occurred.
- The television studios 31, 32, 33A and 33B (1958)
The important elements of the studios are the soundproofing, the design of lighting and electrical, the relationship between the studio floor and the master control rooms above, the relationship between the scenery runway and all the studios. Along with this are the technical factors of the construction itself which illustrates the relationship between filming, editing, production and broadcast via the tower.

Contributory Significance:

- The scenery runway.
- The service areas surrounding the studios which houses makeup, wardrobe, dressing rooms, toilets and green room and technical crew spaces with an intervening corridor.
- The facades of Stage 1 (1956) facing the courtyard of the engineering workshops and the external facades of the former OB garage, and workshops, to Gordon Street and adjoining property.
- The open space provided by the current carpark along Gordon Street and trees older than 50 years. Car parking infrastructure (fencing, kerbing, asphaltting, booms etc) is of no significance. This area

should maintain a landscaped setback in which to view the full façade of stage 1 and stage 3 from Gordon Street and the Rippon Lea boundary.

Non-contributory Significance:

- Stage 3 (1961) interior.
- Stage 4 (1965) all areas.
- Saw-tooth scenery workshop along the railway line.
- OB garage and workshop areas of Stage 1(1956) excepting the facades.

Management Issues

Should change, adaptation or reuse of the site be planned, a Conservation Management Plan should be commissioned by the site owner. This would determine in greater detail, where and how some areas of the site would or would not, be developed in the future.

END OF REPORT

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