

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Co. Offices & Car Shed (former)

**Citation No:**  
2451

**Other names:** -

**Map TBA**



**Address:** 16 Brighton Road, Balaclava

**Heritage Precinct:** None

**Category:** Tramway: Offices, car shed

**Heritage Overlay:** **HO7**

**Style:** Victorian, Federation/Edwardian

**Graded as:** Significant

**Constructed:** 1888, 1918

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Designer:** Unknown

**Amendment:** TBA

**Comment:** New citation

---

## Significance

### *What is significant?*

The former Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Co. (MT&OC) offices and cable tram car shed constructed in 1888 with additions in 1918 at 16 Brighton Road, Balaclava is significant. The contributory features are the two-storey office building, and the remnant section of the car sheds, including the interior, which retains large timber trusses and may contain archaeological remains under the floor.

Alterations and additions made after 1945 are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

The former Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Co. offices and cable tram car shed at 16 Brighton Road, Balaclava are of local historic and representative significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

The MT&OC offices and cable tram car shed are historically significant as a component of Melbourne's cable tramway system. This complex was constructed to serve the first MT&OC cable tram established in 1888 and represents the beginning of the cable and, later, electric tram network in Melbourne which played an important role in facilitating the suburban development of the city in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Criterion A)

The MT&OC offices and cable tram car shed are significant for the potential to provide further information on cable tram operations, as archaeological evidence such as tracks, or cable tunnels may survive under the floor of the former car shed. (Criterion C)

The MT&OC offices and cable tram car shed are of representative significance as a complex that combines the functions of cable tram storage, and offices used by staff employed in the operation and maintenance of the network. (Criterion D)

The MT&OC offices and cable tram car shed is significant for its association with the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company, which played an important role in the development of Melbourne's tramway and public transport network and for the Tramways Board, established in 1917. It is associated with the first cable tram route established by the MT&OC in 1888, and in 1917 became part of the network taken over by the Tramways Board, which constructed additions to the building in 1918. (Criterion H)

---

## Thematic context

### Victoria's framework of historical themes

3. Connecting Victorians by transport and communications: 3.4 Linking Victorians by road in the twentieth century, 3.5 Travelling by tram

### Port Phillip thematic environmental history

4. Transport: 4.4 Railway and tramway links

---

## History

### Cable trams in Melbourne

The Melbourne Omnibus Company was established in 1869 by Francis Boardman Clapp, William McCulloch, and Henry Hoyt. It initially operated 11 horse-drawn buses from Flinders Street and Spencer Street stations via Bourke Street to Fitzroy. The three-penny fare was cheaper than a cab ride and so business expanded with services to Richmond, Carlton, and North Melbourne. With the potential recognised for other traction forms, the company was reformed as the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Co Ltd (MT&OC) in 1877. The MT&OC extended its operations to other suburbs and by 1882 it had 470 employees and 1600 horses and 178 horse buses running on fifteen routes (Vines 2012:37-8).

The MT&OC introduced the cable operated tram system to Melbourne: after years of lobbying by the MT&OC the Victorian colonial government passed the *Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Act* in 1883 citing the cable trams '... would be of great public and local advantage' (Vines 2012:41).

The first line to be completed was the Spencer Street-Richmond line, along Flinders Street, Wellington Parade and Bridge Road to the Hawthorn Bridge. It opened on 11 November 1885 and by 1891 the system grew to about 75 km of double track and 1200 cars and trailers, on 17 routes, which radiated from the centre of Melbourne to what are now inner and middle suburbs. Twelve engine houses and about sixteen tram barns were erected at key locations to power and store the cable cars. It was one of, if not the largest cable car systems in the world, comparable with the San Francisco and Chicago cable car networks (Vines 2012:42).

In Port Phillip, the first cable tram route along Swanston Street, St Kilda Road and Brighton Road between Queensberry Street, Carlton and Milton Street, Elwood opened on 11 October 1888. Two weeks later, a second route opened, running via St Kilda Road, Domain and Toorak roads, and Chapel Street to Carlisle Street. This was followed in 1890 by the route to South Melbourne (via Clarendon, Park, Montague and Victoria streets), which opened on 17 June and the Port Melbourne service via City Road and Bay Street. Both services crossed the Yarra on the new Queens Bridge, built in 1889. The last service established by the MT&OC was the Windsor to St Kilda Esplanade service via Wellington and Fitzroy streets, The Esplanade to the terminus in Acland Street, which opened on 17 October 1891 (Vines 2012).

---

The Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company operated the system from 1885 to 1916, when the newly formed Tramways Board took it over for the Victorian Government. On the expiry of its lease on 30 June 1916, the MT&OC surrendered its authority to operate the city's cable network and the Royal Park horse tramway to the Tramways Board, the forerunner of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB), which was formed in 1919. The MT&OC ceased to function as a passenger carrier from 1 July 1916 and was ultimately de-registered in 1922. From the 1920s the MMTB progressively converted the cable tram lines to electric traction or bus operation with the last Melbourne cable tram operating on 26 October 1940 (Vines 2012:42).

## MT&OC offices and car shed

The MT&OC built a car shed and administrative offices on this site in 1888 to serve their first cable tram route, which opened on 11 October on that year. It was listed in the St Kilda rate books as 'Tram sheds Bk & Iron' with a Net Annual Value of £550. The complex is shown on the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan of this area, prepared in 1898 (Figure 1).

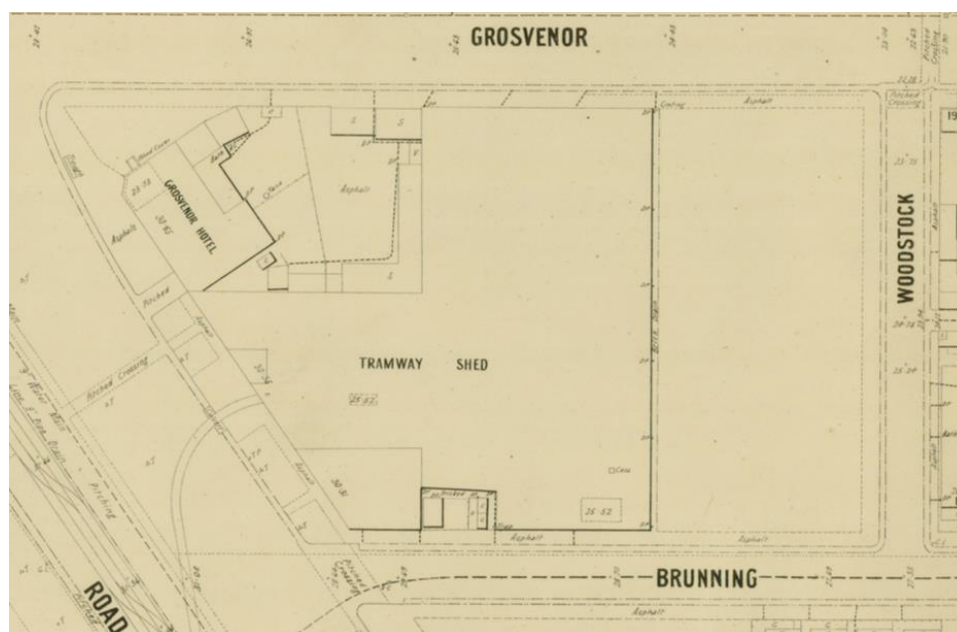


Figure 1: Extract of MMBW Detail Plan 1440 showing the cable tram shed complex in 1898

By 1917 the operation of the Brighton Road cable tram had been taken over by the Tramways Board and in 1918 the Board added a second floor to office building. Designed by the Board architect, Francis Barlow, this provided additional accommodation for the drivers including lockers and cloak rooms (Figure 2) (BP).

Between late 1925 and January 1926 the MMTB progressively converted the Brighton Road route to electric traction, and then in August 1926 extended the newly electrified route along Brighton Road to Glen Huntly Road where it connected with electric tramway to Carnegie. The Prahran & Malvern Tramways Trust had established the first section of the Carnegie route in 1913, from Elsternwick to Grange Road, and in December 1926 the MMTB extended it to the present terminus at Koornang Road (Yarra Trams).

Consequently, the cable tram car shed was no longer required, as the electric trams were to be stored at new depots established by the MMTB at Glen Huntly or South Melbourne. By 1930 part of the building was occupied by Tiger Steel & Welding Works Pty Ltd, while the Tramway Co. was still listed. However, by 1940 the only occupant was H. Fleming, a motor engineer (SM).

The complex was still extant in 1970 (Figure 3). However, in the early 1990s a substantial section of the car sheds was demolished to make way for a social housing development for older persons. The remaining section of the car shed, and the administrative office was acquired by the owners of the Grosvenor Hotel and adapted to become an extension of the dining and lounge areas and a drive through bottle shop.



Figure 2: Extract of 1918 building plans showing the front elevation to Brighton Road (Source: Port Phillip building file)



Figure 3: 1970 aerial photograph (Source: St Kilda Historical Society collection: 'Department of Crown Lands & Survey. Melbourne 1970 Project. Run 42E. 22.1.70')

## References

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan 1440, dated 1898

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) Version 1, July 2020

St Kilda building permit (BP): 3741, 31 October 1918 (Additions to office)

St Kilda rate books (RB): November 1888 (no. in rate 3392); 1891 (3591)

Sands & McDougall Directory (SM) 1925, 1930, 1935, 1940

Vines, Gary, *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*, 2012

Yarra Trams, 'Our history: Tramway milestones; Between the wars' <http://www.yarratrams.com.au/about-us/our-history/tramway-milestones/between-the-wars/> [viewed 25 April 2016]



---

## Description

The former MT&OC offices and car sheds have been incorporated into the Grosvenor Hotel complex, and the original section of the hotel is situated at 10 Brighton Road (see Citation 301). This description relates only to the former MT&OC offices and car sheds at 16 Brighton Road as shown in Figure 4.

The former administrative office is a two-storey corner Federation/Edwardian building, which is constructed of red brick with cement dressings and has a hipped tile roof concealed by a solid parapet with a deep cornice below. There is another cornice between ground and first floor. The symmetrical façade to Brighton Road is divided into three bays by pilasters. The central pilasters extend through the parapet to support the central pediment, which sits above a recessed panel. The windows to the first floor (covered over or removed) have triangular lintels and the rendered chimneys have a string course and capping. The ground floor openings have all been changed or enlarged.

The surviving section of the former car shed wraps around the office building. It has brick walls and wide hipped roofs supported internally by large timber trusses. The façade elevations have been modified and new openings created. The floor is concrete, and remains of tram tracks or cable tunnels may survive beneath (Vines, 2012:182).



Figure 4: Aerial, showing extent of former MT&OC offices and car sheds (Map source: Nearmaps.com)

---

## Comparative analysis

This is one of four surviving heritage places associated with the development of the cable tram network in Port Phillip. The others are:

- Former MT&OC Cable Tram Engine House, 105 Wellington Street, St Kilda (Individual HO360, Citation 2266). Erected in 1891, this was remodelled during the interwar period when it was converted to a motor garage.
- Former MT&OC Cable Tram Engine House, 357-361 City Road, South Melbourne (Significant within HO4 South Melbourne City Road Industrial precinct, Citation 1157). Erected c.1890 to service the Port Melbourne and South Melbourne routes, this building was significantly damaged by fire c.1995 and only the ornate façade remains.
- Former MT&OC Office, 176-178 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park (Significant within HO442 Albert Park Residential precinct). Built in 1890, the MMTB added a second storey in 1918, and in 1940 the building was converted into shops with flats above.

Buildings associated with the development of the cable tram network in Port Phillip that have been demolished include the car sheds in Port Melbourne (formerly at 65 Beach Street), and two in St Kilda (92-98 Chapel Street, and 95-111 Acland Street).

The former office building compares well with the other surviving MT&OC office, which was similarly extended by the MMTB in 1918, before being significantly altered in 1940 when it was converted to shops and flats. By comparison, the exterior of the Balaclava offices remains largely intact to the 1918 additions.

While the former car shed has been significantly altered, and partly demolished, it is nonetheless significant as the only surviving car shed in Port Phillip and the historic use can be interpreted by its association with the office building. Internally, the large timber trusses are a significant feature and provide evidence of the large spans required to provide clear and unencumbered space for the storage of the cable trams.

The *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*, prepared by Gary Vines in 2012 identified the offices and car shed as being of potential State significance.

---

## Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria. The analysis of significance has considered the assessment of State significance by Vines (2012).

---

## Recommendations

Transfer from HO7 to an individual heritage overlay with internal controls to apply only to the timber trusses within the former car shed.

---

## Primary source

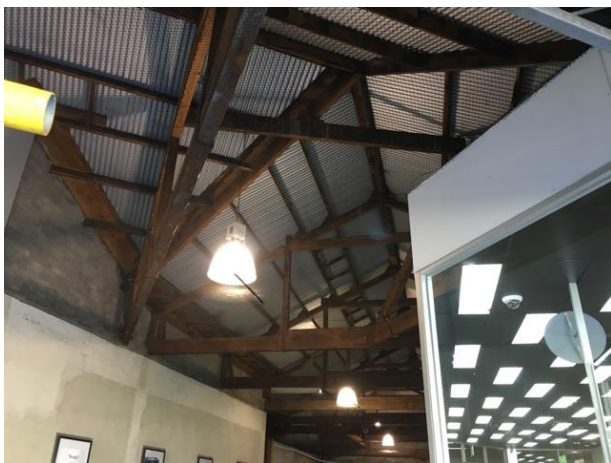
City of Port Phillip, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations*, 2022

## Other studies

Vines, Gary, *Melbourne Metropolitan Tramway Heritage Study*, 2012

---

## Other images



Internal roof trusses within former car shed