

HISTORY NEWS

ISSUE.349 AUGUST 2020



General Motors Holden Social Centre mural

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Heritage Report: RHSV Protests Minister's Short-Circuiting Heritage Listing of GMH Site

GMH Administrative Block, Fishermans Bend (Photo courtesy National Trust of Australia [Victoria])

On 20 November 2019, the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria, recommended that the iconic General Motors Holden site at Fishermans Bend be listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. The Heritage Council began moves to consider registration. The National Trust and the RHSV made strong submissions supporting registration.

In February, however, Planning Minister Richard Wynne called in the nomination, 'sidelining' the heritage process, as Chloe Booker recently wrote in *The Age*. Our fear is not that the Minister might block the nomination, but rather that he is short-circuiting the heritage and planning processes to facilitate development by cutting out much of the historic fabric before it is registered.

We're talking about the site where the first Holden was launched by then Prime Minister Chifley, the site that, more than any other in Victoria if not Australia, embodies the post-war recovery and the new society of suburbs and motor cars. It symbolises Melbourne's significance at the front line of the new trend toward Australian manufacturing.

The key historic parts of the complex are still intact, including the Administration Building, Parts Building and the elegant Social Centre, with its original murals still in place, where Chifley unveiled the first Holden.

Development Victoria purchased the site in 2017, announcing that 'this vacant industrial site will be redeveloped as a centre of innovation for advanced

manufacturing, engineering and design'. The purchase was in partnership with the University of Melbourne, which plans a 'new world-class university engineering campus' for the site.

That is a great idea. What better reuse could there be for this site than an engineering campus and manufacturing centre? The problem is that the Ministry is already planning the development with little regard for the heritage. The heritage listing will then be tailored to suit the development.

The first plans were submitted to Melbourne City Council at the beginning of July 2020. They confirmed our fears. Council officers found the plans 'overwhelmed' the heritage elements. Building heights up to 141 metres were



Prime Minister Ben Chifley launches the Holden 48-215, 29 November 1948 (National Archives of Australia: A1200, L84254)



GMH, Fishermans Bend, Social Centre

proposed in an area where 80 metres was to be the maximum, leading to 'excessive' bulk and buildings 'not responsive to the heritage context'. The plans were 'inconsistent' about the proposed extent of demolition.

The plans were problematic in planning as well as heritage terms. Officers noted a poor 'balance between built form and public realm,' and 'poorly articulated public realm provision, with what appears to be limited open spaces within the site, and limited opportunity for tree plantings'. Above all, there is good reason to fear loss of most of the heritage fabric, with much of it reduced to facades covering bulky box architecture.

By allowing the developer to dictate the plan first, the Minister risks the destruction of one of our most significant industrial heritage sites and the creation of a high-rise slum where there is potential for a great future campus worthy of the heritage around it.

We have written to the Hon. Richard Wynne, MP, Minister for Planning,

protesting at this short-circuiting of process, and to Professor Duncan Maskell, Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne, asking the University to reconsider its plans in the light of the need to make better use of the heritage fabric in the new campus.

The significance of the GMH site for Melbourne and indeed for our idea of Australia cannot be overstated. The Minister should do the right thing. He should circulate the Heritage Council report for public comment, consider submissions, and register this site. Only then should planning the new engineering campus proceed.

For further information:

GMH <https://bit.ly/3eGEuLb>

National Trust <https://bit.ly/2ZJB46b>

If you share our concerns, write to the Minister today.

Charles Sowerwine,
Chair, Heritage Committee.

What's On AT RHSV

Book Club with Robyn Annear. Nothing New.

August 10
5:30pm - 7:00pm

Upholders,
shoddy, Petticoat
Lane, frippers
- Nothing New



opens up a wonderful world that, despite our love-affair with op-shops, is all but hidden from us in today's world of consumerism and obsolescence. Join the wonderful Robyn Annear when she talks about *Nothing New*, her latest book, which chronicles the history of second-hand trade across the world and down the ages 'Jesus' clothes would have been divided up among the soldiers guarding the crosses as their perquisite or perk as we'd say today'. We are asking those that join bookclub to bring their own favourite story of an op-shop find or hand-me-down.

Zoom Cataloguing Clinic

August 13
11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Calling all historical societies across Victoria. Our inaugural clinic was very well attended with people zooming in from across Victoria and Darwin. The clinics will be held monthly and they are a relaxed forum in which to raise your queries about any aspect of cataloguing. They are managed and led by Jillian Hiscock, our RHSV Collections Manager. We will be having guest speakers at future clinics and if you have an issue which you'd like discussed you can always email the details to Jillian before the event: collections@historyvictoria.org.au

ZOOM, Join from anywhere. Information to access these events using Zoom, is available on the RHSV website.