

FORMER SHELL NEWPORT TERMINAL (NORTH GROUP)

Address	39-81 Burleigh Street, Spotswood
Significance	Local
Construction Date	Buildings One (1936-39), Two, Three and Four (early-to-mid 1950s)
Period	Interwar and postwar
Date Inspected	Early 2021



Building One



Building Two (Trades Building)



Building Three (Warehouse)



Building Four (Motor Repair Shop)

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)* at 39-81 Burleigh Street, Spotswood, consists of four significant industrial buildings constructed in the late interwar and postwar periods for the Shell Company of Australia (known as British Imperial Oil Company until 1927). This development occurred as part of the expansion of Shell's regionally important Newport Terminal, established in 1916 on the south side of Burleigh Street (HO47 and HO48). The building's original uses are believed to be associated with the bulk distribution of petroleum products and servicing of Shell's fleet of motorised tankers. Ownership of the terminal complex passed from Shell to Viva Energy Australia in 2014.

The significant buildings and their features/elements are:

- Building One (1936-39) – gabled roof and short-length corrugated metal sheeting, remnant monitor, walls of red brick, unpainted cement-rendered plinth, pilasters, and rowlock coping.

- Building Two, *Trades Hall* (1945-54) – gabled roof and corrugated asbestos-cement sheeting, steel-framed clerestory windows, walls of short-sheeted corrugated metal sheeting, steel-framed fixed/hopper windows, and sliding vehicular door (north elevation).
- Building Three, *Warehouse* (1945-54) – gabled roof and corrugated asbestos-cement sheeting, steel-framed clerestory windows, walls of short-sheeted corrugated metal sheeting, concrete slab/plinth, steel-framed fixed/hopper windows, and double sliding vehicular doors (east elevation).
- Building Four, *Motor Repair Shop* (1945-54) – L-shaped form, gabled roofs, steel-framed clerestory windows, walls of short-sheeted corrugated metal sheeting and exposed red brick, steel-framed fixed/hopper windows, and original sliding vehicular doors.

Other buildings and elements at the place are not significant.

How is it Significant?

The *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)* is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)* illustrates the continued large-scale development of the oil industry in Spotswood during the late interwar and postwar years. Shell's progressive expansion of its important terminal north of Burleigh Street in the late 1930s and early-to-mid 1950s was stimulated by marked increases in the market demand for petroleum products in Australia and their commercial success as a nationally important company. These buildings – especially when viewed in conjunction with the balance of the Newport Terminal and tank farm south of Burleigh Street – also reflects the sheer scale of Shell's bulk storage and distribution operations in Spotswood, which saw it function as a major employer and marker of local pride. This view generally overrode lingering concerns about industrial pollution and the proximity of operations to residences. There remains research potential to more closely tie the distinct forms of the four buildings to technological shifts and advances in fuel storage and dispersal. Their scale and setup likely reflect the need to cater to increasingly voluminous modern tanker trucks. More broadly, the place's past and ongoing heavy industrial presentation has long defined this part of Spotswood, characterising it as a robust industrial landscape. (Criterion A)

Aesthetically, the four specified buildings at the *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)* present as a group of distinctive, purpose-engineered examples of industrial architecture. The original form of the interwar period, red brick Building One remains readily interpretable, despite some fabric loss. Its severe classicism is now rare in the area and attests to a contemporary expectation about 'front of site' industrial design. Buildings Two, Three and Four are remarkably intact. Their size and bold functional utility are notable and encapsulate the postwar emphasis on industrial efficiency, light, ventilation and durability. This apparent simplicity illustrates a design/engineering ideal, not a minimal effort. In particular, the monumental presence of Building Three, underlaid by its volume, height and expressed strength, is striking. The visual impact of these postwar buildings is heightened by the texture and patina of their corrugated wall surfaces, which exhibit a uniform pattern of short sheets and head nail fixings. Other distinctive elements, such as steel-framed openings, clerestories, hopper windows, and sliding vehicular doors, also contribute to their modern industrial aesthetic. (Criterion E)

Description

The *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)* is situated within the industrial landscape of southern Spotswood, between the Williamstown Railway Line and the *Birrarung/Yarra* River. Its considerable rectangular and generally flat allotment is bounded by Craig (north), Burleigh (south), Ramsay (west), and Drake (east) streets. Basalt kerbing and guttering are evident in Ramsay Street, while Drake Street is an unpaved road surfaced with gravel.¹ Craig Street Park occupies the northern top of the subject block. Below Burleigh Road, to the south of the subject place, is the earlier part of Shell's Newport Terminal (former), which is listed as the *Shell Oil Complex* (HO47) and *Six Riveted Oil Tanks* (HO48). At the time of assessment, the site operates as part of the Viva Energy Australia Newport Terminal.

The subject place comprises several industrial and administrative buildings, a storage tank, areas of concrete and bitumen hardstand, internal roads, tree plantings, an above-ground pipe system and gantries, and woven wire fencing; however, only those buildings identified on the following map are examined in depth as part of this assessment.

¹ Craig, Ramsay, and Burleigh streets are bitumen thoroughfares with contemporary concrete kerbing and guttering (except for Ramsay Street).



Aerial photograph of the *Shell Oil Complex (North Group)*, facing east
 Building 1 (shaded red); Building 2 (shaded yellow); Building 3 (shaded blue); and Building 4 (shaded purple)
 (Source: Nearmap, January 2019)

Building One (1936-39) demarcates the southeast corner of the *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)*. Initially, the gabled roof with a central monitor extended the length of the structure, but now only survives to the small section back from Burleigh Street. The monitor and internal plane have been removed from the rest of the roof, seemingly along with the western and northern walls, although the former may always have been open. The monitor has a curved profile with clerestory windows, which are now sheeted over. Cladding is short length corrugated metal sheeting, which is likely original or early fabric.

Facing Burleigh Street, at a small setback, is Building One's red brick gabled wall. Bricks are laid in Flemish bond with a central triangular pediment and rowlock coping apparent. Pilasters are present at the centre and to the corners. This arrangement extends along the Drake Street elevation, with regular pilasters dividing the long wall into fifteen bays. This east elevation has retained its unpainted cement rendered plinth.

Although reduced due to alterations, Building One's design exhibits the application of the Stripped Classical idiom on a functional building via its stark symmetry and simplified but recognisable classical motifs. More elaborate renditions of this spartan classicism in the area are the *Victorian Railways Stores Branch* (HO185) and *Spotswood Railway Workshops* (HO200).²



Building One viewed from Burleigh Street



Building One viewed from Drake Street

² *Victorian Railways Stores Branch Complex and Trees*, McLister Street, Spotswood (Ho185); and *Spotswood Railway Workshops Complex (former)*, 561-569 Melbourne Road, Spotswood (HO200) – both designed by the Victorian Railways chief architect, James W. Fawcett, 1924-27.

Building Two (1945-54) is a sizable single-storey shed sited lengthways towards the middle of the *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)*. Because of its position, it has a lesser prominence from the public realm. The form of Building Two is defined by its six gable-roofed bays, each of which is surmounted by a broad steel-framed clerestory window (south-facing). The openings of the latter are divided into narrow vertical windows by muntins/vertical glazing bars. The roof appears to be clad in corrugated asbestos-cement sheeting.

The walls of Building Two are of short-length corrugated metal sheeting, which is likely original or early. The north elevation appears to have been re-clad and has double sliding doors to its centre. Other openings include large banks of multipaned steel-framed windows (hoppers and fixed panes) and, likely, later addition pedestrian and vehicular doors.



Building Two, viewed from Ramsay Street with its north elevation left of the frame

At the north end of the block, perpendicular to Ramsay Street, is the two-storey **Building Three** (1945-54). This mammoth industrial shed is comprised of three gable-roofed bays, each with a long clerestory window that runs the near length of the southern roof planes. The characteristics of the clerestory are the same as at Building Two (steel-framed, muntins or vertical glazing bars, south-facing). The roof is also likely clad in corrugated asbestos-cement sheeting with walls of original or early short-length corrugated metal sheeting. A concrete slab/plinth is visible.

In the centre of the short east elevation is a cavernous double entry. The long elevations (north and south) are punctured by an upper and lower bank of multipaned, steel-framed windows (hoppers and fixed) with a range of other ground floor openings. There are no other openings in the short east elevation, which bestows an impressive, corrugated metal expanse upon Ramsay Street.



Building Three – south-east part from Drake Street, note extended clerestory windows with muntins/vertical glazing bars



Building Three, north elevation



Building Three, west elevation from Ramsay Street



Building Three, close-up of east elevation cladding, note concrete slab/plinth and prominent header nails



Building Three, standard window unit (four by five) with central pivoting window

Building Four (1945-54) is a substantial structure situated towards the southeast corner of the *Shell Oil Complex (North Group)*. It has a distinctive 'L'-shape form, consisting of a broad gable-roofed bay parallel to Ramsay Street with a pair of gabled bays at right angles. The same clerestory windows as at buildings Two and Three are apparent (steel-framed, vertical divisions) but have been reclad in Colorbond steel.

The west elevation of Building Four is formed by a long red-brick wall in a stretcher bond with raked joints. A course of headers hints at a parapet. It is characterised by a band of big multipaned (four by five) steel-framed windows (hoppers and fixed), divided by brick mullions. The windows display wire glass (fire resistance, shatterproof). Sills are battened headers.

Other elevations are clad in short-sheeted corrugated metal sheeting with an array of small to double width openings (contemporary roller doors). The east (short) elevation is unpunctured.



View to the southeast corner of Building Four from Ramsay Street

The framing utilised at buildings Two, Three and Four to achieve their impressive spans could be steel. This framing, along with trussed-roof systems, may – upon closer examination – be assessed as contributing to, or be integral, the significance of these buildings.

The extensive employment of mild steel sheeting (corrugated to increase its rigidity, galvanised to prevent oxidation) for walls and fibre-cement cladding for roofing at the place was ubiquitous for industrial sites by the postwar years; although, enduring original/early urban examples – differentiated by sheet length and the depth of groove – are less common. Both types of cladding were favoured for their relatively low cost, ease and speed of installation, and fire-resistant qualities. Until the health dangers of asbestos dust became public knowledge in the 1970s, 'fibro' also had associations with modernity as an 'efficient' product.

Similarly, steel-framed windows were popular in industrial settings for their non-combustibility and slimmer framing members, which admitted more light.

History

Context

The suburb of Spotswood covers the unceded Country of the Yalukit-Willam people of the Kulin nation, whose descents today belong to part of the world's oldest living culture and maintain an ongoing cultural connection to the area. From the late 1830s, this low-lying, flat, riverside environment was alienated for agricultural uses. Active amongst the early landowners was John Stewart Spotswood, who took up 119 acres (48 ha) below Stony Creek in 1841, grazing cattle (mainly for dairying), quarrying basalt for ballast and operating a punt service across the *Birrung/Yarra*. As a 'pioneer', whose children were also notable locally, Spotswood's family name was eventually bestowed upon the area, replacing the earlier usage of 'Edom' and 'Spottiswoode'.³

Spotswood emerged from the late 1870s as a principal stretch of the industrial belt developing in western Melbourne, between Footscray and Williamstown. Large-scale industrialists flocked to the region, drawn by cheap, level land and proximity to river and rail transport (with its urban and western Victorian linkages). Over the late 19th century, Spotswood developed rapidly into an urban manufacturing centre, with much of its industry noxious. This reputation intensified in the wake of the First World War, with various petrochemical companies setting up vast storage and distribution nodes in Spotswood. The identity of the locality as one of the city's 'most important industrial suburbs' had solidified by the late 1920s.⁴ The postwar period witnessed another surge of industrial construction and, often, site redevelopment.⁵

Speculative modest homes for workers had been built from the late 1880s and a small commercial strip emerged west of the railway. This residential layer later included considerable developments overseen by the Department of Repatriation and then the Housing Commission and company housing. From the late 1940s, the once more isolated locality combined with the suburban sprawl of Western Melbourne, with houses and factory jobs often taken up by postwar immigrants. Spotswood's distinctive industrial landscape of sawtooth and gabled roofs, sprawling factories and warehouses, railway spurs, chimney stacks, and storage tanks began to be rationalised from the late 1990s, a process that continues. The 1991 Australian film *Spotswood* showcased the locality's working-class/industrial character.



1979 aerial photograph of the northern part of Spotswood with the Westgate Bridge in the foreground
(Source: Wolfgang Sievers, NLA, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-160597704>)

³ Spotswood Railway Station (1878) was known as Edom until 1881, then Spottiswoode. In 1905, it was renamed, Spotswood.

⁴ 'Spotswood Progress', *Williamstown Chronicle*, 12 January 1929, p2

⁵ For a summary of industrial development in Spotswood see Graeme Butler & Associates (Jill Barnard), *Altona, Laverton and Newport Districts Stage 2, Volume 2: Environmental History*, section 3; and Gary Vines, *Industrial Heartland: Introduction to the Western Region Industrial Heritage Study*, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, 1990, passim

Site-specific

The subject land derives from several allotments within Section 7 of the Parish of Cut-Paw-Paw, County of Bourke.⁶ These holdings were situated below Spotswood's dairy, which over the late 19th-century became the focus of industrial and residential development in the locale, with a quarrying and dredging reserve in the east known locally as 'the swamp'.⁷



Extract from a panorama (1873) depicting Williamstown (bottom left) with Spotswood below Stony Creek detailed as flat, largely cleared and mostly vacant - the approximate location of the subject place is circled in dashed red
(Source: Albert C. Cooke, NLA, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230007895>)

In 1914, the British Imperial Oil Company (later Shell Company Australia) acquired 15 acres (6 ha) of vacant land south of Burleigh Street in Spotswood. The holding – south of the subject place – had previously been earmarked for a residential but was developed by Shell as a bulk storage and distribution facility known as the 'Newport Terminal' (HO47, HO48).⁸ Operations commenced in 1916.

Until the postwar years and the opening of Shell's refinery at Geelong (1954), bulk petroleum was brought from overseas via tanker ships, which berthed at nearby river wharves. A steam-driven pump and pipe system then delivered kerosene, fuel oil and petrol into Shell's steel storage tanks. From the Newport Terminal, various petroleum and ancillary products were produced and dispersed by tin cans, carried either by rail or horse-drawn carriage/tankers 'to every corner of Victoria'.⁹ Motorised road tankers

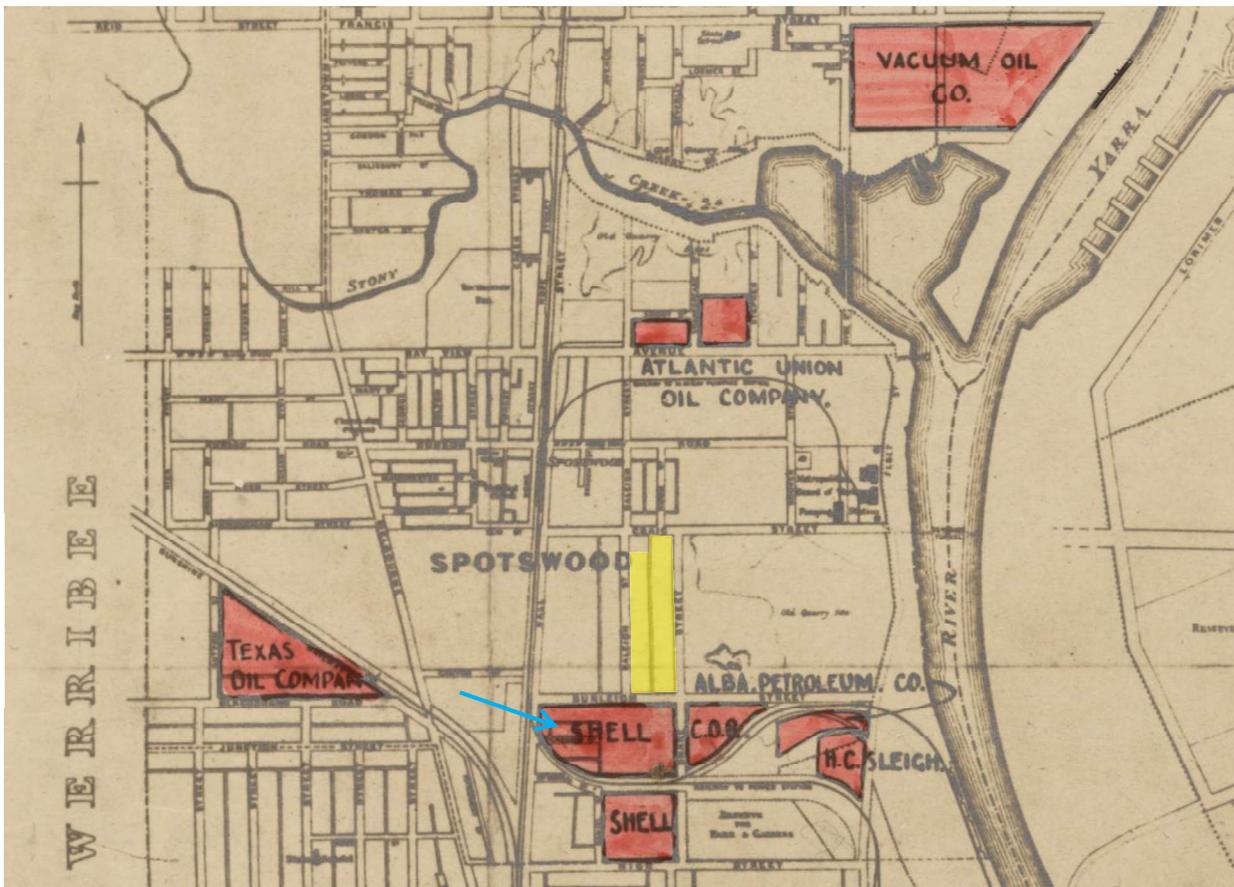
⁶ Specifically – Crown Allotments 47, 48; portions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 of Crown Allotments 57 and 58; part of Crown Allotment 49; and part of portions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 of Crown Allotments 56 (Section 7).

⁷ Moloney, *A history of the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works site including its industrial context of Spotswood, Victoria*, Museum Victoria, 2012, p248

⁸ Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, Shell Australia, 1996, p1

⁹ 'Visit to Shell Works', *Corowa Free Press*, 18 January 1929, p5

supplanted horses over the 1920s.¹⁰ This part of the Newport Terminal (south of Burleigh Road) would continue to undergo progressive enlargement and re-development over the 20th century, much of it driven by the economic climate of the time and advances in storage and manufacture technology.



Extract from an early 1930s map showing the location of the various oil companies in Spotswood. Shell's Newport Terminal (south of Burleigh Street) is indicated by the blue arrow and the subject land – yet acquired – is shaded yellow (the internal road, while gazetted, never appears to have been formed).

(Source: Melbourne Harbour Trust Collection/12, NLA, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2141160643>)

The various allotments that make up the subject land were first collectively acquired in 1920 by the Melbourne Gas Company in what was ultimately an aborted attempt to acquire a considerable property in Spotswood.¹¹

A series of early 1930s aerial photographs, one of which is reproduced below, depict the subject land as vacant, except for what appears to be a fenced oval at the corner of Burleigh and Drake streets and crisscrossing paths. This area may have been called 'Siberia' by some Shell staff in reference to its desolate character – 'wet and muddy in winter and hot and dusty in summer'.¹² South of Burleigh Street, these aerial photographs show the Newport Terminal as densely built up.

In June 1936, Shell Company purchased the subject land – approximately 6 ha (then including the future Craig Street Park) – from the Melbourne Gas Company.¹³ It was incorporated into the Newport Terminal as 'Area A' (as opposed to 'Area B', south of Burleigh Street).

Soon after Shell's acquisition, Building One was constructed. Various aerial photographs dated February 1939 detail its original presentation. It is believed to have been designed as a motor shop and/or cleaning facility for recycled petrol drums.¹⁴ A handful of other industrial structures were also shown as grouped in the southern end of the subject land. Of this interwar layer, only a

¹⁰ Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, p9

¹¹ Certificate of Title, vol. 4310, folio 852; and 'Progress at Spotswood', *Herald*, 27 July 1921, p4

¹² Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, p14

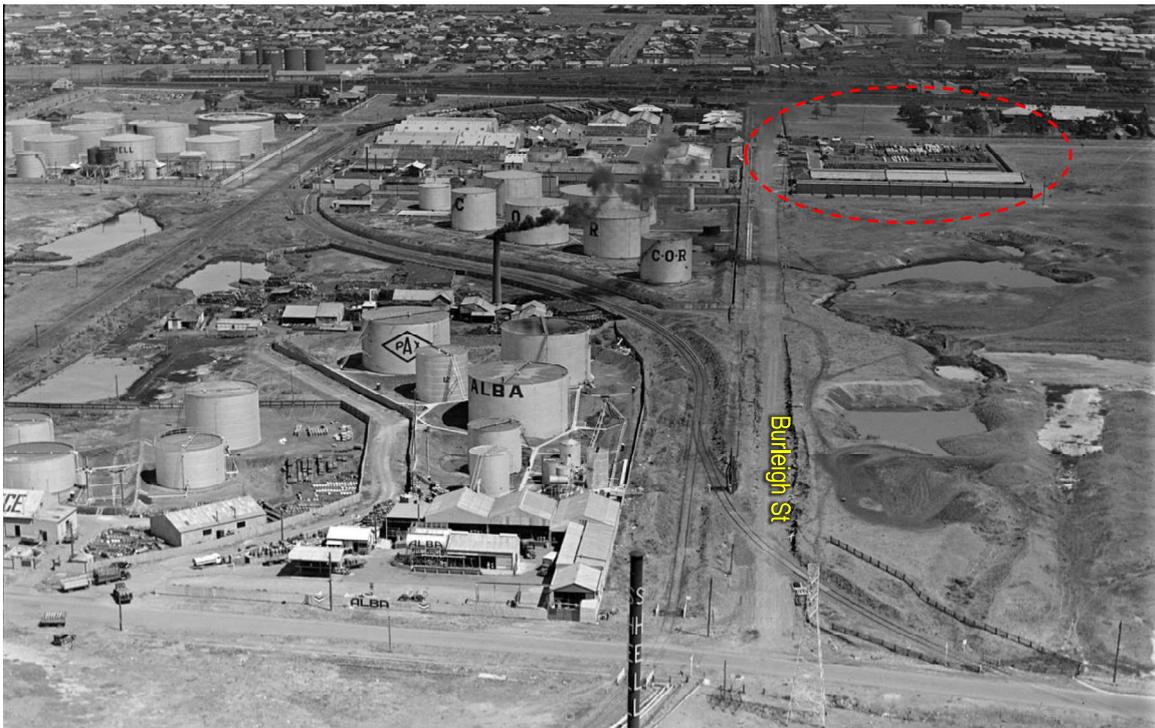
¹³ Certificate of Title, vol. 6058, folio 469

¹⁴ Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, p22

small hipped-roofed building (parallel to Burleigh Street) appears to have survived.¹⁵ Much of the site was utilised as a large outdoor storage yard.

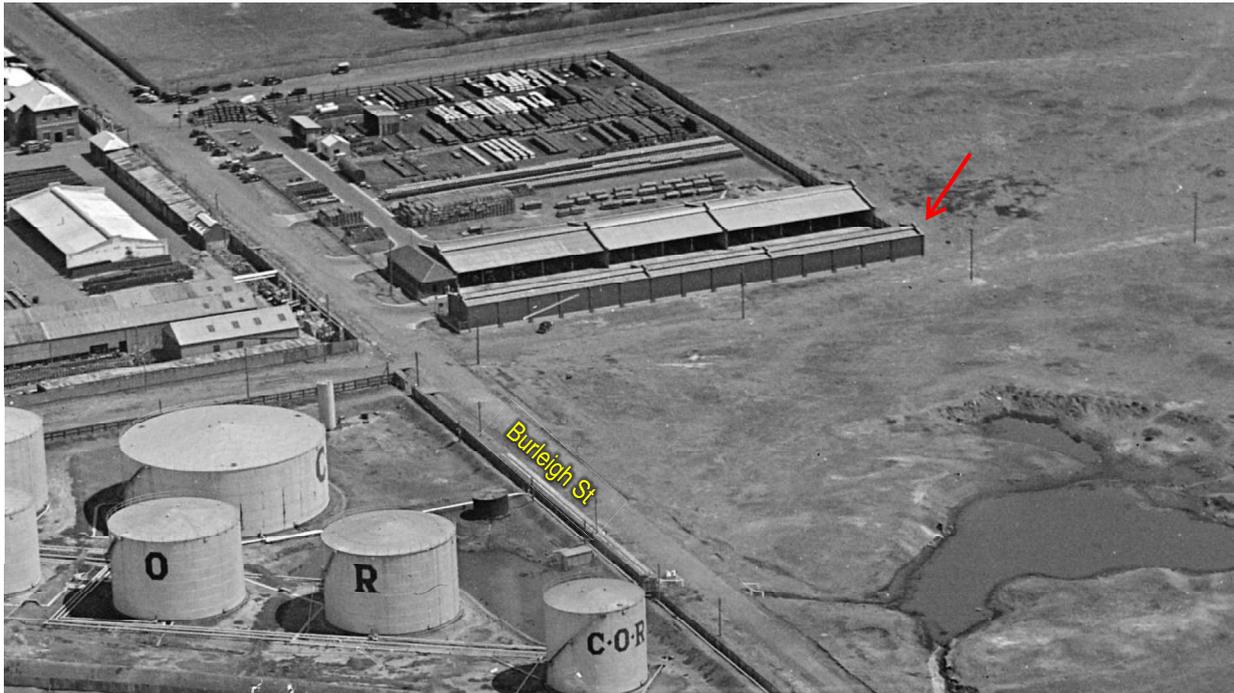


1933 aerial photograph of the subject land, shaded red, facing east
 Shell's Newport Terminal with tank farm and rail sidings are evident south of Burleigh Street
 (Source: Charles D. Pratt, SLV, <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/20911>)



February 1939 aerial photograph, facing west along Burleigh Street, with the developed southern portion of the subject place circled
 (Source: Charles D. Pratt, *Petroleum companies at Spotswood*, SLV, <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/27106>)

¹⁵ To the immediate east of Building One is an existing hipped-roofed brick administrative building that may be shown in the February 1939 photograph. However, the extant building has a clear postwar/late 20th-century character and may have been rebuilt or heavily altered.



Extract from a February 1939 aerial photograph of the southern portion of the subject place with Building One indicated by the red arrow (Source: Charles D. Pratt, Petroleum companies at Spotswood, SLV, <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/27106>)

From about 1940, Shell's Newport Terminal – spanning both sides of Burleigh Street – was identified in the *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria* as a 'bulk oil installation' plant. As demonstrated by the 1945 aerial photograph below, the middle and northern sections of the subject place appear to have been utilised as an enormous outdoor storage yard for the complex.



1945 aerial photograph of the subject place outlined in dashed red – the more built-up part of the Newport Terminal is apparent on the south side of Burleigh Street (Source: Adastral Airways, Melbourne B4A, Zone 7, The University of Melbourne)

At the outbreak of World War II, normal operations in the petroleum industry were suspended and strict rationing was introduced. The various oil companies agreed to a prescribed allocation of business and withdrew their trade names, a situation that lasted until 1948. The lifting of rationing coincided with a boom of domestic car ownership and aggressive moves amongst Australian-based petroleum companies to re-establish and expand their private distribution networks to capture an increasingly lucrative retail market.

Shell responded by investing £1 million into upgrading and reconfiguration the Newport Terminal over the early 1950s, augmenting its role as their chief distribution centre in Victoria.¹⁶ As part of these extensive works, buildings two, three and four were constructed at the subject site (Area A).¹⁷ The following 1954 aerial photograph shows all the buildings completed.



1954 aerial photograph of the Shell's Newport Terminal with the significant buildings at the subject place numbered (Source: *Melbourne and Metropolitan Project No. 3*, Landata)

¹⁶ Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, p23

¹⁷ Available evidence (*Sands Directory*, sewerage plans, contemporary press coverage, secondary material, etc.) has not established more exact dates for the construction of the specified buildings at Area A. It is possible that further research into the Shell Historical Archive at the University of Melbourne may yield further information.

The new buildings at Area A are understood to have been purpose-built to provide for the latest in vehicle repair and filling (Building Two and Four) as well as bulk storage (Building Three).¹⁸ From the early 1950s, various innovations and equipment advancements – particularly the replacement of gravity-fed filling methods for the tankers with electric centrifugal pumps – had allowed the deployment of larger trucks and tankers for the distribution. By 1953, Part A was serviced by a fleet of 175 Shell trucks with some 200 drivers employed by the end of the decade to disseminate petroleum products. The whole workforce of the Newport Terminal peaked at around 500 during the mid-1950s, including a growing number of women and ‘New Australians’, non-British postwar immigrants, many of whom at the site were Italian.¹⁹



'50,000 Gallons of Shell Ready for the Morning Delivery' at the Newport Terminal (south of Burleigh Street) – Shell's interwar fleet (Source: 'The Shell Company's Great Enterprise', *Benalla Standard*, 9 December 1930, p6)



An Albion truck with an attached semi-trailer tanker departs Building One at the subject place, 1954 (Source: Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty Years At Newport 1916-1996*)

¹⁸ Specific uses of building two, three and four were not able to be established in the research of this citation.

¹⁹ Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, pp20-22

While no details have emerged of the designers responsible for buildings One, Two, Three and Four, they were likely planned for and drawn up by Shell's in-house architects and/or engineers. In general, engineers, in particular, were heavily involved in the design of industrial buildings during the mid-20th century. Designing for industrial processes and storage was often presented as an engineering problem.

In the mid-to-late 1950s, the studio of the famed German-Australian photographer Helmut Newtown (1920-2004) was commissioned by Shell to document the Newport Terminal (along with their new Geelong Refinery), seemingly to commemorate the facility's enhancement. These photographs, two of which are reproduced below, chiefly capture internal operations, which makes their attribution to specific parts of the terminal difficult. Nonetheless, some likely document the interior of the subject buildings at Area A.

As postwar Australia's 'Long Boom' dissipated in the more challenging economic climate of the 1970s, the terminal's workforce dropped steadily, reaching 200 by the late 1980s. Nonetheless, during the late 20th century, the facility remained integral to Shell's operations – 'the vital link in the distribution of Shell petrol to the state'.²⁰ The subject place, Area A, continued to function as an increasingly sophisticated delivery and distribution node for the network and service the Shell fleet and contractor vehicles, which continued to evolve.²¹



Main gate, *Former Shell Newport Terminal (North Group)*, since modified/replaced, with Building Three's east roofline evident right of frame
(Source: Helmut Newton and Associates, 1956-61, SLV, <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/117874>)

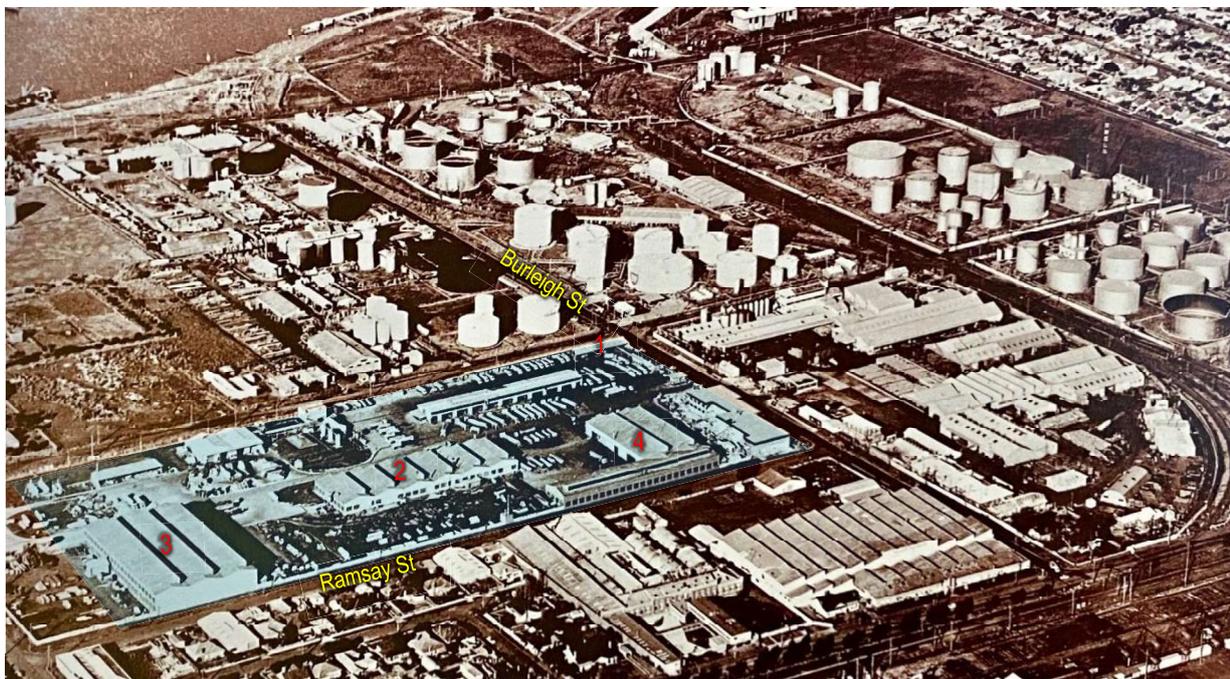


'Paint shop & vehicle repair, Newport' – possibly an internal photograph of buildings Two, Three or Four
(Source: Helmut Newtown and Associates, 1956-61, SLV, <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/117924>)

²⁰ Fiona Athersmith, 'Pickets shut off Shell supplies', *Age*, 27 December 1986, p1

²¹ Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty years at Newport 1916-1996*, p28

The aerial photograph reproduced below depicts the Newport Terminal in 1975. Area A – with Craig Street Park not yet established – is shown carpeted with tanker trucks and devoid of landscaping. Part of Building One's roof had evidently been removed by this time. There are some additional structures and buildings apparent, including the brown-brick office building to Burleigh Street.



1975 aerial photograph of the Newport Terminal with the subject site shaded blue
(Source: Shell Company of Australia, *Eighty Years At Newport 1916-1996*)

The subject land was amalgamated with the Shell complex on the south side of Burleigh Street under a single title (PC356380P) in 1994.²² Craig Street Park was created c2000-2004 but remains in the same land title as the Newport Terminal.

In 2014, the Newport Terminal, including the subject place, was acquired by Viva Energy. It continues to function as a fuel storage and distribution centre.

Shell Australia

From the Federation years, Shell Australia – the subsidiary of a major international oil company, Royal Dutch Shell Group – has advanced as a leading national producer and marketer of petroleum products with a practice marked by innovative business practice and employer-employee relations. While contemporary attention has increasingly focused on the environmental record and legacy of the company, for much of the century, Shell's commercial success and vitality were equated with the health of economies, both national and local.

The 'Shell' Transport and Trading Company of London (est. 1897) set up fuel handling facilities in a former wool store at Nelson Place, Williamstown (since demolished) in 1901 to receive the nation's first bulk delivery of kerosene, fuel oil and petrol.²³

In 1903, 'Shell' Transport entered into a joint venture with the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company to distribute their petroleum and kerosene products in Asia, Australasia, and parts of Africa.²⁴ In a play to local patriotism, the Australasian subsidiary, established in 1905, was named the British Imperial Oil Company. The effective Englishman, Ernest Edward Wagstaff, was appointed manager and oversaw the company's formative phase (1904-27).²⁵

²² Plan of Consolidation, PC 356380P

²³ Another facility was established at Gore Bay in Sydney at the same time. During the 1890s, Shell's products had previously been distributed in Australia by various independent businesses, including Gollin and Company in Victoria.

²⁴ Between 1907 and 1913, Shell Transport and Royal Dutch (combined with other companies) completed a complex merger as the Royal Dutch Shell Group.

²⁵ Robert Murray, 'Wagstaff, Ernest Edward (1870-1965)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2002, available online

Shell's arrival in Australia accompanied a marked increase in kerosene and motor spirit usage within domestic and industrial spheres, particularly for motorcars. In 1914, the company shifted its Victorian operations to Spotswood. It initially acquired some 6 hectares bounded by Burleigh (north), High (south), Hall (east) and Drake (west) streets, where a bulk handling facility and 'tank farm' was established from 1916. This operation was referred to as the Newport Terminal.²⁶

Oil initially imported from the Netherlands East Indies and British Borneo arrived at the Newport Terminal via pipes from nearby wharves (below Burleigh Street). At the Newport Terminal, the received oil was stored in tanks, blended (if necessary), then packaged for distribution across Victoria – either to local depots and/or, from 1925, company-owned kerbside pumps.

Distribution was initially by horse-drawn tanker or rail. This approach was progressively replaced over the 1920s by specialised tank trucks that increased in size and sophistication over the century. A range of testing, manufacturing and mechanical activities also took place at the terminal. High profits and a latent paternalism allowed for Shell to practice an often-celebrated public-spirited benevolence and provide comparatively good working conditions throughout the interwar and postwar periods. British Imperial Oil Co. was retitled the Shell Company of Australia Ltd in 1927.

The end of Second World War restrictions coincided with a boom in private motoring over the 1950s that lifted Shell to new heights over the postwar period. The 1950s saw a national expansion of Shell operations, including at the subject place. From 1955, the oil that passed through the Newport Terminal was predominantly delivered by pipeline directly from the Shell Geelong Refinery rather than imported.

In 2014, the Dutch firm Vitol (trading as Viva Energy Australia) purchased Shell's 'downstream' (production phase to the point of sale) Australian operations.²⁷



Shell employees outside a tanker truck at the Newport Terminal, Spotswood, 1958
(Source: Museums Victoria, Item MM 12699)

Thematic Context

David Helms, *Hobsons Bay Heritage Study Volume 1: Environmental History*, 2003:

- Theme 3: Developing Local, Regional and National Economies – subtheme 'Petroleum and petro-chemicals' (3.4.7)

²⁶ Interwar fabric at the former Shell Newport Terminal is affected by HO47, H048 and HO49.

²⁷ Reuters, 'Vitol completes purchase of Shell's Australian downstream', Reuters, 13 August 2014, available online

Comparative Analysis

The Spotswood area, east of the Williamstown railway line, has been a predominantly industrial precinct since the late 19th century. In recent decades, a number of early buildings associated the area's industrial layer have been cleared.

Contributing to this pronounced industrial character are oil/petrochemical complexes and tank farms that have dominated the southern reaches of Spotswood since the late Federation period. Some of these sites, such as Atlantic Union Oil Co. (later Esso) and H. C. Sleigh (Golden Fleece), have been completely cleared of oil-related buildings as part of contemporary rationalisations, while others like the southern section of Shell's Newport Terminal (former) have undergone repeated phases of modification, reducing their capacity for ready interpretation.

Only a few petroleum-rated buildings survive in Spotswood from the opening phase of establishment, which occurred from the late 1910s and early interwar years. At the *Shell Oil Complex* (HO47) on the south side of Burleigh Street – the original core of the Newport Terminal – is a small group of structures (valve house and boiler building) and a pair of gable-roofed, corrugated metal packing sheds that date from the 1920s and 1930s. These elements are difficult to view from the public realm and, in the case of the metal sheds, have mostly been reclad.

At the south end of Drake Street are situated two small gabled-roofed, red-brick buildings constructed in the interwar period – a Pumphouse (1924) and Office (1940). Both are associated with the site's former occupation by the Commonwealth Oil Refineries Company and are recommended for the application of a Heritage Overlay by this study (*Commonwealth Oil Refineries Co. Buildings*).²⁸ Similar to Building One at the subject place, these two structures exhibit a light application of the Stripped Classical style to a functional industrial/administrative building via their proportions and abstracted pilasters.

More broadly, the nearby cream/manganese-brick Moderne factory 'front' to the 1939 *W. Goetz & Sons Ltd Complex (Former)* (HO139) at 136-140 Hall Street is the largest of the enduring interwar masonry industrial sites in the suburb.

Accordingly, Building One presents as a rare enduring instance of an interwar, petroleum-related structure in Spotswood.

The postwar gabled and corrugated metal-clad buildings at the subject place (Two, Three and Four) are all substantial examples of their type, which was once a key characteristic of Spotswood, particularly along Hudson Street, and 20th-century industrial Melbourne more broadly. This typology in the Spotswood area has undergone attrition in recent decades. Building Three is a particularly impressive instance of industrial architecture.

Intactness

The intactness of Building One, which represents the interwar period of development at the place, is only moderate; however, it presents as relatively high when viewed from the public realm. In combination with historical aerial photographs, Building One remains highly interpretable.

The intactness of the postwar buildings – Two, Three and Four – remains extremely high.

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and/or fences	No
Prohibited Use	No
Aboriginal Place	No

²⁸ The 1922 storage tanks NP6 and NP7 that comprised the *Commonwealth Oil Refinery Co. Tank Farm (Former)* (HO49) were removed in late 2019.

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent of the heritage overlay is outlined approximately below.



Recommended extent of heritage overlay
(Source: Nearmap, January 2021)