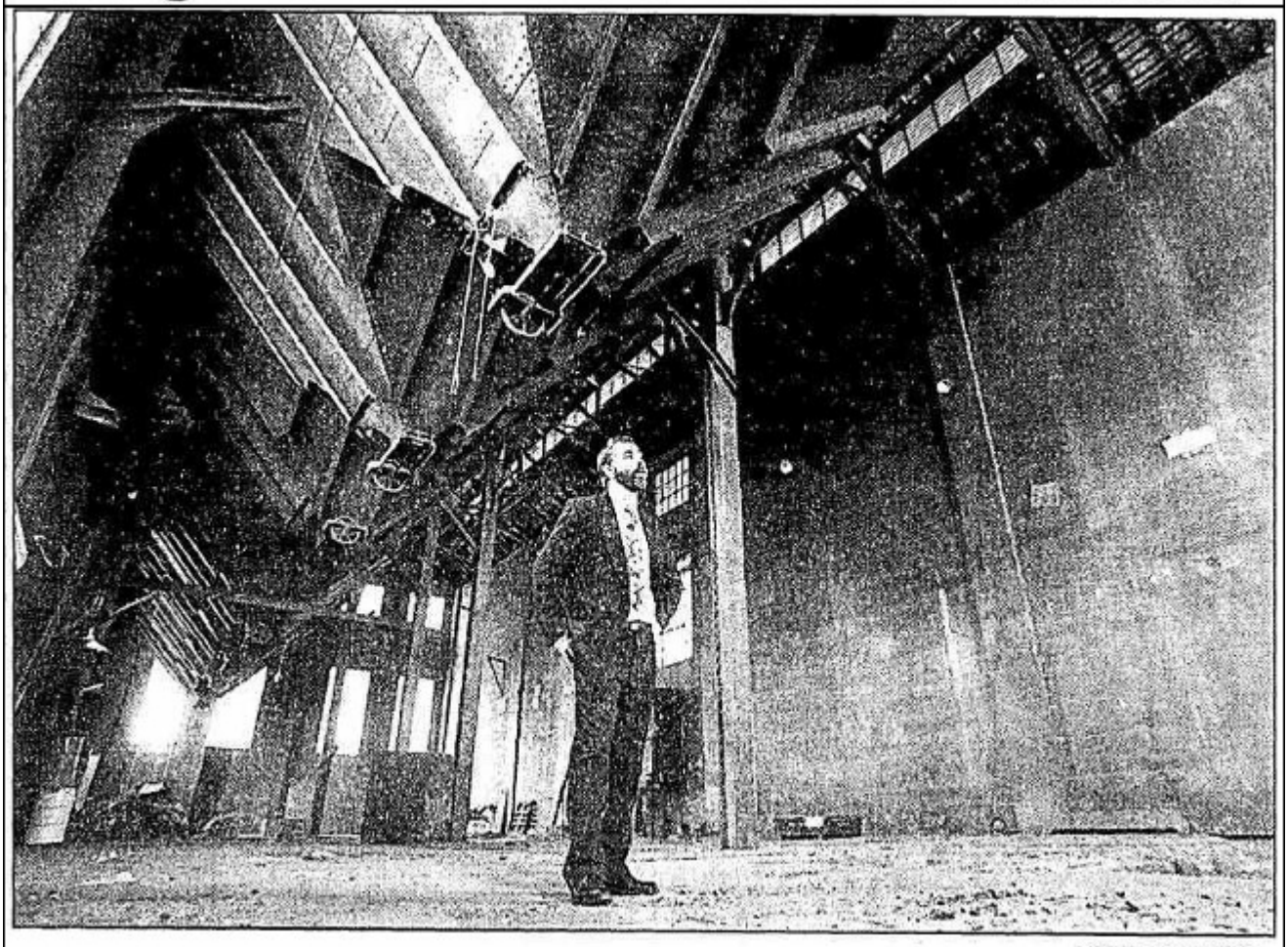
Stage set for Powerhouse theatre



Picture: DEAN McNICOL

Gary Humphries inspects the old Kingston Powerhouse, a possible site for a theatre complex. Below: A picture of the building in the 1950s.

By ROBERT MACKLIN, Arts Editor

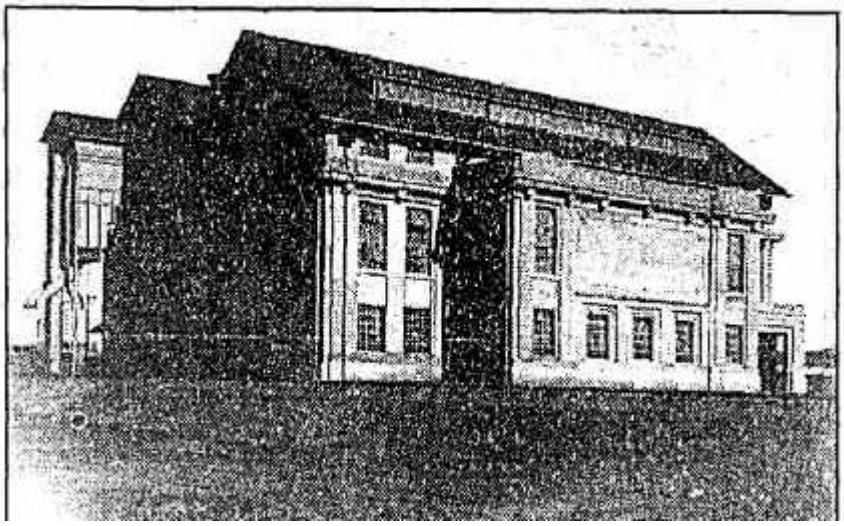
The 80-year-old Kingston Powerhouse is to discover a new life as a theatre space. And Canberra's liveliest young theatre group, Splinters, has put up its hand to be the resident company.

Yesterday Arts Minister Gary Humphries inspected the site which will be central to the Kingston foreshore development following the land swap between the ACT and Federal Governments.

"It's an extremely exciting prospect," he said. "It would make a wonderful site for theatrical presentations and other cultural pursuits. Just look at those ancient coal hoppers."

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Indeed, the old, blackened shapes at one side of the raw concrete space loomed broodingly over us. Infernal ghosts flickered in the collective memory. The coal-fired station operated





for 40 years before they finally closed it down in 1957 when the Snowy scheme set the national grid shivering with high voltage.

"We will appoint the Kingston Foreshore Authority soon," he said. "Their job will be to coordinate everything on the site, including the planning competition which should only run for six months.

"By this time next year we'd expect to have the models and plans of the grand vision. But within that we can designate the powerhouse as a theatrical site."

Mr Humphries' enthusiasm is more than matched by that of Chief Minister Kate Carnell who organised yesterday's meeting to inspect the site. (The company with the greatest natural claim on it as a permanent home, Splinters, celebrates its 10th birthday on Monday.)

"We are desperately in need of just such a site," said founding Splinters' member David Branson. "We deal in big structures so it would be ideal for storage; and to rehearse we're having to pay $150 a day. It's ridiculous."

Renovation of the building, which is under a heritage order, would cost up to $1 million.

The National Theatre Festival has pleaded for the nearby bus depot for a performance in October.