

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Dick Whittington Tavern
Other names: Alma Hotel (former)

Citation No: 2447

INSERT MAP



Address: 34 Chapel Street, St Kilda
Category: Commercial: Hotel
Style: Interwar
Constructed: 1924
Designer: Joseph Plottel
Amendment: TBC
Comment: New citation

Heritage Precinct: Not applicable
Heritage Overlay: TBC
Graded as: Significant
Victorian Heritage Register: No

Significance

What is significant?

The Dick Whittington Tavern (former Alma Hotel) at 34 Chapel Street, St Kilda, constructed in 1924 and designed by Joseph Plottel is significant.

Features that contribute to the significance of the place include:

- Two-storey scale.
- Hip roof clad in terracotta tiles with a wide, timber-lined soffit. Also six red brick chimneys with moulded, rendered caps.
- Brick walls in stretcher bond (mostly over-painted).
- Symmetrical façade with a recessed balcony featuring paired columns.
- Paired windows flanking the balcony with geometric patterns in leadlight and stained glass to the upper sashes. Also paired windows to the north elevation and windows with exposed concrete lintels to the south recess and rear/east elevation.
- Entry area at the south end of the ground floor including a basalt threshold and original cream and black tiling.

Alterations and additions are not significant, including alterations to the ground floor and late 20th century single-storey additions to the north and east sides. The current paint colour scheme is not significant.

How is it significant?

The Dick Whittington Tavern is of local historical, aesthetic, and social significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

The Dick Whittington Tavern is historically significant as a hotel constructed during the Interwar period as a replacement for an earlier smaller hotel on the site which had been in continuous hotel use since 1860. It is representative of the common decision to modernise Victorian-era hotels during the Interwar period, whereby earlier buildings were typically remodelled, upgraded, expanded or, as occurred less frequently, fully replaced. The Chapel Street address is reflective of the traditional practice of prominently locating hotels along major thoroughfares. (Criterion A)

The Dick Whittington Tavern is of aesthetic significance as a partly intact (that is, intact to the upper floor and roof), early Interwar period hotel in the Georgian Revival style. The Georgian Revival style is not common in the municipality, especially among the group of remaining Interwar period hotels. Indicative of the style the design incorporates restrained classicising detailing, symmetrical façade and recessed balcony with paired columns. The noted architect, Joseph Plottel, undertook many commissions in the St Kilda area but this is the only hotel he is known to have designed in the municipality. (Criterion E)

The Dick Whittington Tavern is of social significance for its longstanding association (for a century in the current building and over 150 years at the site) with members of the local community, who mostly reside in St Kilda/St Kilda East/Balaclava. The current community values the Dick Whittington Tavern as a local landmark and welcoming atmospheric meeting place that is important to the character and social fabric of the local area. (Criterion G)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

5. Building Victoria's Industries and Workforces: 5.6 Entertaining and socialising

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

3. People: 3.5 Expressing identity and culture

History

Contextual history

Providing food, refreshments, entertainment and accommodation, hotels – or pubs – have been popular places to eat, socialise and stay in the City of Port Phillip since the arrival of European settlers. Wilbraham Liardet was the first to open a hotel in the area, the Brighton Pier Hotel, in October 1840. During the gold rush period from 1851 to 1876, 51 new hotels were opened in Port Melbourne alone.

Before the creation of civic buildings, hotels were often used as meeting places for early councils, social groups and committees, as well as general socialising. Some of the oldest buildings in the City of Port Phillip are hotels that have stood the test of time, such as the Golden Gate Hotel (1853), Prince of Wales Hotel (1863), the George (which began as the Terminus in 1857), the Esplanade (which began as the New Bath Hotel in 1856), the Golden Fleece Hotel (1872) and the Balaclava Hotel (formerly Carlisle Hotel 1869). Some, like the Hotel Victoria built in 1888 on Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park, remain but no longer used as hotels. Others, like the Greyhound Hotel (1853) have been demolished. Hotels have been particularly associated with working-class people as centres of Australian drinking culture, and continue to provide vital social venues for the community today.

Dick Whittington Tavern

The subject site formed part of Crown portion 138A of about 5 acres which was purchased in the 1850s (pre-1857) by Edward De Carle and Henry Holmes (PP).

The original hotel on the site was built in 1860 for James Hayes. The March 1860 rate book describes it as 'unfinished' (RB no.1128). The next year, the March 1861 rate book records an eleven-roomed brick building and stables named the Alma Hotel (RB no.1203). James Hayes owned the hotel until his death in 1876 (*Argus* 7 Apr 1876 p1).

The 1873 Vardy plan (Figure 1) shows the hotel during the time it was owned by James Hayes. At that time it occupied a smaller land parcel that stretched between Chapel and Queen streets. At the corner of Chapel and Crews streets there was a grocer shop and residence owned by John Drew.

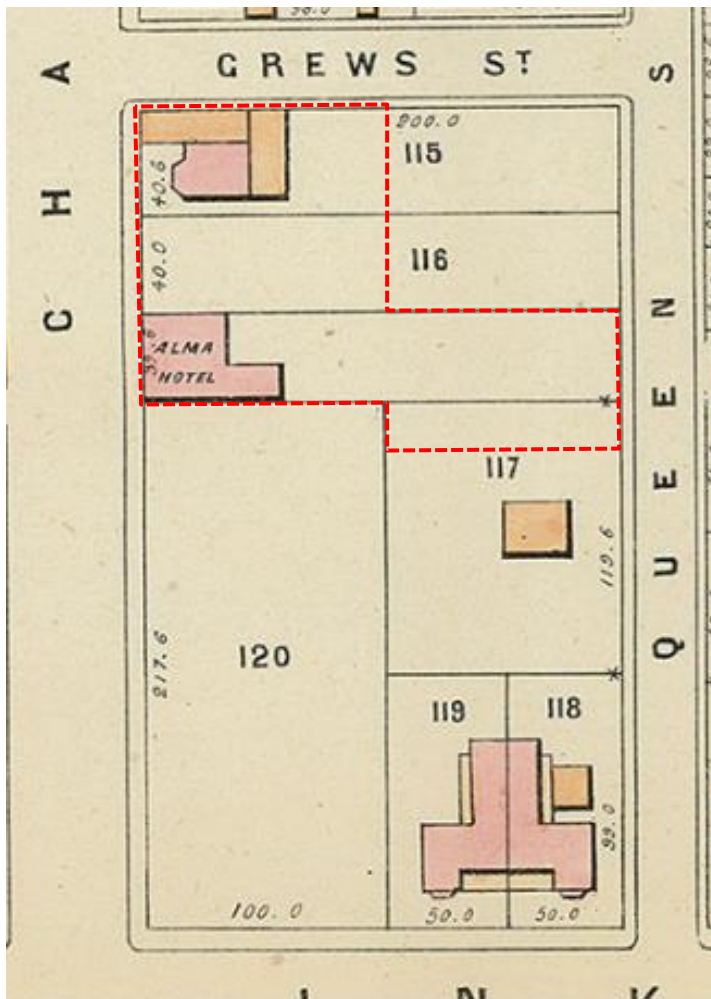


Figure 1 - Plan of the Borough of St Kilda, North Ward No. 6 (J.E.S. Vardy, 1873). The approximate current boundaries of the subject site are indicated.

The 1897 MMBW plan (Figure 2) shows the footprint of the hotel. The hotel had been enlarged - the corresponding 1897 rate book records 18 rooms. On the footpath in front of the hotel there was a trough and at the rear of the hotel there was a fernery. Rear access to the hotel was established via a right of way off Queen Street. On Queen Street, there were two houses (brick house at no. 11 and timber house at no. 13) where the carpark currently is.

Billiards was apparently a popular activity at the Alma Hotel. There was a billiard room and billiard tournaments were held, such as that in April 1898 (*Prahran Chronicle* 9 Apr 1898 p3). In 1899, licensee Mary Elizabeth Webster was fined £5 for permitting billiards to be played after hours (Age 25 May 1899 p6).

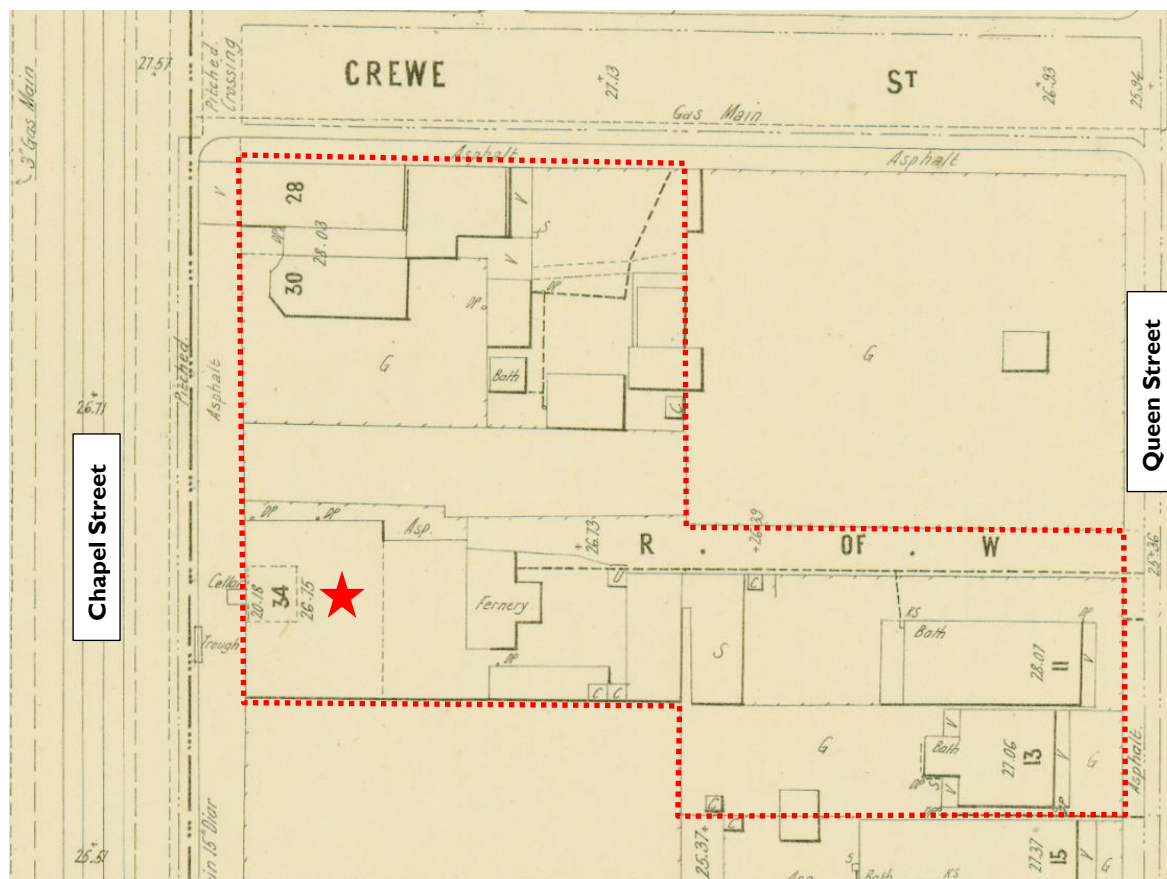


Figure 2 - MMBW detail plan no. 1423, dated 1897. The approximate current boundaries of the subject site are indicated.

In early July 1924 the noted architect Joseph Plottel placed a tender advertisement for rebuilding the Alma Hotel (*Argus* 5 Jul 1924 p5). Seminel & Co were selected as the builders. On 14 July, a building permit was issued to owner Marc Gurney for a new brick hotel (BP no. 5788). Construction was apparently underway soon after, as in October it was reported that a 71-year-old worker fell from a ladder and suffered serious injuries (*Herald* 1 Oct 1924 p14).



Figure 3 - West/front elevation. Undated drawing by Joseph Plottel (Source: Council Building File)



Figure 4 - East and north side elevations. Undated drawing by Joseph Plottel. (Source: Council Building File)

In 1936, after 26 years as owner and licensee, Marc Gurney sold the Alma Hotel to Caroline Moran who had run the Court House Hotel in Footscray for the previous 12 years (*Argus* 11 May 1936 p4).

The 1945 aerial photograph (Figure 5) shows the extant hotel building. Also shown is a c.1930s house on the corner of Crews Street which replaced the earlier combined grocery and residence.



Figure 5 - Aerial photograph dated 1945. The approximate current boundaries of the subject site are indicated. (Source: Landata, Proj No 5, Run 17E, Frame 58012)

It was probably not until the 1970s that the site was expanded to include land on the corner of Crews Street (CT vol. 9012 fol. 520). Also during the 1970s, the hotel appears to have been renamed the Dick Whittington Tavern.

Joseph Plottel - Architect

Joseph Plottel was born in Yorkshire in 1883 and trained in London. In 1906 he moved to Melbourne where he worked for the railways department then in the office of Nahum Barnet. He opened his own office in 1911 designing a wide variety of building types including factories, offices, shops, civic buildings, houses and apartment blocks. Plottel undertook more than a dozen commissions in the St Kilda area including a number of flats (e.g. Eildon Mansions 34 Eildon Road in c.1922 and Clarendon 26-28 Blessington St in 1915 & 1935), two examples of combined shops and flats (Waverley 115-119 Grey Street in 1920 and The Warwick 75&75A Fitzroy Street in 1933), and for the Jewish community, notably the St Kilda Synagogue in Charnwood Crescent in 1925. (Grow, 2012).

References

Aizen, Becky, *Pots, Punks and Punters: a history of the hotels of St. Kilda and South Melbourne*, 2004

Building Files held by Port Phillip City Council

Certificates of Title (CT)

Grow, R, 'Joseph Plottel' in Philip Goad and Julie Willis (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, 2012.

Newspapers: *Herald*; *Argus*; *Prahran Chronicle*

Parish Plan - at Elwood, Parish of Prahran, P81-13 (PP)

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH), February 2021

Rate Books for St Kilda 1859-1900, accessed via ancestry.com

St Kilda Council building permits (BP)

Description

The building is located at the south-western part of a large, flat site with an area of 1,720m². The L-shaped parcel of land has a frontage to Chapel Street, but extends along nearly half of Crews Street, and has a narrow frontage to Queen Street. Except for the hotel building, most of the land is paved in concrete with some limited areas of planting to the car parking areas to Crews and Queen streets.

The building consists of the original 1920s section with late 20th century, single-storey additions to the north and east sides, including a wide canopy to front.

The original section is two storey with a hip roof clad in terracotta tiles. It is punctured by six red brick chimneys with a moulded, rendered cap. There is a wide, timber-lined soffit to all sides except the south, where the building is constructed to the boundary.

The brick walls in stretcher bond are painted except for some of the rear first floor areas - a recess to south side and the east wall - where the original red brick remains unpainted. The brickwork to the façade was likely differentiated, such as the window sills. According to the blueprints, the dado to the ground floor was possibly tiled.



Aerial, showing site boundary (dashed) and original 1924 section, star (Source: Nearmap 21.04.21)

The first floor remains intact whilst the ground floor has been altered. The first floor façade is symmetrical with a recessed balcony indicative of the influence of the Georgian Revival style. There are paired columns to the balcony with those abutting the wall being a half post. Flanking the porch are paired windows with geometric patterns in leadlight and stained glass (in muted tones) to the upper sashes, as compared to multi-paned are indicated on the drawings. To the balcony, there are windows to the centre and doors flanking. There is a metal railing not evident on the drawing.

Windows to the north elevation are paired and the concrete lintels to the windows are visible to the south recess and rear/east elevation.

To the ground floor, there are some recessed entries and aluminum-framed windows, both fixed and folding. A cantilevered canopy with a wide fascia extends the length of the façade and continues along the north side. A canopy extended along the front with a broad triangular peak to the centre (including the name) and block to either end. At the south end of the façade is the indications of an original entry by way a basalt threshold and original cream and black tiling.

A small, two storey, red brick section with a skillion roof, clad in sheet metal, is partly visible to the south boundary.

The single storey additions are for the main part rendered with channeling, and a black tile dado to the front part (west and north elevations).

Comparative analysis

There are many hotels included in the Heritage Overlay, either as individual places or included in a precinct. The hotels predominantly date to the Victorian period, however many were remodeled during the Interwar period in a contemporary style, as was a common approach to the modernisation of hotels at the time in response to recommendations made by the Licenses Reduction Board. Only a few were built as new buildings during the 20th century, though often replacing an earlier hotel on the site. Most are located on corners and/or main thoroughfares.

The Georgian Revival style was popular from about the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, and less common in the municipality than most of the other Interwar period styles. Typically incorporating some restrained classicising detailing, it is associated with 'good manners' and more so with residential buildings than commercial. Characteristics of the style include a symmetrical facade, walls can be face brick or rendered, windows are multi-paned (with 6-pane sashes), and entries might include a fanlight or a porch with Tuscan order columns. The design of the Dick Whittington Tavern expresses the style by way of restrained classicising detailing, a symmetrical facade and a recessed balcony with paired columns. The architect, Joseph Plottel, undertook many commissions in the St Kilda area but this is the only hotel he is known to have designed in the municipality.

The Newmarket Hotel, 36 Inkerman Street, St Kilda (Significant in HO5), possibly dating to 1921 when brick additions were undertaken, is unusual as it demonstrates a bungalow influence on an urban building. It has a symmetrical red brick, including quoining, with a gable roof clad in terracotta tiles. The windows have been removed but had been boxed-framed to the upper level.

During the 1920s, most hotels were designed in a classicising mode, whether new buildings or pre-existing hotels that were remodeled. This is the most common architectural style of the Interwar period as applied to hotels. These buildings are usually rendered, have a parapet often with a pediment and a cornice, and individual windows (a remnant of the Victorian period building). Examples which are generally intact include:

- Post Office Club Hotel, 306 St Kilda Road, St Kilda (Contributory within HO6). Retains original tiles to ground floor exterior. Diamond glazing bars to upper sashes (first floor).
- Elephant & Wheelbarrow, 169 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda (Contributory within HO5). Freestyle design with a curved corner, oriel windows and arched openings.
- Bayview Hotel, 279 Cecil Street, South Melbourne (Contributory within HO3). Has a recessed balcony with columns to first floor, intact tiled dado to ground floor, stained glass to some windows.
- Queens Arms Hotel (former), 336 St Kilda Road (Sydney Smith & Ogg, 1924) (Significant within HO6, Citation 927). Parapet with triangular pediments and featuring a corner tower.
- Several other hotels in similar vein include the Cricket Club, Emerald, Golden Fleece, Limerick Arms, Montague, O'Connell's Centenary, and Rising Sun. Some of these were designed by Sydney, Smith, Ogg & Serpell.

The Grosvenor Hotel, 10 Brighton Road, Balaclava (Citation 301), designed by Harry Norris in 1928 is a rare instance of the Spanish Mission style applied to a hotel within the municipality.

During the mid to late 1930s, the Moderne/Functionalist style became popular and there are several examples in the Municipality. Typically, they include a parapet, are rendered, and have a horizontal emphasis by way of banding or speed lines. Some feature Art Deco detailing to the bands, etc.

Social Value

Between 22 March to 18 April 2021 community engagement was undertaken to gauge the potential social significance of the Dick Whittington Tavern. The core components of this engagement included an online survey and story sharing board on Council's Have Your Say website, which were promoted to targeted interested groups.

In total, 69 people completed the survey for the Dick Whittington Tavern. Most of the respondents were aged 35-49 years (35), followed by 25-34 years (14) and 50-59 years (11), with a few respondents older than 60 and younger than 24. Respondents were overwhelmingly local residents, with almost all (63) residing in the immediate suburbs of Balaclava, St Kilda East and St Kilda area. More than half of respondents visit the hotel on a regular basis, either weekly (12) or monthly (26). About half (36) of the respondents have been visiting the hotel for more than 6 years, specifically 6-10 years (18), 11-20 years (13), 21-30 years (3), and more than 30 years (2). Three groups were identified as having a connection to the Dick Whittington Tavern.

When asked about what aspects of the hotel contribute to its character, 'location' (27) and 'atmosphere' (19) were the most popular responses. Less popular were 'façade/appearance from street' (7), 'outdoor areas' (5), 'architectural style' (2), 'bar' (1) and 'room layout' (1).

The majority of respondents associated the hotel with their local community and were overwhelmingly in agreement with statements such as 'the Dick Whittington Tavern is a local landmark', 'the Dick Whittington Tavern is important/special to the character of 'Balaclava/St Kilda East', 'I feel connected to my community when I visit the Dick Whittington Tavern', and 'the Dick Whittington Tavern is important as a meeting place'.

In terms of historical associations, respondents indicated a strong attachment to the name 'Dick Whittington Tavern'. Opinions were subtly in favour of there being an appreciable sense of history and describing the hotel as historical rather than contemporary.

Respondents generally favoured descriptive words such as welcoming, timeless, lively, homey, characterful, and popular.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to elaborate on their opinions in an open question: 'In your own words, what do you think the Dick Whittington Tavern means to your community? Who is it important to? How does it contribute to a sense of place or identity? What is it best known for?'. Numerous responses were received (41) of which the majority were supportive. The most emphasised theme was the importance of the Dick Whittington Tavern to the local community as a meeting place. Several respondents noted that the hotel is known for its friendly atmosphere, the food, trivia nights and its name. Two respondents referred to the undesirable fate of the Greyhound Hotel and another two mourned the relatively recent loss of the 'Dick Liquor' signage.

'Social value' is a collective attachment to a place that embodies meanings and values that are important to a community. Based on the responses to the survey, the social value of the Dick Whittington Tavern is demonstrated against the key indicators below. The indicators derive from the *Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines* (Heritage Council Victoria, Dec. 2020).

- **The existence of a current community/group by whom the place is valued.**

There is an informal community of predominantly local people who are united through their common patronage and appreciation of the Dick Whittington Tavern.

Some comments provided by survey respondents paint a picture of this community:

It's a great place for the older community to meet that hasn't been bulldozed or turned into some trendy bar.

A great place to go for a counter meal with family, friends and children.

It's a real community hotel that understands the locals ...

A place of country pub vibe, down to earth and friendly, very very popular with the locals.

... I think a broad cross-section of the community feel welcome, accepted and appreciated there and enjoy each others differences.

...exceptionally friendly staff

Trivia night is fun and has always been my group of friends regular weekly catch up.

- **The strength of the community/group's attachment to the place.**

The Dick Whittington Tavern provides an important reference point in the community's sense of identity/place. The survey results suggest that the community's attachment to the Dick Whittington Tavern is more closely related to the location, atmosphere and sense of community it generates than its physical appearance. When asked to rate their level of attachment to the place on a scale of 1 to 10 the majority of respondents (50 out of 67) selected a level of 6 or above. Some comments provided by survey respondents provide some insight into the nature of the attachment:

I think it's a local institution. Great place to meet with character, unlike other newly built venues.

On face value the venue might be seen as just another place. But the name (which i love!), the services, the value, and the location, mean that it is incredibly important to the community. As someone new to the area, i see it has a spot in the heart of many locals ...

It is a stand alone ICON in East St Kilda ...

The Dick Whittington is an important part of Balaclava - it provides a gathering place and many happy memories for the community.

- **The time depth of that attachment.**

The Dick Whittington Tavern (previously called the Alma Hotel) has served the community as a meeting place continuously since 1860 at this site, albeit having been rebuilt in 1924. The attachment to the place has evolved with communal interaction over time. Amongst the current community there are some members who have been visiting the Dick Whittington Tavern for several decades, while others have a more recent association.

- **Whether the social values resonate across the broader community as part of a story that contributes to the municipality's identity.**

For over 180 years, hotels have facilitated an important social function in Port Phillip and continue to provide important social venues for the community today.

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.

Recommendations

Add to the Heritage Overlay as an individual place. Exclude the carpark off Queen Street from the extent of the HO.

Apply external paint controls in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (to ensure complementary colour schemes are employed and/or encourage paint removal from brickwork).

Primary source

RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2*, 2021

Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

Other images



North-east corner



Façade, north end, showing stained glass windows (upper sash) and paired columns to the recessed balcony



Basalt threshold and original cream and black tiling to the deck

Area to be included in HO

