

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Waiora
Other names: Duplex, Flats

Citation No:
2065



Address: 5 & 5A Mitchell Street, St Kilda

Category: Residential: Flats, duplex

Style: Interwar: Bungalow

Constructed: 1926

Designer: Unknown

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Heritage Precinct: St Kilda
Botanical Gardens & Environs

Heritage Overlay: **HO7**

Graded as: Significant

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Significance

What is significant?

Waiora, the single-storey inter-war Bungalow-style duplex, designed by B.S.W. Gilbertson and constructed by J.T. Berkeley in 1926, at 5 & 5A Mitchell Street, St Kilda is significant. The original front fence to no.5 and the original section of the front fence to no. 5A also contribute to the significance of the place.

Alterations and additions, including the additions to the front fence of 5A and the brick outbuilding are not significant.

How is it significant?

Waiora at 5 & 5A Mitchell Street, St Kilda is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Waiora is of aesthetic significance, as a well-detailed and intact example of the inter-war bungalow style applied to a duplex. It is massed in a manner to be interpreted as a single house, with its transverse gable and a projecting jerkinhead roofing clad in unglazed terracotta tiles above both dwellings. Detailing on Waiora is rich and well-executed and it is of note for retaining original finishes, including the unpainted roughcast render (with weatherboards to the upper sections of the gable ends and to the side of the porch) to the upper walls, and the use of clinker and smooth red brick as accent details. The smooth rendered sign *Waiora* at the centre of the jerkinhead roof bay, a smooth rendered band across the gable ends, and a smooth rendered buttress at the front right corner provide visual relief to the use of roughcast render. Beneath the projecting jerkinhead roof is a large semi-circular arched opening that has a clinker

brick archivolt, that forms a recessed porch over the entry to no. 5. Double-hung sash windows, are boxed, resting on brick corbels and have multi-panes with leadlight detailing on the upper sashes. There is also a small, boxed picture window beside the entrance to 5A. The house is sited near a bend in Mitchell Street, and is on axis with Mitchell Street, closing views along the street when looking southwest, contributing much to the built form character to this portion of the street. The setting of Waiora is complemented by the rendered brick fence relieved in clinker brick cruciform-motifs and clinker brick piers. (Criterion E)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

6. Building towns, cities and the garden state: 6.3 Shaping the suburbs, 6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

5. Buildings and cultural landscapes: 5.2 Shaping the suburbs (5.2.2 Private development), 5.3 Diverse Housing (5.3.3 Suburban bungalows)

History

Contextual history

Private development in the City of Port Phillip began from the time of the first sales of Crown land in the 1840s and 1850s. The gradual development of infrastructure, including roads, public transport networks and utilities, paved the way for increasing development of private land. Private subdivision within the broad framework set out by Hoddle's survey saw neighbourhoods in the City of Port Phillip grow into populated, thriving communities.

The early twentieth century saw a marked decline in the viability of large mansions across Melbourne's suburbs in general, but it was particularly felt in the more affluent inner southern suburbs such as St Kilda and Brighton, where land was highly sought-after by a new generation of homebuilders seeking smaller detached dwellings, duplexes or flats. The trend toward higher-density living in St Kilda began with the conversion of mansions and terrace houses into boarding houses in the early 1900s and continued with the first purpose-built flats that appeared at the beginning of World War I. A 1919 newspaper article noted:

It was held to be no longer necessary to labour with a house and all the domestic drudgery that entailed when by borrowing Continental ideas, people who could afford it could live in flats... Land has become so valuable the villa of the Victorian days, in a crowded thoroughfare, no longer shows anything like an adequate return of interest on the land's present capital value. It is more profitable to pull the house erected thereon down, and to erect flats. When the flat became popular in England the experiment was made in St Kilda, and it did not take long to discover there was a genuine demand for flats (Prahlan Telegraph, 18 October 1919, p.4)

Higher-density housing in the form of boarding houses paved the way to flat development. Flats first appeared in Melbourne around 1906 and slowly spread to the suburbs. They followed a strong pattern of development, appearing close to transport routes, particularly along or within walking distance of tram routes, to allow easy travel to the city. With their proximity to the beach and parklands, good public transport networks and seaside character, the suburbs of St Kilda and Elwood were especially popular locations for flats. Flats became a dominant characteristic of St Kilda and Elwood, and still make up a high percentage of dwellings in those areas. They include some of the earliest surviving flats in Melbourne, some of the best examples of architectural styles and types of flats, and as a group demonstrate the increasing popularity of the lifestyle of flat living from the early twentieth century (TEH).

There was huge growth in flat development in St Kilda and Elwood in the 1920 and 1930s, attracting migrants, single people, and people of diverse sexuality. In 1920 there were 527 purpose-built flats in 92 blocks in St Kilda municipality. By 1925 this had increased to 884 flats in 164 blocks, including large complexes such as the Ardoch flats in Dandenong Road. By 1935, despite a slowing of development due to the Great Depression, there were more than 2,800 flats in over 500 blocks. A further 2,000 flats were added by 1940; however, the onset of World War II slowed development. Nonetheless, by 1947 St Kilda contained 5,500 purpose-built flats, a quarter of all flats in Melbourne (TEH).

Waiora

The area surrounding the St Kilda Botanical Gardens has been a desirable residential neighbourhood since the Gardens were first established in 1860 and by the end of the nineteenth century Blessington, Tennyson, Dickens and Herbert streets were lined with substantial villas, and mansions set in large grounds. By the early twentieth century with the proximity to tram routes, the gardens and the Village Belle shopping centre, this area became a popular location for flats and some of the first flats in St Kilda were built here toward the end of World War I. These included Clarendon, designed by Joseph Plottel and built in 1915 at 26-28 Blessington Street, and two blocks by Howard Lawson at 44 (Clairvaux) and 46 Blessington Street, built in 1917. Some of the early mansions such as St Albans (74 Blessington Street) and Himalaya (10 Tennyson Street) were also converted to flats around this time.

In the nineteenth century this property was the eastern corner of a large triangular shaped allotment on the south side of Mitchell Street, which extended from the bend to Foster Street. By 1860 a two storey villa, later known as Barnefield House, which faced west toward Foster Street, had been built (See Figure 1) and this is the house that survives today on the adjoining property at nos. 3 and 3a (MMBW, RB). By the early 1900s it was known as Ingleside.

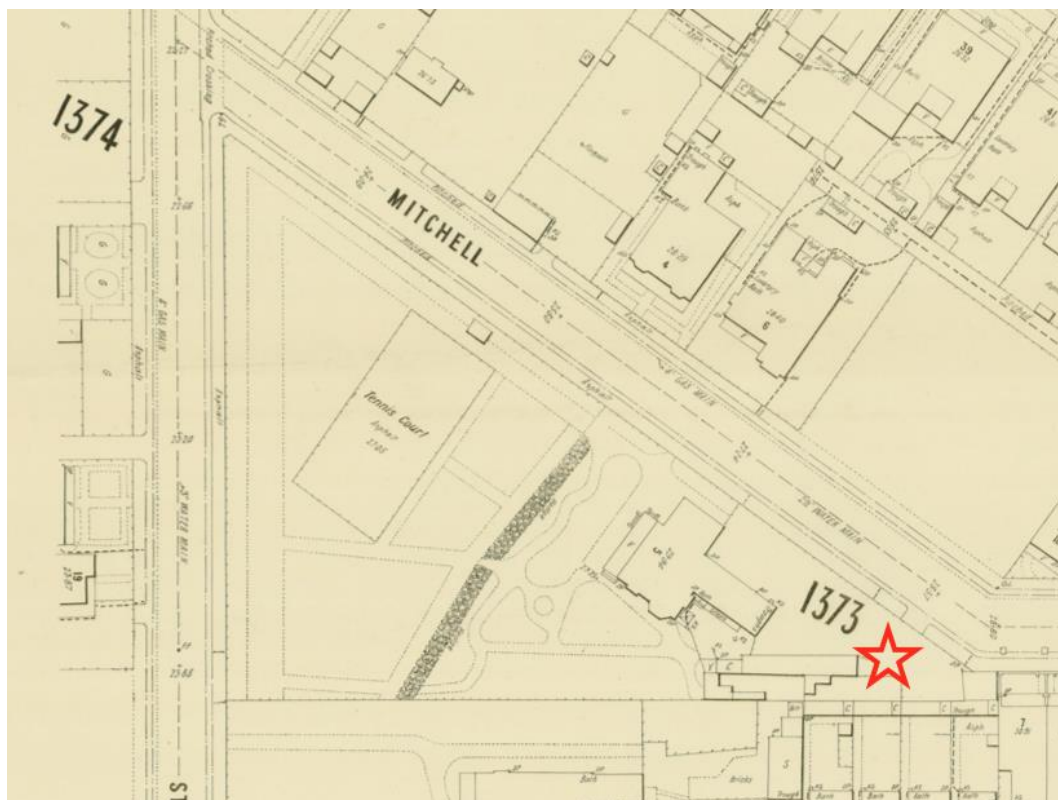


Figure 1 - MMBW Detail Plan 1373 showing Barnefield House in 1897. Red star indicates the location of Waiora

The grounds of Ingleside were reduced by subdivision in the early twentieth century creating four allotments along Foster Street (nos. 2-8), as well as this property and no.1 Mitchell Street with Ingleside between. In February 1926 Ingleside and the two adjoining allotments in Mitchell Street, which were described as 'excellent residential flat sites' being within '2 minutes of 3 tram routes, Picture Theatre, and shops', were offered for sale (*The Argus*, 10 February 1926, p.2).

Builder J.T. Berkley purchased one of the allotments and in May 1926 he obtained a permit for 'brick flats'. B.S.W. Gilbertson, architect & civil engineer, prepared the plans (BP). The flats were constructed as an investment for rental. In 1930 a Miss Youngman was the occupant of 5, with Mrs. Mary Wood at 5A (SM).

B.S.W. Gilbertson

B.S.W. Gilbertson was the St Kilda City Engineer for many years. While employed as City Engineer, he also designed several blocks of flats in St Kilda and Elwood, as well as the additions to the St Kilda Town Hall in 1939. Apart from Waiora his other known buildings in Port Phillip are:

- St Margaret Mansions, 25 Dalgety Street, St Kilda (1925), Conversion of two, three storey Victorian terrace houses into six flats (Citation 883)
- Southey Court, 41 Milton Street, Elwood (1925). Two storey Mediterranean style flat complex. Similar details to Brynmawr and Ormond Court (Citation 2064)
- Brynmawr, 2 Inverleith Court, St Kilda (1926). Mediterranean style flat complex. Similar details to Southey Court (No citation)
- Ormond Court, 1 Glen Huntly Road, Elwood (1926) Mediterranean style flat complex. Similar details to Southey Court. (Citation 411)
- House, 29 Southey Street, Elwood (1926). Two storey house with Arts & Crafts detailing. (No citation)
- Gurner Court, 74 Grey Street, St Kilda (1933). Old English style flats, two-storey around a central courtyard. (No citation).

References

Cuffley, Peter, *Australian houses of the twenties and thirties*, (2nd edition) 2007

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan no.1373, dated 1897

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

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) no. 6425, 7 May 1926

St Kilda Council rate books (RB), 1859 (no. in rate 1786, 1787), 1859-60 (1620 & 1621), 1861-62 (1803)

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1930, 1935, 1940

Description

Waiora is a single-storey, inter-war duplex, which has been designed to be interpreted as a single dwelling. A broad jerkinhead roof projects from the main transverse gable roof of the house with smaller transverse gables set back on both sides. The small transverse gable at right forms a porch over the entry to no. 5A. All of the roofs are clad in unglazed terracotta tiles and have deep eaves supported by timber brackets. The upper portion of the walls are finished in roughcast render (with weatherboards to the upper sections of the gable ends and to the side of the porch) and the lower portions are finished in clinker brick in a stretcher bond, with a central panel of pressed red brick in a soldier course. Other details include a smooth rendered sign *Waiora* at the centre of the jerkinhead roof bay, a smooth rendered band across the gable ends, a smooth rendered buttress at the front right corner. There is one rendered chimney, placed centrally in the roof, in roughcast render with a smooth band and one terracotta pot.

Beneath the jerkinhead roof is a large semi-circular arched opening that forms a recessed porch over the entry to no. 5. This arched opening has an archivolt of clinker brick and a brick balustrade that matches the lower section of the walls. The rear wall of the porch has a pair of double-hung sash windows, and to the either side of the archway are pairs of similar windows with a rendered hood supported by rendered corbels. All these windows are boxed, resting on brick corbels and have multi-panes with leadlight detailing on the upper sashes. There is also a small, boxed picture window beside the entrance to 5A.

The house is sited near a bend in Mitchell Street, and is on axis with Mitchell Street, closing views along the street when looking southwest. The house has a shallow setback from the street. A rendered brick fence,



relieved in clinker brick cruciform-motifs and clinker brick piers extends along the street boundary. The fence has been altered on 5A, the piers increased in height with panels of timber palings between them. A timber paling gate of a similar height extends across the drive for 5A.

The house and fence are in good condition and (except for the fence to 5A) have a very high degree of external intactness.

Comparative analysis

Following the economic depression of the 1890s, there was concern that inner Melbourne was becoming overcrowded. Terrace houses fell out of favour, as they were perceived as being cold and dark with limited garden space. Instead, detached bungalows became the most popular form of housing from the Federation/Edwardian period onward. Despite this, semi-detached houses or 'duplexes' (also called 'villa-flats' by the interwar period) remained popular as a cheaper alternative to a detached house, but with its own private garden space, unlike a conventional flat.

One of the most popular housing styles in suburban Melbourne during the inter-war period was the 'bungalow' and according to Cuffley (1989:48) 'it gained almost universal acceptance in Australia as the ideal style for the average suburban house'. In this style of house, the roof plays an important part in the composition and is sometimes extended to form porches supported by heavy piers of stone or brick, occasionally in combination with wood. Depending on the detailing and pitch of the roof sub-categories could include California Bungalow, Craftsman Bungalow (characterised by its steeper roof) or Australian Bungalow (Cuffley 1989:59-62). The term Australian Bungalow (as used by Cuffley) indicates 'the degree of local identity ... which had evolved from the American Type and other less direct influences'. Cuffley (1989:62) goes on to say that:

Substantial bungalow residences in Australian suburbs of the period 1910 to 1940 show less and less of the horizontal character and low-pitched gables of the California or Pasadena type and more of the Craftsman or Middle West influences. Often there are additional Old English details such as half timbered gables and leadlight windows.

Single-storey semi-detached pairs or duplexes of the Edwardian and interwar periods fall into one of two distinct types. Most commonly, they were designed as symmetrical pair, each half forming a mirror-reversal of the other in its composition, fenestration, and detailing. An alternative approach was to 'disguise' the building as a single dwelling – this includes both asymmetrical and symmetrical types. Less common were examples where a distinct architectural expression was adopted for each house (for example, 20 & 22A Foam Street, Elwood, Citation 1488).

The symmetrical types typically have a prominent gable-ended bay to the street that often makes no attempt to express the physical division between the two halves. There are numerous examples throughout Elwood, including several on the north side of Mason Avenue (nos. 6-8, 22-24 and 34-36), and others such as 4-6 McRae Street, 20-22 Byron Street, and 83-85 Mitford Street that are all simply representative of their type and era. Of this type, the examples at 17-19 Havelock Street, St Kilda (Citation 2009) and 80-82 Chaucer Street, St Kilda (Citation 875) stand out above the norm for their particularly fine decorative detailing.

Waiora is a fine and intact example of an asymmetric inter-war duplex in the Bungalow style, which has been designed to appear as a single dwelling. Of note is the relatively high integrity, which includes the original unpainted render and brick details and the original front fence. It compares well with others including 12-14 and 16-18 Alma Grove (designed by architect, Joseph Plottel), 132-132A Alma Road, St Kilda East (designed and built by Dunlop & Hunt Home Builders in 1926) and 4-6, 7-9 & 8-10 Palm Court, St Kilda East. Another comparison is Farnley, the duplex at 8 Foster Street, which has been marred by an inappropriate colour scheme that includes overpainting of the original rendered finishes.

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

Retain in the Heritage Overlay with paint controls.

Primary source

Peter Andrew Barrett, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations*, 2021

Other studies

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

Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, *St Kilda 20th century architectural study*, Volume 3, 1992

Other images



Waiora in 1998 showing the original front fence to 5A.

