

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Darjeeling  
**Other names:** Flats

**Citation No:**  
**1490**



**Address:** 15 Foster Street, St Kilda

**Category:** Residential: Flats

**Style:** Interwar: Arts & Crafts

**Constructed:** 1924

**Designer:** H.V. Gillespie

**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?*

Darjeeling, designed by H.V. Gillespie and constructed in 1924 at 15 Foster Street, St Kilda is significant to the City of Port Phillip. Darjeeling is a two-storey block of flats, designed in a distinct interpretation of the Arts & Crafts style. The front and side fence and lych gate also contribute to the significance of the place.

The single storey addition to the north side, and the two-storey addition to the west side, and the garage, are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

Darjeeling at 15 Foster Street, St Kilda is of local aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

Darjeeling is of aesthetic significance as a distinct example of the Arts & Crafts style, designed by the prominent architect, H.V. Gillespie. Darjeeling demonstrates prime characteristics of Gillespie's work, which is defined by a carefree fragmentation of forms and detailing applied to elevations; giving an impression of a 'loose fit' between the various parts of the composition which are applied in a casual, if not quirky, manner. These elements include the use of prow and curved forms, arched and rectilinear wall openings, and bands of clinker brickwork that relieves the large areas of roughcast render walls. These elements work to tie the mixed ensemble together, as a distinct Arts & Crafts composition. Other detailing of note is the chimney expressed in the wall on the elevation facing Foster Avenue, with its cruciform

smooth render detail at top; and a diagonal buttress at one corner. The setting of Darjeeling is complemented by the front and side fence and lych gate. (Criterion E)

Darjeeling is of associative significance, as the residence of H.V. Gillespie during the 1920s and 1930s, when he designed several buildings in St Kilda. This association is clearly demonstrated in the distinctive architecture of Darjeeling, which is particularly characteristic of Gillespie's residential work. (Criterion H)

## 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 (5.3.5 Higher-density housing)

## History

### Contextual history

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 (Pahran 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).

## Darjeeling

The area surrounding the St Kilda Botanic 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 constructed 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 late nineteenth century, the west side of Foster Street was partially developed and contained several detached villas. In the early twentieth century, these were all replaced with flats, while one property was subdivided to create Foster Avenue.

Following the Foster Avenue subdivision, Darjeeling, a two-storey duplex containing two flats (one on each level) was constructed in 1924 on the north corner of the two streets. Each flat comprised a generous entrance which opened to a large bedroom, lounge, and kitchen. The bathroom and a 'sleepout' were accessed via the kitchen. Unusually, the building as constructed 'flipped' the design shown on the original plans (see Figure 1) (BP).

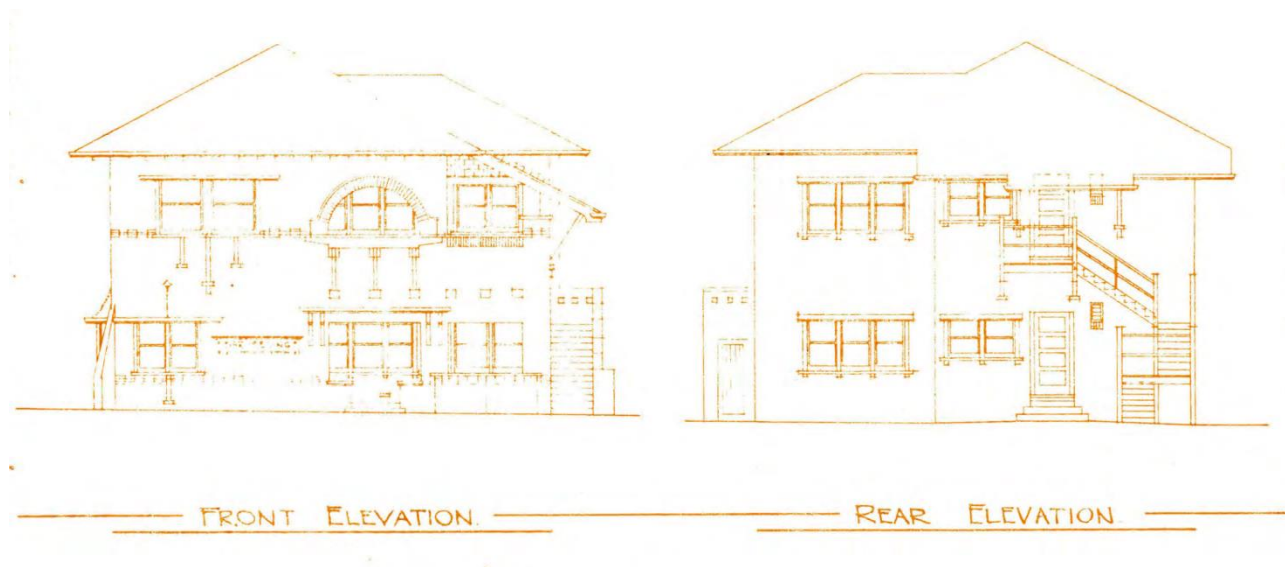


Figure 1 – Original elevation plans show a mirror image of the building, as constructed, with the stairs on the north side. The internal layout was similarly 'flipped'. (Source: Port Phillip building file)

H.V. Gillespie was the architect and the owner of the property (BP), and by October 1924, when his son Marcus was born, he and his wife, Bertha, were living in one of the flats. The birth notice identified their address as 'Darjeeling, Foster Street, St Kilda' (*The Argus*, 29 October 1924, p.11 'Family Notices'). Directories indicate Gillespie was still living at Darjeeling in 1940, but by 1945 (one year before his death) it was tenanted (SM).

In 2002, the building, still comprising two flats, was sold and in the following year alterations and additions were made to convert the building to a single residence, which included a two-storey addition at the rear. The garage was altered and extended at the same time. The 2003 plans also show that two rooms had previously been added on the north side of the building.

## H.V. Gillespie

Harold Vernon Gillespie (1888-1946), architect, was elected as an Associate of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1921. He was a specialist in factory and hotel buildings, but most of his buildings in the City

of Port Phillip were residential and he is represented by several distinctive houses and flats, and at least one commercial development, most dating from the decade after World War I. His buildings of the 1920s are highly individual and while they often drawn on disparate architectural motifs, most demonstrate the strong influence of the Arts & Crafts style. Other buildings by Gillespie in Port Phillip are:

- Windsor Court, 24-26 Robe Street, St Kilda (1920). Conversion of a former hotel and terrace houses to flats. Arts & Crafts detailing (Citation 793)
- San Remo, 354 Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda West (1923). Conversion of existing house to flats. Similar details to Darjeeling (Citation 420)
- House, 44 Mary Street, St Kilda West (1924) First floor additions to an existing house (Citation 449)
- House, garage and fence, 38 Eildon Road, St Kilda (1927). Large attic residence with Arts & Crafts details (Citation 903)
- Moira, 16 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea (1936). Two storey house showing influences of the Moderne and Mediterranean styles (Citation 1497)

## References

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan no.1374, dated 1897

O'Hanlon, Seamus, 'Home together, Home apart: Boarding house, hostel and flat life in Melbourne c.1900-1940', PhD Thesis, History Department, Monash University

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

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) no. 5626, 20 February 1924

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1925, 1930, 1935, 1940, 1944

Sawyer, Terry, (1982) 'Residential flats in Melbourne: the development of a building type to 1950', Honours thesis, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne

## Description

Darjeeling is a two-storey, inter-war, Arts & Crafts inspired block of two flats (one flat on each level), which has a tile hip roof with exposed timber rafters on the eaves, and roughcast render walls. The house is sited in a mature, densely planted garden, which has created a recessive quality to Darjeeling when it is viewed from its two street boundaries. Enhancing the relationship of the house and its landscape setting, are the large balcony areas on the southeast corner of the flats.

Extending around the street boundaries, at front, is a rendered brick fence. The pairs of plain timber elements extending between roughcast render piers with smooth copings may have been added. A lych gate, detailed with high rendered piers, detailed in a similar manner to the fence, is adjacent to the Foster Street/Avenue corner. It has paired timber boards with splayed ends that extend over the gateway, which is formed by piers. One of these timber boards were replaced in the 2002 works. There are wrought iron gates fixed to the piers of the gateway.

The façade of Darjeeling is asymmetrically composed, with L-shaped recessed verandahs on both levels at left. The verandah on the upper level is accessed by an external stair that returns. A ridge of the hip roof extends to form a catslide roof supported by diagonal timber brackets, that covers the stairs and part of the upper verandah. There is a semi-circular wall opening to the upper verandah, its archivolt detailed in clinker brick and above this a rendered moulding. The front door of the flat on the upper level is accessed from this verandah. Also on the upper level of the façade is a prow window, its base supported by timber brackets in a staggered configuration. Below this window, on the ground floor is a curved bay window, also supported by a timber bracket. At the adjacent corner is a diagonal buttress. There are two wall openings to the verandah on the lower level, one with a prow form the other with a more conventional rectilinear wall opening. There is a rendered panel with the name *Darjeeling* on the lower level of the façade.

The side elevation visible from Foster Avenue is less complex in its massing and detailing. A chimney is expressed in one bay, which has a stepped effect in places that is detailed with diagonal and curved forms.



The top of the chimney has a smooth rendered cruciform pattern. The roughcast rendered walls of this elevation are relieved in places with a hit and miss pattern of clinker brick, and soldier courses of clinker brick form the tops of the balustrade of the upper level verandah.

At rear, there is a sympathetic two-storey addition that references the materiality and detailing on the front of the house. This was completed in 2002. The garage was also rebuilt during this time. An earlier single-storey brick addition, with a concealed steel deck roof, has been built on the north side of the house.

The building is in good condition.

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## Comparative analysis

The Arts & Crafts style is characterized by features including the use of contrasting textures and materials on facades (such as face brick, roughcast render, timber shingles and brackets to gables); entrance porches beneath the main roof supported on heavy battered piers or paired timber posts or columns resting on low piers; simple, geometric decoration created by projecting bricks or small voids (e.g., hit and miss brick walls); box windows (with timber frames that project from the wall, resting on timber or brick corbels) and semi-circular windows and openings.

There are many examples of Arts & Crafts style flats in St Kilda, several of which were designed by the prominent designer/builder Howard R. Lawson such as Wimmera (1917) and Clairvaux (1917). Biltmore (Dunlop & Hunt, 1922-23), which is included on the Victorian Heritage Register, is another fine Arts & Crafts design with Oriental influences.

Darjeeling demonstrates prime characteristics of the work of its architect, H.V. Gillespie, and his unique interpretation of the Arts & Crafts style which is an almost careless fragmentation of the forms of his buildings; an impression of 'loose fit' between the parts of the composition which are then resolved by a casual use of elements, such as chains, columns and bands of feature brickwork to tie the whole design together.

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## 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.

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## Recommendations

Retain in the Heritage Overlay with paint controls.

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## 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 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural study*, Volume 3, 1992

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## Other images



