

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Mandalay
Other names: Flats

Citation No:
396



Address: 17A Albion Street, Balaclava

Heritage Precinct: Brunnings Estate & Environs

Category: Residential: Flats

Heritage Overlay: HO7

Style: Interwar: Old English

Graded as: Significant

Constructed: 1934

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Designer: James H. Wardrop

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Significance

What is significant?

Mandalay, the block of flats designed by James H. Wardrop, and built in 1934 at 17A Albion Street, Balaclava, is significant. Designed in an Old English-style Mandalay is two-storey and L-shaped in plan, with a hip and gable roof clad in glazed terracotta tiles and rendered walls with brick accents. The low clinker brick front fence, with soldier courses along its top between plain piers, also contributes to the significance of the place.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Mandalay at 17A Albion Street, Balaclava is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Mandalay is of aesthetic significance as a distinctive and well-detailed example of the Old English-style. Of note is the use of decorative brickwork including clinker brick with quoining, soldier courses, semi-circular and square-panels of tapestry brickwork, and brick surrounds around wall openings, and the prow-shaped oriel window on the first floor of the front elevation, which is a distinct element and an uncommon approach to the design of a projecting bay window. Other windows are timber frame double-hung sashes, expressed as more conventional wall openings on elevations. The series of projecting gables, with centrally placed corbelled chimneys along the west elevation creates a picturesque effect, and on this elevation the

proportion of render and face brickwork is reversed, with render used more sparingly. The setting of Mandalay is complemented by the low front fence that references the materiality of the flats. (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 (5.3.5 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 (Prahman 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).

Mandalay Flats

The first flats in Brighton Road were constructed at the end of World War I. One of the first was Yurnga, designed by local architect Harry R. Johnson, which was built in 1920 at the south corner of Brunning

Street directly opposite the cable tram terminus. The electrification of the Brighton Road cable tram and its extension, by 1926, from the terminus in Brunning Street, Balaclava to Glen Huntly Road in Elsternwick encouraged the building of flats along the route and in adjoining streets. Between 1926 and 1941 no fewer than 21 blocks were constructed in Brighton Road between Carlisle Street and Glen Huntly Road and many more in the adjoining streets.

The Mandalay flats at 17A Albion Street were built in 1934 by builder J.A. Trencher for S. Golding.

James H. Wardrop was the architect for Mandalay. A newspaper article explained how the flats were 'an attempt to cater for tenants with moderate incomes by giving them the amenities and conveniences of more luxurious flats', adding:

The old idea of flat life in cheap tenements, where each tenant knew exactly what his neighbour was doing at any time and privacy was practically unknown, has definitely passed, and even the cheapest flat today must have the character of a private home. (The Herald, 28 February 1934, p.16 'Flats for tenants with moderate incomes').

References

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. 8505, 6 March 1934

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1935-1940

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

Mandalay is two-storey block of inter-war flats in the Old English style, L-shape in plan, and with a hip and gable roof clad in glazed terracotta tiles. The front elevation of the flats is finished in render, overlaid with brick detailing expressed as quoining, soldier courses, semi-circular and square-panels of tapestry brickwork, and brick surrounds around wall openings. However, it is the prow-shaped oriel window on the first floor of the front elevation that is the most distinct and unusual element of the flats. Other windows are timber sash with multi-paned upper frames. On the west elevation, which features a series of projecting gables with centrally placed corbelled chimneys, the proportion of render and face brickwork is reversed, with render used more sparingly. The face brickwork of the east (side) elevation has been overpainted.

The flats have a shallow set back from the street boundary. A low brick fence of clinker brick, with soldier courses along its top between plain piers, extends along the street boundary. A pedestrian entrance is adjacent to the side boundary at right, and a drive extends along the other side setback and under a rear wing of the flats to a paved rear yard.

The building is in good condition and has a relatively high degree of external intactness.

Comparative analysis

James H. Wardrop's career in Port Phillip is represented by several houses and flats, and a church hall, all built during the 1930s. His buildings were mainly in the Old English style, sometimes combined with Moderne detailing. Many of his buildings are distinguished by patterned and decorative brickwork.

Old English Revival, which included Tudor and Medieval influences, was a popular style for residential buildings of the interwar period and there are many examples in Port Phillip. It is characterised by red and clinker bricks, brick nogging and half-timbering, tiled roofs with steeply pitched gables, and highly modelled brick chimneys. Massing and details are picturesquely asymmetrical, as were window types, ranging from

arches, standard casements and oriels, with multiple panes (often with diamond leadlights). Front fences are low and often in clinker bricks.

Early examples, in the late 1910s and 1920s tended to have gabled roofs and half timbering or brick nogging in gables. By the mid-1930s, most examples had hipped main roofs accented by vergeless gables, and walls and gables were entirely of brick enlivened by patterning in multiple colours.

The earliest use of the style in Port Phillip was in the flat conversion known as Hampden, 74 Barkly Street, St Kilda designed by Arthur W. Plaisted and constructed in 1919-20 (HO370, Citation 405). Plaisted also designed one of the finest examples, Hartpury Court (1923) at 9-11 Milton Street, Elwood (included on the Victorian Heritage Register, VHR H797, Citation 381), as well as the house Limerick Lodge (1927) at 58 Brighton Road, Ripponlea (Citation 306).

Other Old English flats within the HO in Port Phillip mostly date from the 1930s and include include Surrey Court (J. Esmond Dorney, 1933), 71 Ormond Road, Elwood (Citation 362), Astolat (Leslie J.W. Reed, 1934), 301 Carlisle Street, Balaclava (Significant within HO316 precinct, Citation 317), Flats (Marsh & Michaelson, 1936) 628 St Kilda Road, Melbourne (Citation 928), Clovelly (Joseph Plottel, 1938) 136 Alma Road, St Kilda East (Citation 400) and Eildon Close (Bernard Evans, 1940) 7-9 Eildon Road, St Kilda (Citation 896).

Mandalay is one of three blocks of flats designed by Wardrop in the early 1930s that express his distinct interpretation of the Old English style. They have rendered walls, overlaid with brick detailing expressed as quoining, soldier courses, semi-circular and square-panels of tapestry brickwork (reminiscent of brick 'nogging' in traditional Tudor architecture) and brick surrounds around wall openings. The others are Camelot Court (1933) at 1 Wimbledon Avenue, Elwood and 4A Meredith Street, Elwood (1934-35). At Camelot Court, the brick detailing is much simpler and lacks the brick panels, while 4A, built after Mandalay has similar complexity. In later examples by Wardrop such as Zaneth Manor (1935-36) only face brick is used, the Old English influences are more abstracted and Moderne influences are evident. Compared to these examples, Mandalay is distinguished by the oriel window to the façade, and the picturesque massing of the side elevation with its succession of gables and hipped roofs and corbelled chimneys.

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, *HO7 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

