

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Camberley
Other names: Flats

Citation No:
2063



Address: 17A Milton Street, Elwood

Heritage Precinct: St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs

Category: Residential: Flats

Heritage Overlay: **HO7**

Style: Interwar: Old English

Graded as: Significant

Constructed: 1934-36

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Designer: H.D. Berry

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Significance

What is significant?

Camberley, the flats designed by H.D. Berry and constructed in 1934-36, at 17A Milton Street, Elwood are significant. Camberley is a large, three-storey, complex of brick flats, designed in a restrained Old English-style, of a U-shaped plan around a broad and deep central courtyard. The low brick boundary fence to two street frontages, and the two-storey rear garage wing with a transverse gable roof, also contribute to the significance of this place.

Non-original alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Camberley at 17A Milton Street, Elwood is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Camberley is of historical and representative significance as an early bachelor flat development, which catered specifically for single people. The U-plan around a large central courtyard also demonstrates improvements in flat design. It demonstrates the improvements made to flat design in response to issues with early flats including the poor relationship of flats to the external space, a lack of privacy and the unsuitability of flats for families. Maisonettes, built over two levels and with a separate entrance and private internal stairs, provided an attractive alternative to conventional flats, as they were larger, but without the cost and upkeep commonly associated with detached housing. Here, the use of maisonettes has been

combined with a courtyard plan to provide an attractive landscape setting for each unit, as well a greater level of privacy and communal outdoor space to its residents (Criterion A)

Camberley is of aesthetic significance as a large, three-storey complex of brick bachelor flats, designed in an Old English-style and built around a broad and deep central landscaped courtyard. The flats have form, materiality and detailing synonymous with this style, with gable roof forms clad in terracotta tiles, diamond-shaped glazing in upper window sashes, and clinker brick face brick walls with panels of tapestry brick - a fine example of this being the subtle arrow-shaped panels of brickwork. These, with the narrow bays facing Milton Street, give a sense of verticality to the end bays of Camberley. The Tennyson Street elevation, and the other side elevation of the flats, have similar materiality as the front, but are less formal in their compositional arrangement, and more restrained in their detailing. The setting of the flats is complemented by the low brick front fence. (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 (PPHR, Vol. I, p.34). 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. 370 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).

Camberley, 17A Milton Street

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 constructed in 1920 at the south corner of Brunning Street directly opposite the cable tram terminus. The electrification of the cable tram in Brighton Road 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 nearby streets. Between 1926 and 1941 no fewer than 21 blocks were constructed in Brighton Road between Carlisle Street and Glen Huntly Road with many more in the adjoining streets.

Camberley was constructed in two stages for W. Cummings. The first stage was completed by December 1934, and the second wing was constructed in 1936, which increased the number of flats to 26. A newspaper article described the building as containing 'bachelor flats' comprising one bedroom, a living room, kitchen and bathroom. H.D. Berry was the architect (*Argus*, 'Architecture & Property: Flats are still popular', 4 June 1936, p.9).

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 permits (BP) nos. 8619, 6 July 1934; 8929, 18 June 1935

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

Camberley is a large, three-storey, complex of inter-war brick flats, designed in a restrained Old English-style, at the southeast corner of Milton and Tennyson streets.

The Milton Street elevation is symmetrically composed of a U-shaped plan around a broad and deep central courtyard. The two wings of the flats that project towards Milton Street have vergeless transverse gable roofs clad in glazed terracotta tiles. There is a slightly projecting gable bay on each of these wings, with a chimney expressed at centre, with an arrow shaped panel of tapestry brick. This detail, and other details using clinker brick, give a verticality to the flats. Single double-hung sash windows, with clinker brick details at their heads and cills, flank the chimneys. Clinker brick is also used to form corbels on the eaves on each gable end. To the side of the projecting gable bay is a narrower bay below the transverse gable roof, which has pairs of double-hung sash windows at each level, also with a clinker brick detail at their heads and cills.

Two gable bays are at the end of the courtyard at centre, each with a balcony to their side. Stairwells that lead off the central courtyard have long narrow vertical windows of leadlight glass. Other detailing on the stairwells include a stepped parapet, and external lighting above the entrances that have a luminaire with *Camberley* written upon them. Elsewhere, the flats have well-detailed glazing, with diamond-shaped panes of glass on the upper sashes of the double-hung sash windows facing Milton Street and the central courtyard.

The Tennyson Street elevation and the other side elevation of the flats have similar materiality to the front, but are less formal in their compositional arrangement, and more restrained in their detailing.



At the rear of the flats, facing Tennyson Street, is a two-storey wing with a transverse gable roof, with three garages at its base. A drive extends from Tennyson Street along the boundary to another garage/outbuilding, which has a drying area upon its flat roof. The low brick fence that extends along the Milton and Tennyson street boundaries has brickwork that is consistent with the flats and is most probably original.

Comparative analysis

Old English

Old English, 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 the use of 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).

Camberley is a very simple and pared back example of the style, which is demonstrated by details such as the vergeless gables, use of clinker brick accents including 'nogging' to the tall chimneys and as lintels and gable brackets, and diamond pane leadlight glass.

Bachelor and Minimum flats

Camberley is also an example of the 'Bachelor' and 'Minimum' flats, which became increasingly popular during the 1930s. Best Overend is often credited with introducing the concept of the 'Minimum Flat' to Australia. Overend had worked in London with Wells Coates, the English architect responsible for the concept of the 'Minimum Flat', which sought to offer space, economy and modernity with minimum rentals. In Melbourne, Overend demonstrated this concept with Cairo Flats, which was constructed in 1936. The 'Minimum Flat' at Cairo comprised a living room, bathroom/dressing room, and kitchenette incorporating a built in dining nook. In addition, there were eight 'Bachelor' flats with a separate bedroom and more spacious lounge.

While Cairo is often described as the first true 'Minimum Flat' development in Melbourne there were earlier examples with similar qualities. In the City of Port Phillip, Harry R. Johnson's Yurunga (1920) at 36 Brighton Road, Balaclava (Citation 302) included six bed-sit or studio flats which consisted of a kitchen, bathroom, dressing room and living room; however, until the 1930s these remained the exception rather than the rule in most flats, which predominantly contained two or three bedrooms. With the exception of some early duplex flats (for example, Darjeeling at 15 Foster Street, St Kilda, Citation 1490). Camberley, commenced in 1934, was one of the first (if not the first) to comprise an entire block of single bedroom flats in Port Phillip. Two years later (at the same time as Cairo) Mewton and Grounds designed Bellaire at 3

Cowderoy Street, St Kilda (Citation 877) and Woy Woy at 77 Marine Parade, Elwood (Citation 2055), which each contain single bedroom flats and are, in planning, are much closer to the 'Minimum Flat' concept and demonstrate the radical Modernist concepts Mewton brought back with him from a period of work and travel in America and Europe (where he was strongly influenced by the architecture of Dudok).

Courtyard flats

According to Sawyer (1992:13-4) the shortage of houses and the desire for smaller, more manageable homes had been a factor in the development of flats, but a common criticism of early flat developments was the poor relationship of the building to its external space, together with a lack of privacy. In many early flat developments, the site coverage was very high, and the open space left over was not integrated with the building and of little practical use. In 1922 architect James H. Wardrop, a proponent of flat development argued that aggregation of open spaces in flat developments would provide '... a decent breathing space' when compared with the 'mean yard space' available to the conventional small cottage (Sawyer 1982:83).

This led architects and developers to seek alternatives such as the 'Bungalow Court' concept, which was introduced as early as 1916 when it was described in an article in the *Real Property Annual*. The one and two roomed units were grouped around a U-shaped courtyard in pairs with no fences or hedges between them. However, Sawyer (1992:14) concludes that 'the old concern with lack of privacy once again surfaced and the concept does not appear to have gained a ready acceptance in Australia at this time'. Nonetheless, the 'Bungalow Court' concept did eventually evolve into the courtyard flat types, where flats were grouped around a semi-enclosed garden court.

The 'garden court' or courtyard approach to flat planning began to emerge in some better quality flat developments by the early 1920s. Sawyer (1982:82-83) identifies Joseph Plottel's Garden Court, built c.1918 in Marne Street, South Yarra as an early attempt to integrate flats with garden areas. Garden Court is built in a shallow U-shape with the open side facing Marne Street; however, the area was small and was separated from the flats themselves by accessways or balconies. The concept of a central courtyard was developed further by Arthur Plaisted in his designs for Hampden (1919) in Barkly Street, St Kilda (Citation 405) and Hartpury Court (1923) in Milton Street, Elwood (Citation 381). At the former, a Victorian house was extended with projecting wings to create a central garden area, while at Hartpury Court an L-shaped block was placed at one side of the garden of a Victorian era mansion, which was retained on the opposite side. At Hartpury Court the flats had an unimpeded view over the gardens as the stairs and accessways were placed within the building itself (ibid).

Following on from these early precedents Hawsleigh Court, 2B Hawsleigh Court, Balaclava designed by architect Hugh Philp in 1928 appears to be the earliest example of a complete U-plan courtyard type in Port Phillip and demonstrates a conscious and deliberate approach by the architect to improve the amenity of the flats by providing direct access to and views of the outdoor space (see Citation 2010). Alcazar, built one year later at 3 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea comprises six maisonettes and two single-level flats around a semi-enclosed courtyard (Citation 327). Later examples include the two blocks of flats directly built directly opposite Hawsleigh Court in the early 1930s, as well as Camberley, 17A Milton Street, Elwood (1934-36, Citation 2063), Tudor Close, 7-9 Eildon Road, St Kilda (1940, Citation 896), and Glen Eagles, Kinross and Kinfauns, 58-60 Queens Road, Melbourne (1940-42, Citation 2226).

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 images



