

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Arawa
Other names: Flats

Citation No:
912



Address: 15 Wimbledon Avenue,
Elwood

Heritage Precinct: St Kilda
Botanical Gardens & Environs

Category: Residential: Flats

Heritage Overlay: **HO7**

Style: Interwar: Mediterranean

Graded as: Significant

Constructed: 1932

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Designer: H. Welstead

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Significance

What is significant?

Arawa, including the flats and front fence designed and built by H. Welstead in 1932, at 15 Wimbledon Avenue, Elwood is significant.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Arawa at 15 Wimbledon Avenue, Elwood is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Arawa is of aesthetic significance as a rare surviving example of an interwar flat building with original exterior finishes and materials. The simple symmetrical massing with deep central balconies is enhanced by the subtle contrast between the unpainted render and the clinker brick details and features, which includes the original front fence. (Criteria B & 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 (Prahra 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).

Place history

Wimbledon Avenue, together with Hennessy Avenue, was created in the early 1920s following the subdivision of two mansion estates: Wimbledon and Rothermere. Unlike some other mansions, both survived and have been converted to flats: Wimbledon at 2 Wimbledon Avenue, and Rothermere at 14 Hennessy Avenue. The first house in Wimbledon Avenue was constructed in 1920, and the first block of flats was erected at the corner of Hennessy Avenue in 1926. By 1940 the street was almost completely built up.

With the proximity to shopping, the electric tram route and the St Kilda Botanical Gardens, Wimbledon Avenue was a popular location for flats and eight blocks were built here during the interwar period, most clustered around the intersection with Hennessy Avenue.

In 1932, builder H. Welstead of Brighton designed and built two, two-storey blocks of flats on lots 10 and 11 sited on the bend in Wimbledon Avenue. Known as Arawa (no.15) and Regno (no.17) each contained

four, two-bedroom flats with private balconies, and seven garages were provided in the southwest corner accessed by a driveway between the flats (BP).

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. 8027, 23 March 1932

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

Arawa at 15 Wimbledon Avenue, Elwood is a two-storey interwar building containing four flats. It has a prominent hipped tile roof with deep flat eaves and the symmetrical façade features centrally placed deep balconies that project slightly from the main façade but are contained under the main roof. The balconies have fluted Tuscan columns (round to first floor and square below) and are flanked by boxed horizontal tripartite timber sash windows. Entry to the first-floor flats is via external stairs at sides which have porches over the landing formed as an extension of the main roof. The walls are finished in original unpainted render with clinker brick details and accents including a dado to sill height (forming balustrades to the ground floor balconies), quoining, corbelled windowsills and originally as supports for window boxes (all of the boxes have been removed), stair treads and pillars, coping to balconies and for the chimneys, which are simple corbelling. The same clinker brick is used for the original low brick front fence.

Arawa is in good condition and has very high external integrity. The only visible change has been the presumed removal of the window boxes, for which the corbelled supports survive.

Regno on the opposite corner has similar form and detailing. Also symmetrical in plan, it has projecting hipped bays at either end, with the balconies contained within the recessed bay between. However, the original unpainted render and brick details have been overpainted, impacting upon its integrity and presentation.

The original garages survive in an altered state in the rear southwest corner.

Comparative analysis

While Arawa is a typical example of interwar flats, it is notable for the high degree of external integrity, which includes the original unpainted render and brickwork. This is now rare within Port Phillip. Other examples with original unpainted render finishes once included Mimi, 20 Eildon Road, St Kilda (Citation 898) and Southwold, 57 Acland Street, St Kilda (Citation 391), but the original render finish at Mimi has been replaced, and Southwold has been overpainted.

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 as a Significant place within the St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs precinct.

Primary source

City of Port Phillip, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations (Part 2)*, 2022

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



Arawa, c.1998 (Source: Port Phillip Heritage Review)



Detail of the east staircase