

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Carmel and San Bernards
Other names: House, duplex

Citation No:
373

Citation map TBA



Address: 36 & 38 Tennyson Street, Elwood

Category: Residential: House, duplex

Style: Interwar: Spanish Mission

Constructed: 1929, 1935

Designer: Gordon J. Sutherland

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?

Carmel and San Bernards, designed by architect Gordon J. Sutherland in 1929 and 1935, respectively, for Bernard Harrison, at 36 and 38 Tennyson Street, Elwood are significant. The front fences to both properties contribute to the significance of the place.

Alterations and additions including the 1945 additions to San Bernards are not significant.

How is it significant?

Carmel and San Bernards at 36 and 38 Tennyson Street, Elwood are of local aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Carmel is of aesthetic significance as fine and well-detailed example of the Spanish Mission-style with characteristic and distinctive detailing including the use of Cordoba tiles for the roofs and wall capping, roughcast render walls, wrought iron work, and dovecote chimneys. It is notable for:

- The bold and picturesque massing that responds to the corner location, achieving diagonal symmetry about the corner emphasised by the valley of the roof and the dominant truncated gable treatments.
- The porch, which has a parapet capped with Cordoba tiles and decorated with ornamental vigas above arched openings with twisted Baroque half columns and elaborate wrought iron work containing the monogram 'JB', believed to be the first name initials of the original owners, a detail that is repeated in the stucco medallion in the balustrade.

- The ornate Baroque-influenced stuccowork to the paired timber sash windows to the projecting bays, which also have scroll pattern leadlight upper panes and scalloped timber hoods.

Carmel is complemented by San Bernards that shares similar Spanish Mission style materiality and detailing and has distinctive details including the wrought iron light fitting to the top of the arched porch opening with 'San Bernards' etched into the glass fitting, the series of three arched windows stepping up from the side of the porch to the parapeted stairwell and the treatment of the shallow projecting window bay. The two buildings are unified by the similar front fences, which feature ornate wrought iron balustrades. (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.

Mansion estates – large detached homes on generous allotments – defined early, permanent housing in Elwood and St Kilda, in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the oldest surviving houses in Elwood – such as Vautier House, built in the mid-1850s – are terrace houses, it was mansions on large allotments that came to characterise the neighbourhood in its early years. The estates were located in four distinct clusters: St Kilda Hill; the semi-rural estates occupying the high ground on the south side of Dandenong Road from the Nepean Road (now St Kilda Road) to Orrong Road; those surrounding the St Kilda Botanical Gardens and along Brighton Road; and the remote 'sea-side' estates along Ormond Esplanade. Kearney's 1855 map of the area shows the contrast between dense residential development in St Kilda, and the large mansion estates to the east of the Nepean Road including Charnwood and Marlton, south of Carlisle Street (then known as Beach Road), and on both sides of Brighton Road, including Erindale and Chiverton, and Bramshaw, Osborne House and Wiltonia further south (TEH).

As demand for housing grew, mansion estate subdivisions commenced as early as the 1870s when part of the Charnwood Estate in St Kilda was subdivided to create Charnwood Crescent and Charnwood Grove, where detached villas were erected. The original mansion often survived the first two rounds of subdivision, only to be demolished by the interwar or post-war periods. Those that were retained on much smaller blocks of land were rarely used as single dwellings. Instead, many were converted into boarding houses or flats and this often ensured their survival.

Significant population growth after World War I created a demand for housing, leading to the subdivision (or re-subdivision) of the remaining pockets of vacant or underdeveloped land in the City of Port Phillip. This included vacant land previously thought to be unsuitable for housing, such as in Fishermans Bend, as well as the re-development of the remaining mansion estates. Apart from the mansion estate subdivisions,

there were two major interwar subdivisions at either end of the City of Port Phillip: The 'Garden City' estates in Port Melbourne and the Brunnings Estate subdivision in Ripponlea.

Place history

The development of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens from c.1860 led to the surrounding area becoming a desirable residential neighbourhood. By the end of the nineteenth century Blessington, Tennyson, Dickens and Herbert streets were lined with substantial villas, and mansions set in large grounds.

In 1891 a 45-room mansion, originally known as Rotherfield, was built on the east side of Tennyson Street south of Dickens Street for prominent businessman Joseph Cowen Syme in 1890-91 at a cost of £8,000. David C. Askew of Twentyman & Askew was the architect. Rotherfield was subdivided in 1926. The mansion was retained on a much-reduced allotment at 14 Hennessy Avenue (see Citation 336) and 15 new building lots were created on the extensions to Hennessy Avenue, which curved around the mansion, and Wimbledon Avenue, as well as along the Tennyson Street frontage.

Bernard Harrison purchased the allotments on the south corner of Hennessy Avenue. The allotments extended from Tennyson Street to Wimbledon Avenue and between 1927 and 1936 Harrison had four buildings erected on his land, three of which were designed by Gordon J. Sutherland:

- The first was Neville Court, the flats at the corner of Wimbledon Avenue designed by Sutherland in 1927 (BP).
- In 1929 Sutherland designed Harrison's own two-storey residence at the south corner of Hennessy Avenue and Tennyson Street (BP). The house was named 'Carmel' (*The Herald*, 13 March 1934, p.13).
- In 1935 Sutherland designed the duplex flats at 38 Tennyson Street for Mr. Harrison's eldest son Matthew and his wife Sylvia (nee Cashmore), who had married in August of that year (AHB; BP; *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 22 August 1935, p.7). It was named 'San Bernards' (AHB, 1935).
- Finally, in 1936, the Juliette flats, designed and constructed by the Premier Building Co., were constructed between Neville Court and Carmel, replacing a tennis court at the rear of Carmel (BP).

As originally constructed Carmel contained nine rooms on the ground floor, all but three (kitchen, laundry, and maid's room) opening off the entry hall. The hall (labelled as a lounge in the permit drawings) was a feature of the house, with coved ceiling, panelled walls and central arch with wrought iron grille to the staircase behind that led to balconies at first floor level. These areas, one for parents and the other for children, were a highly characteristic feature of 1920s architecture and reflect the fresh air fad of the period.

An article in the November 1930 issue of *Australian Home Beautiful* entitled 'The fascinating possibilities of concrete' featured an image of the newly completed house with its colour blend cement tiles (Figure 1)



Figure 1: Carmel in 1930 soon after completion. Note the colour variation in the roof tiles and the opening to the first floor sleepout facing Tennyson Street (Source: *Australian Home Beautiful*).

San Bernards originally featured leadlight glass window in the entrance door with an interlaced M and S, the initials of the newlywed Matthew and Sylvia Harrison, as well as elaborate wrought ironwork in the arched opening to the porch into which the name San Bernards was interlaced. (AHB).

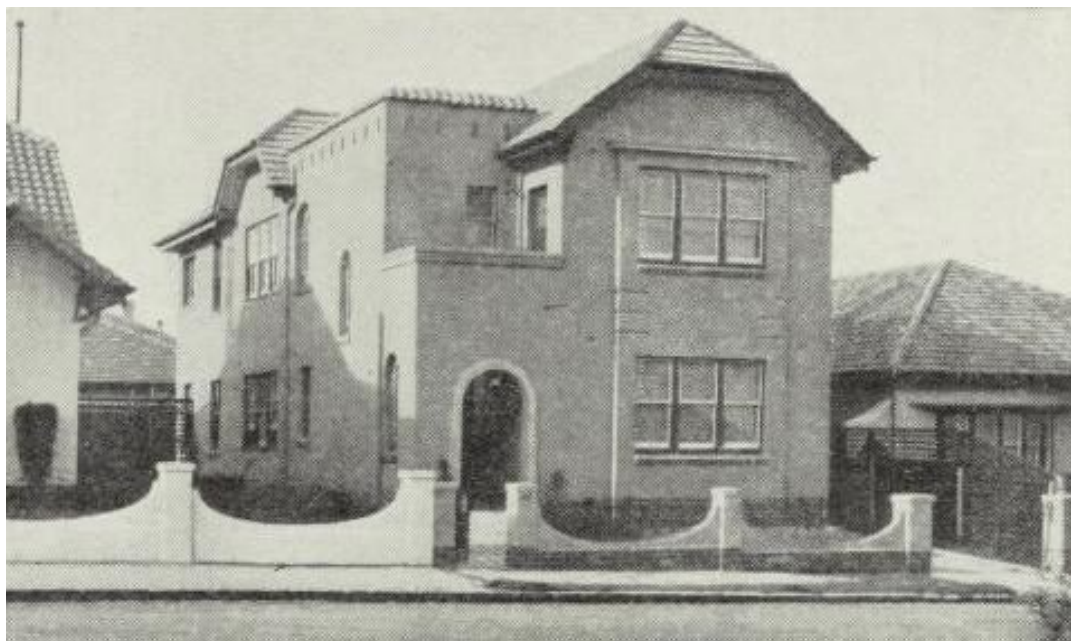


Figure 1: San Bernards in 1936 soon after completion (Source: *Australian Home Beautiful*).

In 1945 the Harrisons constructed a two-storey addition at the rear of San Bernards containing a two-bedroom dwelling (BP).

Mr. Harrison also obtained a permit in 1942 for an air raid shelter designed by W.H. Merritt, but it is not known whether this was built (BP).

Bernard Harrison was an honorary Justice of the Peace and a prominent member of the local Jewish community. He was for many years a trustee of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and a member of the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation. He was an original organizer of the Jewish Welfare Society, a Jewish National Fund Commissioner and one of the founders of the Elwood Talmud Torah. He was also a supporter of the Jewish National Home and other charities. He died at 36 Tennyson Street on 8 October 1954 (*The Australian Jewish News*, 15 October 1954, p.2).

Gordon J. Sutherland

Gordon J. Sutherland was elected associate of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1917 and the following year won a competition for the design of a new Architectural Atelier building at Melbourne University, which he carried out in conjunction with University architects, Bates, Peebles & Smart. He acted as an assistant lecturer in architecture at Melbourne University in 1934 and in 1938, he was appointed by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects to the Board of Architectural Education committee of examiners. Sutherland also contributed several articles to popular home and building journals and his designs were published in *Real Property Annual*, *The Argus* and *Australian Home Building*. He became a Fellow of the RVIA in 1935 and from about 1937, Gordon worked in partnership with his younger brother Bruce Sutherland (AAI, Heritage Victoria).

His architectural work predominantly consisted of residential buildings in a range of styles, including Arts & Crafts, Mediterranean and Spanish Revival, and, by the mid to late 1930s, Moderne. In Port Phillip Sutherland designed several houses and flats in the 1920s and 1930s. His residential work of the early 1920s such as Clovelly flats, 51 Robe Street (1923) shows the influence of the Arts & Crafts style, which is also evident at Inverleith Court, 14A Acland Street (1926); however, the latter building also shows a transition toward the Mediterranean and Spanish Mission styles that he would favour through the late 1920s and early 1930s. This can be seen at Inverleith Mansions, 11 Eildon Road, St Kilda designed two years after Inverleith

Court, which includes a distinctive cross-braced 'X' motif in the parapet that featured in several of his buildings of this period. In Port Phillip it was first used at Neville Court, 15 Hennessy Avenue, Elwood (1927) and it appeared in other Sutherland buildings across Victoria including the Argo Hotel, South Yarra (1927) and the Kaniva Shire Hall (1929). His work of the later 1930s, in partnership with his brother Bruce, was predominantly in the Moderne style, one example being the flats and shops at 188 Barkly Street, St Kilda.

The Sandringham Masonic Hall, designed at the height of his career in 1931, is a rare example of the Egyptian Revival style and is included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

References

Australian Home Beautiful (AHB): 1 November 1930, p.12; 1 July 1936, 'Flats at St Kilda', pp.15-16

Bick, David with Wilson Sayer Core Pty Ltd, *St Kilda Conservation Study Area 2*, 1984

Heritage Victoria, H2355 Sandringham Masonic Hall citation

Lewis, Miles, *Australian Architectural Index* (AAI)

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plans nos. 1385 (dated 1905)

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

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) 7392, 16 January 1929 (House, 36 Tennyson St, includes working drawings and specifications); 8905, 29 May 1935 (Duplex, 38 Tennyson St); 10957, 9 January 1942 (air raid shelter); U.13, 18 September 1945

Description

Carmel at 36 Tennyson Street, Elwood is an interwar attic bungalow, designed in the Spanish Mission style. It has roughcast render walls with clinker brick accents and details, and a dominant jerkinhead roof clad in Cordoba tiles with deep bracketed eaves. The massing is responsive to its corner location, achieving diagonal symmetry about the corner emphasised by the valley of the roof and the dominant truncated gable treatments. Notable features include:

- Dovecote chimneys with Cordoba tiles.
- The porch, which has a parapet capped with Cordoba tiles and decorated with ornamental vigas above arched openings with twisted Baroque half columns and elaborate wrought iron work containing the monogram 'JB', believed to be the initials of Mr Harrison and his wife, which is repeated in a stucco medallion in the balustrade.
- The paired timber sash windows with scroll pattern leadlight upper panes and scalloped timber hoods. Those to the projecting bays feature ornate Baroque-influenced stuccowork, and those to the right of the entrance are contained a small box bay capped with Cordoba tiles. A similar box bay on the Hennessy Avenue elevation containing a horizontal leadlight window, and another forming a base to one of the chimneys, which has an inset panel framed by clinker bricks.
- The garage, which features a parapet capped with Cordoba tiles framed by capped piers.

Internally, Carmel retains some original bathroom fittings, a fine coved ceiling to the hall, wrought ironwork to the stairwell arch, and ornate leadlight glass to doors to the principal rooms.

San Bernards shares some of the same Spanish Mission materiality and details as Carmel including the rendered walls with clinker brick accents, jerkinhead roof with bracketed eaves, a dovecote chimney, the parapeted return wall above the stairwell capped with Cordoba tiles and decorated with ornamental vigas, and the porch with arched openings. Other distinctive features are:

- The porch with an original light fitting to the top of the arched porch opening with 'San Bernards' etched into the glass fitting, a terrazzo floor and wrought iron balustrade to the staircase.
- The series of three arched windows stepping up from the side of the porch to the stairwell.

- The shallow projecting window bay with a bracketed hood, triple timber sash windows with leadlight upper panes, and three incised lines on either side between the windows.

The two buildings are unified by the fences of similar design along the frontages of the properties to Hennessy Avenue and Tennyson Street. The fence to the residence features roughcast rendered capped piers separated by a half round in smooth and roughcast render with ornate wrought ironwork. The fence to San Bernards is of the same design, but slightly lower with smaller piers and has a clinker brick base.

Both buildings are in good condition and have relatively good integrity. Changes to Carmel include the recent replacement of the original Cordoba tiles, the enclosure of the sleepout balcony facing Tennyson Street, replacement of the garage door, and alterations and additions at the rear. Apart from the 1945 addition to the rear of San Bernards the other significant change is the addition of a balcony on the north side.

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.

This concept of a 'garden suburb' (as distinct from the consciously-planned model Garden City estates that came later – see below), comprising a reasonably spacious single-family dwelling in a secluded garden setting, became the ideal expression of urban living in the early twentieth century. Facilitated by improvements to public transport networks, particularly the electrification of the tram and railway networks, this housing defines the suburbs that developed during this era, including much of Middle Park, St Kilda East, Elwood and Ripponlea.

Spanish Mission is a romantic and evocative style. It emerged in the late nineteenth century in the United States and was popularized in the 1920s, particularly in California and Florida. In Australia, awareness of the style owed much to the influence of Hollywood and the first examples appeared by the mid-1920s. It is characterized by use of light tones and colours, exploitation of sunlight and shadow and concentrations of elaborate ornament contrasted with plain surfaces. Buildings are generally asymmetrical with stuccoed wall surfaces with simulated handcrafted texture. Roofs are medium pitched and often feature half-round tiles. Distinctive features include arcaded loggias and balconies, often supported by 'barley twist' columns, and use of decorative wrought-iron work, ceramic tiles or plaster ornament, often invoking classical features. Fences were often high and solid. (Apperly, 1989:179, Cuffley 2007:94-97).

Carmel at 36 Tennyson Street is a fine and well detailed example of the interwar Spanish Mission Revival-style. As well as possessing many features and details that are typical of the style Carmel is notable for the bold and picturesque massing, and the ornate Baroque-influenced detailing to the porch and windows. It is complemented by the adjoining duplex, San Bernards, by the same architect, which shares similar Spanish Mission materiality and detailing, and the two buildings are unified by the similar front fences. Together, they are part of a collection of housing in the Rotherfield subdivision that are representative of the diverse architectural styles popular in the 1920s and 30s.

Carmel and San Bernards compare favourably with other Spanish Mission style houses included in the HO in Port Phillip include:

- House, 11A Charnwood Road, St Kilda (1927) designed by Leslie J.W. Reed (Citation 956)
- Granada, 28 Eildon Road, St Kilda (1927) designed by F.D. Meadows (Citation 899)
- Midlothian, 64 Brighton Road, Ripponlea (1929) constructed by Dickson & Yorston (Citation 307)
- House, 4 Los Angeles Court (1930) designed by Schreiber & Jorgensen (Citation 341)
- Granada, 34 Tennyson Street (1930) duplex designed by Archibald Ikin (opposite corner to Carmel, but much altered).

- House, 20 Monkstadt Avenue, Ripponlea (1931) designed by Marcus Barlow (Citation 356)
- House, 14 Maryville Street, Ripponlea (1934) designed by Alder & Lacy (Citation 348)

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 external paint controls.

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

Bick, David with Wilson Sayer Core Pty Ltd, *St Kilda Conservation Study Area 2*, 1984

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

Other images



San Bernards - at right shows the parapet capped with Cordoba tiles and ornamental vigas above the stairwell, and the series of three arched windows leading from the porch



San Bernards - detail of the porch showing original wrought iron light fitting with San Bernards etched into the glass, terrazzo floor and wrought iron balustrade to the staircase.



Carmel details: At left, the ornate Baroque influenced stucco detailing around the windows and the wrought ironwork balustrade to the front fence; At right, porch detailing including Baroque twisted half columns and wrought ironwork with an interlaced 'JB', a feature repeated in the stucco medallion in the balustrade below.