



THE NOOK
25 ALPHINGTON STREET

Charles E James and Percy Dobson declared their subdivision of Vidal's Crown Portion 114 in 1893. They called it the St James Park Estate.

By the 1890's, Samuel Steele of Glen Parrie Road, New held lots 16-18 of this estate. He sold to J W Beveridge, an accountant, who in turn sold part of lot 17 and all of lot 18 to Elizabeth and Richard Heron. The Herons had built a house there by 1893 however this was incomplete until the following year. By 1901 Richard Heron was leasing 25 Alphington Street to Jane Pettinson and it appears that significant improvements were made to the house in that year.

In the following year, Noel E Ruck purchased it and in those years it was named The Nook. Subsequent occupier, Robert H Simpson, was replaced in 1913 by a new owner-occupier, the Alphington Presbyterian Minister George M Connor, whose former residence had been burnt, along with his Heidelberg Road Church.

The Connors stayed at the Nook for over sixty years; in that time adding a bedroom wing at the south east.

The Nook is a covered timber house in the Italianate style which had developed in Regency England as a picturesque revival of Italian domestic architecture. The house



consists of the normal double-fronted verandahed and asymmetrically planned villa, common elsewhere in Northcote, which faces west and has been attached to an asymmetrically placed tower and a south-facing gabled bay, similar to that facing Alphington Street. Corniced, semi-octagonal window bays, with arched openings, architraves, colonettes and keystones have been attached to both of these gabled bays whilst the gables themselves have decorative king post trusses which have panels with trefoil piercings. Turned pendant mouldings and finials are applied to the king posts.

The cladding to the tower and house walls is an uncommon form of ship-lapped board which emulates quoined ashlar whilst the typical bracketted eaves, and cornice detail alternates around the house, relating to the roof shape.

The upper level of the tower has matching details in respect to openings and cladding but with further enrichment to the entablature, below the cornice, in the form of swags and rosettes. A cast-iron finial survives on the typical Italianate hipped roof of the tower.

Stuccoed chimney shafts with panelling, bracketted cornices banded tops and rosettes repeat this detailing above a patterned slate roof.

The return verandah is decorated with cast-iron frieze-work of a guilloche pattern and attached brackets which rest on foliated column capitals. Framing in the concave roof of the verandah and breaks in the frieze suggest that arches were originally placed, in the roof, central to each verandah bay. The crossing of the entrance door with the verandah roof and visible flashing alterations above

suggest possible alterations to the original roof line.

The doorway has parallel side lights and top lights with the original coloured glazing intact. Alterations to the exterior are minor. New ogee spouting has replaced the original of the same profile and some boarding has been replaced with non-matching sections on the tower. Extensive alterations and additions have occurred at the rear, internally and externally.

The interior matches the exuberance of the external detail with ornate plasterwork and intact mantels. Minor interior alterations are apparent from early this century; undertaken presumably by the Connor family. The garden contains mature species from a number of eras: the boundary hedge (*Pittosporum undulatum*) which has replaced what was presumably the original picket fence is notable and a large *Morus alba* (White Mulberry) at the rear was possibly a part of the earliest garden at the Nook.

The Nook is a rare and original example of timber Italianate which may be seen repeated in stucco on a grander scale at Caroline House, 74 Caroline Street, South Yarra and Toorak at 21 St Georges Road, Toorak. It also repeats a towered vernacular which, inspired by river views, was current from c 1890 in Fairfield and Alphington (Andersbach^{qv}) but is now visible only in The Nook and the two towered hotels on Heidelberg Road.

