



Alex Miller Memorial Homes 73 McKillop Street

(see 324-332 Ryrie Street)

History

The Alexander Miller Memorial Homes are represented throughout Victoria but commenced in Geelong around 1909. For this complex, architects, Laird & Buchan carried out the design in 1919 and the prolific J C Taylor & Sons, the building work in the period January 1919 to April 1920. The contact was worth £4173 on completion¹. Laird & Buchan designed all of the Geelong complexes and presumably, by their resemblance to the Geelong examples, the other complexes throughout the State (ie. Rushworth, Benalla).²

When this complex was opened by trustee representative, James Borrowman, it was heralded as a major step towards new town planning principals, in fact the 'first section of Geelong's Town Planning Scheme'. This meant that instead of building four row houses on the frontage, five attached cottages were built across the site and 'beautiful gardens' provided as well with no 'ugly back yards'. This concept had apparently been inspired by the

architects' visit to Australia's first town planning conference in Adelaide. The five cottages had two apartments allowing two couples per cottage. A Mr. Cary had suggested the memorial stone for the old St. Andrew's manse (1840) which these homes replaced, in respect for what had been the oldest 'ecclesiastical landmark' in the district³. The opening ceremony ended with a sojourn in the A3C Cafe.

Miller (1842-1914) was born in Scotland, the son of a farmer. In 1928 memories of Miller were recited in the local press:

In the seventies in a drapers shop in Moorabool street, Geelong, a young man was making an indelible mark on the minds and memories of all classes of people...in his master's shop. Elderly women speak today of the kindly attention and obliging service of young Alex Miller. Quick at his work, keenly observant of human nature, and rapidly increasing his knowledge of his trade, he was always thoughtful of his customers requirements...Gradually Miller extended his business into the country centres and his name became a household word for fair and honourable trading throughout the north-east of Victoria and its Goulburn valley.

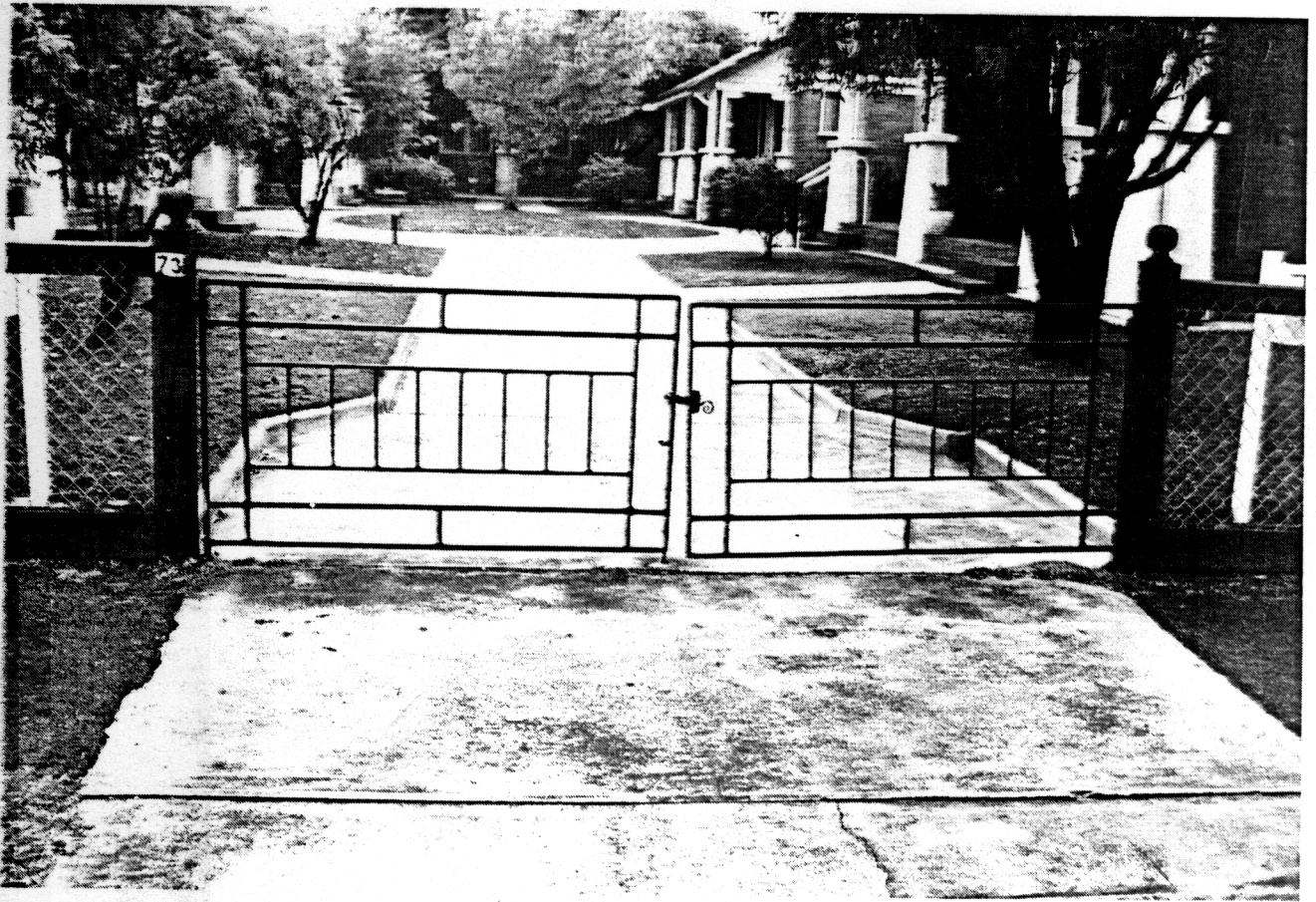
Miller's homes were intended for the elderly who had no other means of support, particularly those who lived in the towns from which he had earned an income with his stores. His projects (1909-) began before his death and

1 Laird & Buchan contract book 5, p.96, GHRC

2 see Butler, Waranga Conservation Study (1989)

3 GA 13.11.19

4 W R Lang, 'Alexander Miller- the man', *Investigator* 9.86 p.95f



his aims were inspired by the dearth of any old age pension until c1900.¹ He left £50,000 in his will for the continued upkeep of the homes.

Description

Based on the Bungalow Court principles expounded in America early this century, these are five red brick Bungalows grouped symmetrically around and facing a courtyard of concrete and lawn.

Each gable-roof design resembles the Indian and Asian colonial era traveler's accommodation prototypes which inspired the Bungalow on America's west coast. Developed there as an inexpensive form of housing which contrasted with the despised 19th century row-houses, the Bungalow and Bungalow Courts used land economically, sharing their open space as part of the courtyard. A similar principle was reiterated after the Second War, in Australia, as an answer to housing shortages.

Red brick, terra-cotta roof tiles and the broad gable roof line associated with the Bungalow are all typical attributes of the Indian or Far Eastern bungalows colonial derivatives which preceded the more predictable Californian Bungalow. Nevertheless, the elements of the later more widespread style can be recognized in the heavy brick verandah piers, 'box' window construction and Marseilles tiled, gabled roof line.

External Integrity

As original, except for paint colours.

Streetscape

Isolated adjoining a Victorian era residential streetscape and west of the similarly inspired Haines Homes at Bellarine Street.

Significance

Historically, part of an architecturally distinctive series of estates created across rural Victoria in the name of one of Geelong's more successful shopowners, Alex Miller, and part of a recurring theme in Geelong, from different eras, of private charity accommodation.

Architecturally, following a prototype which was innovative in its use of a new house form and residential planning concept which, as a group, formed the first examples of Bungalow Courts in the State and, nationally, early examples of the Bungalow Style.

¹ *ibid.*