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<b>Name</b>	<i>Myrtle Hill</i>	<b>Reference No</b>	
<b>Address</b>	14 Vista Avenue, Kew	<b>Survey Date</b>	31 January 2006
<b>Building Type</b>	Residence	<b>Grading</b>	B
<b>Date</b>	1873-4	<b>Previous Grading</b>	B



#### Extent of Overlay

To title boundaries.

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**Intactness**    ☐ Good    ☒ Fair    ☐ Poor

**Heritage Status**    ☐ HV    ☐ AHC    ☐ NT    ☐ Rec.    BPS Heritage Overlay

#### History

*Myrtle Hill* was built for Francis Bowyer Miller to a design prepared by prominent architect George Raymond Johnson, in 1873.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps best known as the architect for both the Fitzroy and Collingwood Town Halls, Johnson called for tenders for the construction of the residence in the *Argus* in July of that year.<sup>2</sup> The house remained in the Miller family's ownership for nearly one hundred years. Miss L C Miller, reputedly the last surviving member of the family,<sup>3</sup> continued to be listed in the *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria* until 1967.

As constructed, *Myrtle Hill* originally addressed Normanby Road (now Argyle Road) to the north. Like its neighbours of the day, *Hillsbury* and *Pleasant Hill*, it was set well back from the street, and was approached via an elaborate curving driveway with a return carriage circle.

Subsequently, the house has had a long and complex history of subdivision. It is thought that *Myrtle Hill* was first subdivided at approximately the same time as *Hillsbury* and *Pleasant Hill* in c.1920.<sup>4</sup> Several new streets resulted from the subdivisions - Glendene, Myrtle and Pleasant Avenues. While listings in the *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria* are open to interpretation, initially at least, it appears that the subject property retained an address to Normanby Road (no. 46), along the alignment of the original driveway. From 1939, however, the property was listed at 10 Myrtle Avenue, and occupied by Harold D B Miller.<sup>5</sup> A new house was constructed at 46 Normanby Road and this was occupied by members of the Miller family until at least 1974.

From 1950, in addition to the Myrtle Avenue address, *Myrtle Hill* was also listed at 12 Vista Avenue, and it is thought that at this time the driveway alignment was altered to form the Vista Avenue entrance to the property. Concurrently, a new street - Bowyer Avenue - was listed running south from Myrtle Avenue and adjoining the property's western boundary.<sup>6</sup>

(G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded buildings study (draft), 2001, additional research by Lovell Chen, 2005)

### Description & Integrity

*Myrtle Hill*, listed variously as 46 Normanby Road, 10 Myrtle Avenue, 12 Vista Avenue and now 14 Vista Avenue, has had a complex history of subdivision, and at least two of the surrounding houses - 46 Normanby Road of c.1940 and 5 Myrtle Avenue of 1946, have been occupied at various times by the owners or former owners. Of direct frontages only a driveway gate to Vista Avenue (with reproduction gates but possibly early posts, relocated) and a 50-metre frontage to Bowyer Avenue remain. Sited on a truncated allotment, the house itself remains in good albeit altered condition, with recent refurbishment works following a phase of semi-dereliction in the 1960s.

Designed by George Johnson and completed in 1873, *Myrtle Hill* is a sprawling single-storey brick Italianate house rendered with stucco ruled in an ashlar pattern. The 1904 Board of Works plan<sup>7</sup> shows the house as entered by a long curving drive from Normanby Road, with the entry side facing south. The original front door, sidelights, and the main north-south hall were to the immediate west of a projecting breakfront with a canted bay window. This breakfront separated a main return verandah on the west side and a longer plain wall without verandah to the east. The rest of the main verandah flowed round a second canted bay, facing west, then stepped back halfway across the north elevation, and continued on right round a north facing wing with a third canted bay. The 1904 plan shows the north-western part of this main verandah as being infilled with a timber annexe, now removed. There appear to have been additional verandahs on the east side around the kitchen court and apron areas, and there was a smaller verandah on the main east west wing, facing north. These verandahs have all been removed.

The roof is slate, partly refurbished, with galvanized iron ridge-capping. The verandah has a similar slate roof and cast iron lace frieze, but much of it has been completely rebuilt, particularly at the northern wing around the so-called ballroom. The house has emphatically corniced rendered chimneys and deep-bracketed eaves with even bracket spacing. The verandah soffits are tongue and groove planking. The verandah posts are grouped cast iron columns with Corinthian capitals, and the frieze is in a cast iron swag pattern with bracketing in curved floral patterns springing from each set of columns. The verandah floor is tiled reinforced concrete of more recent date with bluestone nosing, the verandah's original timber floor having rotted out. The decaying timber floor can be seen in a 1971 John Collins photograph.<sup>8</sup> The front door is signaled by a curved timber and cast iron lace frieze forming a stilted segmental arch above six grouped columns. An additional set of balustraded steps faces west and leads from the verandah into the former west garden, now enclosed with rear paling fences from the subdivided properties along Bowyer Avenue, to the immediate west.

Large cellar areas open up under the house and are entered through steps on the north-west side. These have flooded frequently.

The original windows are an interesting group with narrow lipped sills in bluestone, paneled risers under those, and then sashes above. Three of these are on the canted bay facing west, and these were used as image sources when a set of windows on the north wing, east side, and the east wing, north side, were converted into French windows. The south side-the original entry- has a similarly interesting set of Italianate windows in the canted bay by the former front door: these have rounded corners and flourish-form voussoirs. As with the other canted bays, these windows are separated by a set of corner indentations matching the chamfers at the window reveals. These both underscore, literally, the turn of each canted bay, yet they also read as grouped pilasters between the windows. As was common in Australian Italianate, specific classical orders were avoided.

The north east wing was originally a kitchen wing. It housed male and female privies, entered from outside, and is illustrated in John Collins' 1971 photographs held in the State Library.<sup>9</sup> This has been refurbished, with the privy doors mortared over, the brick wall cement rendered and the north side fitted with ball lanterns and French doors similar to those diagonally opposite on the east side of the north wing. These replaced a set of double-hung sashes and wooden shutters. The ballroom is a complete wing, probably built after the original house was complete but showing on the MMBW plan of 1904. The southernmost wing, running east-west, has been refitted as a kitchen wing twice over, with the actual kitchen area being relocated each time. This south wing has also been extended by c.1.3m. It now houses both the kitchen and a family room.<sup>10</sup>

A swimming pool was added in 1977,<sup>11</sup> and a new building - identified initially as a two-storied detached garage and study - was added on the north side of the site in 2002-3,<sup>12</sup> facing Myrtle Avenue at the Locksley Avenue corner. The rest of the garden - facing north - was then screened by a new high timber fence running the remaining of the property as it now faces Myrtle Avenue. The Vista Avenue gateway is flanked by two houses built after earlier subdivisions. 12 Vista Avenue is a replacement of an earlier brick house that appears in the photographs of 1989; 16 Vista Avenue is of relatively recent construction, and is sited between the gateway and the path linking Vista and Myrtle Avenues.

A number of trees on the site are relatively mature, with the balance of plantings of recent origins. Though surrounded by subdivision the remaining garden is still substantial in area, and has been opened up to connect with that of 5 Myrtle Avenue. Two large trees were removed to accommodate the garage and study building on the garden's north side.

### **Historical Context**

*Myrtle Hill* was one of a number of substantial Victorian houses erected in this elevated section of East Kew. The district retained a rural character, surrounded by nurseries and flower farms, until the inter-war period. The property was subsequently subdivided and a group of interwar and early wartime houses appeared where the Normanby road frontage had been, including No. 46, occupied by the Miller family. The Bowyer Avenue houses, including one occupied by the previous owner, Ian and Nan Cameron, were built either in the 1950s or 1960s. Blocks around the drive gate from Vista Avenue were developed more recently.

### **Comparative Analysis**

There are few houses surviving in Boroondara which are directly comparable to *Myrtle Hill* in age and form. Though similar in many respects to the sprawling single-storey villas that appeared through Camberwell and Canterbury after c.1885, it predates these by at least a decade. One early Kew example is the slightly earlier 2 Merrion Grove, of 1869, but there are few others. Relevant examples in the former City of Camberwell are all later, see for example, *Coolattie* at 29 Canterbury Road of 1897, and 8 Balwyn Road of 1889 (both q.v. and B-graded).

### **Assessment Against Criteria**

*Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria*

*CRITERION D: The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as a part of a class or type of places or objects.*

Though variously altered and added to, *Myrtle Hill* survives as a good example of a large and imposing single-storey Italianate house of the early 1870s, originally sited on a large suburban allotment, now dramatically altered through subdivision and development.

### **Statement of Significance**

*Myrtle Hill*, at 14 Vista Avenue, Kew, is of local historical and architectural significance as a good example of a large and imposing single-storey Italianate house of the early 1870s surviving in Kew. While the house has undergone a degree of alteration, its overall form remains evident and extensive original fabric survives. Originally sited on a large allotment overlooking Normanby Road (now Argyle Street), the setting of the house has been dramatically altered through extensive subdivision and development.

### **Grading Review**

Unchanged.

### **Recommendations**

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme.

### **Identified By**

Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, Kew Urban Conservation Study, 1988.

## References

*General:* Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, Kew Urban Conservation Study, 1988, G Butler & Associates, Kew B-graded places study (draft), 2001.

*Specific:*

<sup>1</sup> Reference is from 'Myrtle Hill' citation, *Melbourne Mansions* on-line database, George Raymond Johnson calls tenders for brick villa residence at Kew for Francis B Miller, *Argus*, 24 July 1873, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The driveway alignment is shown on MMBW Plan no. 66, Kew, scale 160':1", dated 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, Dorothy. *A history of Kew*, 1973, pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> This date has been approximated from the date of subdivision of the neighbouring *Grange Hill* estate in 1919, details of which were obtained from the State Library of Victoria Map Collection – this consisted of land between Normanby Road and Glendene Avenue – and from the date of the first appearance of Glendene, Myrtle and Pleasant Avenue, in the *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, in 1921.

<sup>5</sup> *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, 1935-1940.

<sup>6</sup> *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, 1950.

<sup>7</sup> MMBW Plan No. 66, 160'/1" scale, dated June 1903/1904.

<sup>8</sup> John Collins, 'Myrtle Hill? HS i.e. homestead', State Library of Victoria, jc010328, taken c. 4 September 1971: <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/jcollins/0/1/0/doc/jc010328.shtml>, accessed 5 December 2005.

<sup>9</sup> John Collins, 'Myrtle Hill? HS', State Library of Victoria, jc007499, taken 4 September 1971: <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/jcollins/0/0/7/doc/jc007499.shtml>, accessed 5 December 2005, accession no. H97.250/1614.

<sup>10</sup> Details sourced from City of Kew Building Index, #8110, dated 20 August 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Details sourced from City of Kew Building Index, #6882, dated 12 September 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Details sourced from City of Boroondara Building index, #95/041, dated 4 December 1995 after an Administrative Appeals Tribunal appeal and direction; Building Permit #1147/020516/1, dated 24 September 2002.