
Name	<i>Thule Croft</i>	Reference No	
Address	24 Albion Street, Surrey Hills	Survey Date	20 September 2005
Building Type	Residence	Grading	B
Date	1911	Previous Grading	B



Extent of Overlay

Refer Recommendations

Intactness Good Fair Poor

Heritage Status HV AHC NT Rec. BPS Heritage Overlay

History

Harrison Rotherham acted as builder and C M Rotherham as owner to construct this nine-room, two-storied concrete dwelling in 1911.¹ To date, no architect has been associated with the project. Curiously, an image of this house or an identical house is reproduced in the Camberwell Conservation Study 1991 (vol. 2, p. 55), where it is described as being the home of SH Wilson, Albion Road, Canterbury. No date is given but the source of the image is identified as the *Real Property Annual*.²

Harrison Rotherham and his family lived there until c.1925. Rotherham resided in Leopold Crescent, Surrey Hills, at the turn of the century and later at 435 Kent Street, Surrey Hills.³ His business lay with Rotherham Wood & Co., manufacturers agents, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.⁴ Within a generation he had reputedly shifted his interests to the Dominion Brace and Garter Co. Pty Ltd, Hawthorn. Rotherham, Wood & Co. represented among others: Josiah Parkers, makers of locks; Geo Salter & Co., spring balance (scales) and iron manufacturers; Summerscales Mangles; Newman door springs; the Wyoming Shovel Co.; and Adshead and Smellie, art-metal makers. They were wholesale only but displayed all of the makers' samples and could be contacted by telegraph from any government or Reuter office. Rotherham attended the Philadelphia Commercial Congress, as Melbourne's delegate, in 1899.⁵

Thule Croft had minor (and unspecified) additions in 1935 and 1947, and was converted into flats and had a carport constructed in 1960.⁶ More recently it was returned to use as a single dwelling, and alterations were undertaken to the front fence and the rear of the house (at ground and first floor levels) in 1999-2002.⁷

(G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, additional research by Lovell Chen, 2005)

Description & Integrity

Thule Croft, at 24 Albion Street, Surrey Hills, is a two-storey attic-roofed house evidently with stone footings,⁸ and concrete masonry ground floor walls and chimneys, a return verandah facing north and east, and a shingle covered upper storey, formed from several attic wings. The shingles at the upper level appear possibly to have been replaced more recently in an atypical pattern of 30 cm squares. The attic wings and dormers are original other than for the small dormer in the main roof form, which has been added. The v-pattern half-timbering at the upper gable was covered in shingles sometime after 1991.⁹

The original roof, probably of slate, has been resurfaced in powder-coated galvanized steel. Several front windows have been altered or given new frames, though the arched stained glass window bearing the name *Thule Croft* in milky coloured glass may be original or early. The western quarter of the front yard has been paved over to form a court in front of a new garage building with automatic door, and the original concrete fence has been removed at that point. The remaining garden, to the north and east of the house, appears largely mature.

The front fence planking and gate have been replaced more recently in works applied for in 2001,¹⁰ though the posts and base are in the original vesticulated concrete masonry seen on the ground floor walls and chimneys of the house itself (note that the blockwork was proposed to be rebuilt).

Historical Context

Albion Street had been laid out by the turn of the century, but was little developed until the 1910s and later. The new tram service from Hawthorn along Riversdale Road to Wattle Park opened in c.1916¹¹ and this further encouraged new development in the Surrey Hills area.

Comparative Analysis

While it has been suggested that an architect was involved in the design of *Thule Croft*, this has not been confirmed and it is possible that the house was builder-designed.¹² The house has a neighbour of very similar design to its west: 22 Albion Road, probably by the same builder and/or architect. This has identical concrete masonry in the walling and its main ground floor windows are in their original frames. Number 22 also has a roof in original slate, and a more recent picket fence.

Graeme Butler has noted the following in relation to *Thule Croft*;

Machines to produce plain and vesticulated concrete masonry wall blocks were available from both America and Britain in this period and were advertised in the early 1900s.¹³ Williamstown builder, John Garnsworthy, constructed similar concrete masonry structures in Nelson Place (Modern Buildings) during 1909. Garnsworthy's own in-situ concrete home, the White House in The Strand, was built two years earlier of reinforced concrete. The engineer and concrete builder, H R Crawford, built in-situ concrete homes in Canterbury, one in Mont Albert Road. With a render coat, the house no longer expressed its special construction type.¹⁴

(G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study, 1991)

As Butler notes, 22 and 24 Albion Road are linked chronologically with examples of concrete masonry houses in the Williamstown area, and with in situ concrete houses by H R Crawford at Mont Albert Road and elsewhere in the Camberwell-Canterbury region.¹⁵ Concrete masonry was later abundant on the Mornington Peninsula and Phillip Island, often manufactured on site or nearby as it was difficult to transport heavy materials there. It occasionally reappeared in post-war vernacular housing elsewhere, particularly in Melbourne's southern suburbs. No. 24's use of concrete masonry is very early here, and its detailing is very early in the development both of the bungalow and gabled attic house styles in the early twentieth century.

Compositionally the house is poised between Federation villa of the 1900s and gabled attic bungalow modes of the later 1910s and 1920s. The projecting rafters are early by Melbourne bungalow standards, and the Chinese horn-brackets supporting the verandah¹⁶ were not common in Melbourne in 1911.

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.

Thule Croft is an early and clear example of an early twentieth century attic form house, influenced in varying degrees by the arts and crafts movement.

CRITERION E: The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

Thule Croft is well-composed, boldly massed and unusual in its integration of vesticulated concrete masonry. It is an early and characteristic fusion of the Federation villa with its return verandah, and the gabled attic house more typical of the 1920s.

CRITERION F: The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

Thule Croft's use of concrete masonry is unusual at this time, particularly in this middle-suburban setting. It does, however, share these characteristics with a neighbour, 22 Albion Road, which in its basic house form appears to be as, if not more, intact.

Statement of Significance

Thule Croft at 24 Albion Street, Surrey Hills, is of local historical and architectural significance. Externally relatively intact, it is an early and clear example of an early twentieth century attic form house, influenced by the arts and crafts movement. Along with its neighbour, 22 Albion Street, *Thule Croft* is a relatively early example of this form, and demonstrates the transition from the Federation villa, with its return verandah, toward a gabled attic form more typical of the 1920s. Both 22 and 24 are distinguished by their bold massing and are unusual for this period in their incorporation of vesticulated concrete masonry.

Grading Review

Unchanged.

Recommendations

While 24 Albion Street is considered to be of sufficient significance to warrant its inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme, it is recommended that the overlay also include the more intact but ungraded building at 22 Albion Street. A new citation addressing both buildings should be prepared.

Identified By

G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study, 1991.

References

General: G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study, 1991.

Specific:

¹ City of Camberwell Building Applications 1899-1918, 1466.

² Which ran in Melbourne from 1912.

³ WD Wise, *Victorian Post Office Directory*, 1899-1900.

⁴ WD Wise, *Victorian Post Office Directory*, 1899-1900.

⁵ WD Wise, *Victorian Post Office Directory*, 1899-1900.

⁶ Details sourced from the City of Camberwell Building Permits Index, Nos. 5184, dated 17 June 1935; a study added, 1026, dated 18 December 1947; other unspecified additions, 17835, dated 15 February 1956; a garden shed (not visible from the street), 19304, dated 2 October 1956, convert to apartment house, 28298, dated 9 December 1960.

⁷ City of Boroondara Building Permit No. 1130/990013/0, alterations to front fence, 4 March 1999, see also Proposed Alterations (drawing by Alexander Metherall, August 2001) approved by the Hendry Group, # 2001/641.

⁸ Personal communication from a neighbour who worked on repairs to the roof, 20 September 2005.

⁹ Compare Butler's photograph: Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, vol. 4 p. 4.

¹⁰ Proposed Alterations (drawing by Alexander Metherall, August 2001) approved by the Hendry Group, # 2001/641.

¹¹ Allom Lovell & Associates. *Wattle Park Heritage Conservation Plan*, p. 15.

¹² G Butler, *Camberwell Conservation Study*, vol. 3, p.4.

¹³ M Lewis, *200 Years of Concrete in Australia*, [Melbourne]: Concrete Institute of Australia, [1988?], p. 26.

¹⁴ M Lewis, *200 Years of Concrete in Australia*, [Melbourne]: Concrete Institute of Australia, [1988?], p. 26.

¹⁵ G Butler, *Camberwell Conservation Study 1991*, vol. 4. p. 4.

¹⁶ G Butler, *Camberwell Conservation Study 1991*, vol. 4, p. 5.