

Name	<i>Doneraile</i>	Reference No	
Address	15 Alma Road, Camberwell	Survey Date	September 2005
Building Type	Residence	Grading	A
Date	1890-91	Previous Grading	B



Extent of Overlay
To title boundaries.

Intactness ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor
Heritage Status ☐ HV ☐ AHC ☐ NT ☒ Rec. BPS Heritage Overlay

History

The house, *Doneraile*¹, is thought to have been constructed in 1890-91 for Joseph Blair, previously a resident of Coburg.² In September 1890, the architect Evander McIver accepted tenders for the 'erection of a brick villa for J Blair, Esq., in Camberwell'.³ Joseph Blair was listed in Alma Road, Camberwell in the *Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directories* from 1891, with the house being identified as 'Elderslie' in 1904.⁴

The house was owned by retired opera singer, Miss Amy Castles in the 1940s.⁵ Amy Castles was born in 1880 at Carlton, Melbourne, eventually training in opera under Allan Bindley and, in Paris, under Madame Marchesi and Jaques Bouhy. After winning prizes in Australia, she performed in London with Ada Crossley and Clara Butt, at the Queens Hall in 1901 and made her European debut in grand opera at Cologne in 1907. Many overseas tours followed, including a post with the Viennese Imperial Opera company just before the war and New York during, where she opened up her home for visiting Australians and gave benefit concerts to aid the wounded. In 1930-1 she took part in a sound motion picture but appears to have retired soon afterwards. She was the first Australian prima donna to make her debut in grand opera in Australia.⁶ Castles died in 1951 and is buried in Box Hill Cemetery.

Amy Castle's two sisters, Eileen and Esther (Dolly) were also prominent singers. Esther was well-known in Gilbert and Sullivan opera, while Eileen sang in opera and concert engagements, sometimes with Amy and their brother George, and later took up broadcasting.⁷ At least one of the two sisters also lived at 15 Alma Road from the 1940s (Amy was said to have been living with her sister Esther at Camberwell at the time of her death in 1951) to the early 1960s.⁸

George E Castles occupied the property during the mid-1960s, before the property was purchased by Dr and Mrs Shumack in 1968.⁹

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

Description & Integrity

Designed by Evander McIver, *Doneraile*, at 15 Alma Road, Camberwell, is a double fronted house built in 1890-1 with return verandah to the north and east, and an east elevation marked by two substantial round arches in cream brick over the front door approach. The house has plain walling in red brick, mildly weathered in places. Aside from the entry arches, cream brick is confined to the chimney caps and their flanking vertical straps. The bracketed gable barge boarding projects clear of the brick gable surface behind it. Its pattern is Japanese, echoed more tentatively in the glazing bars on the upper sashes of the verandah windows. The concave verandah canopy was in cast iron with cast iron lace and a corrugated galvanised steel roof, replaced in recent years with the addition of two transparent acrylic corrugated sheets. The slate main roof is original, though with more recent ridge capping in powder-coated steel. A bulged acrylic skylight has been added on the main roof's west side. The verandah roof has also been replaced in recent years, and has two large sections of corrugated clear plastic to allow light through. The timber front fence is not original. There was an earlier fence replacement in 1943, and two sets of interior alterations, one including a laundry in 1968, and additions, not visible from the street, in 1971.¹⁰

The garden, to a generally circular plan in its front arm, was reworked, probably in the 1970s, with native plantings. Some of the older trees may possibly date from the early twentieth century. Flowering wisteria, a motif in this street and probably a more recent planting, covers the verandah frame.

Historical Context

Conveniently located between Camberwell Road and Burke Road, this pocket of the Camberwell area underwent significant development in the late Victorian period. *Doneraile* was one of a number of villa residences which had been constructed in Alma Road by the early 1890s. Later development in this part of the street consisted largely of bungalows and attic-bungalows from the 1920s.

Comparative Analysis

Graeme Butler has observed that *Doneraile* was 'perhaps a prototype for the later Queen Anne villa style,' adding that it was 'a successful and early prototype of a common early 20th century villa style.'¹¹ In fact, it ranks with only six or seven prototypes for the Federation villa that appeared in Melbourne in the period 1889-92, and is potentially of significance in a wider context. The most direct formal parallel is A B Rieusset's villa in Caulfield, which was published around the same time.¹² Evander McIver, as with A B Rieusset, Alfred Dunn, Christopher Cowper and others active in the Camberwell-Surrey Hills area, was prominent in moving in this direction and the house sets out much of the Federation form that would spread around Australia in the next ten years.¹³

There are many Camberwell houses that parallel *Doneraile's* general composition and materials, but few which match its lightness in detail and its early engagement with Japanese line and pattern. The chimney treatment, derived from the strapwork on British and American urban Free Style houses of the 1870s and 1880s, was relatively new at the time. So too was the pyramidal main roof, the use of an unstriped plain red brick over all the wall surfaces (instead of stucco as at 23 Alma Road or dichrome brick, as at 25 or 36 Alma Road). The gable timbering, suggesting half-timber but with the frame lifted off the brick gable face, was seen on a few houses in Melbourne suburbs of this period, as in Berkeley Street, Hawthorn or Railway Parade, Murrumbeena. The interest here is in the plain Japanese patterning of the timber gable frame, an early announcement of the Federation period usage of Japanese patterns that extended to verandah valances, door screens and balustrading. In *Doneraile* the Japanese motif extends to the elegantly thin window framing in the upper sashes. The concomitant in progressive architecture of this period-Richardson's free style American Romanesque-appears in the round arches at the east return of the verandah, at the entry. It is of interest to note that McIver, *Doneraile's* architect, was designing churches in a free, quite progressive manner at this time.¹⁴

The general layout of the house shows the continuing debt to Victorian Italianate in early Federation design. The verandah was still separate from the main roof eave and was fitted with a cast iron lacework valance, as in many houses on the Tara Estate nearby. This is framed in several timber bays, in a manner seen also on 25 and 36 Alma Road (q.v.). The verandah is graceful and shallow, and, accompanying the main roof form, its lightness hints at 'Old Colonial' homestead forms then

fascinating an increasing number of Australian architects. The pyramidal main roof, in slate, is early Federation in character, being flared elegantly near the lower edges. The rafters protrude below, in what would have read at the time as a distinct shift from 1880s eave bracketing.

Assessment Against Criteria

Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria

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.

Doneraile is a prototype for the emerging Federation villa. Its asymmetrical planning, strapwork chimneys, plain brick walling, pyramidal slate roof and Japanese turned timber detailing are all Federation characteristics, but were seen in combination in only a few houses prior to 1890. It is one of a limited number of prototypes that appeared in Melbourne during the period 1889-1892.

Doneraile is a virtual compendium of very early Federation forms and detail; these components are combined with elegance and directness, and with a particular scale that was to recur throughout the Federation period.

Doneraile is one of the key examples in Boroondara which demonstrate the shift toward Federation architecture, along with houses by Alfred Dunn and others in Oxley Road, Hawthorn, by Ussher and Kemp in Camberwell, Canterbury and Balwyn, and Christopher Cowper in Hawthorn. It is part of Boroondara's contribution to the development of Federation architecture in Australia.

Statement of Significance

Doneraile is of local historical and state architectural significance. Designed by architect Evander McIver and constructed in 1890-91, *Doneraile* is a prototype for the emerging Federation villa. Its asymmetrical planning, strapwork chimneys, plain brick walling, pyramidal slate roof and Japanese turned timber detailing are all Federation characteristics, but were seen in combination in only a few houses prior to 1890. It is one of a limited number of prototypes that appeared in Melbourne during the period 1889-1892. *Doneraile* is a virtual compendium of very early Federation forms and detail; these components are combined with elegance and directness, and with a particular scale that was to recur throughout the Federation period.

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The association in the 1940s with the prominent opera singer, Miss Amy Castles, is of local historical interest.

Grading Review

Revised to A grading.

Recommendations

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

Identified By

G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study, 1991.

References

General: G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study, 1991.

Specific:

¹ Information supplied by Dr and Mrs Shumack, 5 July 2007.

² *Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directory* 1892.

³ *Building Engineering and Mining Journal*, 6 September 1890, supplement, p. 5, cited in the Miles Lewis Index of Australian Architecture.

⁴ The house was identified in the 1991 Camberwell Conservation Study as having been constructed for Robert and/or Elizabeth Burroughs, however the Burroughs' residence was further west along Alma

Road. The subject property was two houses to the east of Thomas Gagin's residence at 25 Alma Road (q.v.); Sands and McDougall Melbourne Directories, various dates.

⁵ Details sourced from the City of Camberwell Building Index, # 15947, dated 15 November 1943.

⁶ *Who's Who in Australia*, 1935; Maureen T Radic, 'Amy Eliza Castles', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7, pp. 588-89.

⁷ *Who's Who in Australia*, 1962.

⁸ Maureen T Radic, 'Amy Eliza Castles', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7, p. 589; Sands and McDougall Victoria Directories, various dates.

⁹ Information supplied by Dr and Mrs Shumack, 5 July 2007.

¹⁰ Details sourced from the City of Camberwell Building Index: fence, #15947, 15 November 1943; laundry and interiors, #43825, 3 September 1968; additions, #49276, 10 June 1971.

¹¹ G Butler, City of Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, v. 4, p. 8.

¹² Conrad Hamann, 'Nationalism and Reform in Australian Architecture, 1880-1920', *Historical Studies*, 18, 72, April 1979, pp. 393-411.

¹³ Compare with other seminal Federation houses of the period, such as Alfred Dunn's double and single storied houses on the Irving Road Estate in Windsor, of 1889, see *Australasian Builder and Contractor's News* from that year, or indeed Dunn's 'Residence at Camberwell', I of 1892, which Butler reproduces in his Camberwell Conservation Study, v. 3: Restoration Guide, p. 7. Cowper's major shift in design, seen in the Hawthorne house at Kerang, appeared pre *Doneraile*. Beverly Ussher's seminal *Cottage by the Sea* orphanage at Queenscliff (now demolished), which set out the mature Federation villa form, appeared a short time later: see *The Building and Engineering Journal*, 8, 184, 9 January 1892, p. 14, cited in Tibbits, below. It is well before Ussher's forays into the Boroondara region: see George Tibbits, Ch. 4 in Trevor Howells, ed., contrib., *Towards the Dawn: Federation architecture in Australia 1890-1915*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1989, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ As with McIver's St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Kerang, 1892, completed two years after *Doneraile*. See Miles Lewis, *Victorian Churches*, Melbourne, National Trust, 1991, p. 128. St Andrew's' timber belfry and porch show McIver's developing interest in conspicuous timber usage and his parallels with contemporary Australian practitioners of Richardson Romanesque. The broad Gothic arch is almost round, and compositionally the church moves closer to Free Romanesque experimentation elsewhere in Australia, as with George Temple Poole's Highway Church in Claremont, WA, of 1895. See Richard Apperly et al., *Identifying Australian Architecture*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1989, p. 117; Myra Orth, 'The influence of the "American Romanesque" in Australia,' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 34, 1, March 1975, pp. 2-11. McIver's other well-known churches preceded *Doneraile*: The Brunswick Presbyterian Church, 212 Sydney Road, 1884, is discussed by Lewis, *Victorian Churches*, p. 61 n. 56; he also worked on the formally similar Kew Presbyterian Church of 1887 for Nathaniel Billing, Highbury Grove, Kew, of 1887, where the leading Federation architect Henry Kemp was married. See Tibbits, *Towards the Dawn*, p 64; Lewis, *Victorian Churches*, p. 75, n. 105. McIver also trained Christopher Cowper, another of the key figures in Melbourne Federation architecture. See Tibbits, *Towards the Dawn*, p. 64.