
Name	<i>Thomas Gaggin House</i>	Reference No	
Address	25 Alma Road, Camberwell	Survey Date	September 2005; 31 January 2006
Building Type	Residence	Grading	B
Date	1889	Previous Grading	B



Extent of Overlay

To title boundaries.

Intactness Good Fair Poor

Heritage Status HV AHC NT Rec. BPS Heritage Overlay

History

Accountant, Thomas W. Gaggin, purchased two allotments from John Kelly in Alma Street during the late 1880s, adding a house in 1889.¹ His architects, Oakden Addison & Kemp, called tenders for the house in 1888.²

Later owners included O.A. Mevendorf and R. Morgan.³

Gaggin held the post of 'accountant to the Treasurer'⁴ the second most senior position in the treasury, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, serving through the period of the country's major economic recession. He served under such ministers as Sir George Turner, succeeding G.T. Allen in this role.

(G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study 1991)

Description & Integrity

As constructed, the *Thomas Gaggin House*, at 25 Alma Road Camberwell, is an asymmetrically-planned Italianate Victorian villa. Other than for the alteration of one bay, it is largely intact on the north side of the property and to the extent that it can be viewed from the north-west and north-east sides. Originally the house had its verandah on three sides, uninterrupted, with the original north and east bays kept hidden under the verandah roof.⁵ The front northern bay has been altered with a later window detailed by the architect OH Jorgenson added in 1937; this replaced the original canted bay in this location and appears to have been altered again since that date.⁶ The hipped roof is in patterned slate with galvanized iron ridge capping with eave brackets to the front wing. It has tuckpointed dichrome umber and cream brick walling. The cream brick is patterned in two-course bands and in groups of stepped horizontal patterns approximating quoins. These appear around the doors, windows and chimney corners. The chimneys are corbelled with battered cement-rendering tops and

dichrome brick in miniature quoin patterns and horizontal strapping. The door and window joinery all looks original, though screen doors have been added. The verandah, constructed round the house on its west, north and eastern sides, is separate from the main roof above it. Council's Building File lists a 'new verandah' in 1989, and on this basis, it would appear that the verandah was either reconstructed or substantially repaired at this date.⁷ The verandah posts are in turned wood, supporting rectangular timber frieze frames enclosing panels of metal lacework. The columns are evenly spaced with a pairing at the north east corner and two pairings either side of the front door steps. This entry is marked by a small pediment.

Numerous alterations and additions have been made to the house. In the late 1930s, Jorgenson completed drawings for an addition extending along the south fence from the original stables. This added a sitting room, two more bedrooms and a concrete floored verandah,⁸ and is next to the current swimming pool, added in 1967. A kitchen and laundry, were added in 1980.⁹ More recently, a conservatory with canted bay was added, projecting south east from a refurbished and deepened family room. This is flanked on its south side by a recent courtyard paved in a set of concrete plates laid diagonally. This diagonal patterning is now repeated through all the garden paths to the north and east of the house. The south courtyard is flanked on its west and south sides by an extension in cement rendered brick, painted pale grey, which links the original house with the stables and extension group completed in Jorgenson's 1937 additions. The stable wing has now been altered to include a new garage, and a plant room for the swimming pool was added at the eastern end of this extension.

Apart from the garage none of this is clearly visible from the street, and from the east garden the extension, mostly separated from the original house by the courtyard and surfaced in painted cement rendering, reads as a separate building. The original house has always had a deep plan with a centrally placed lantern over its bathroom and a large vestibule to the rear, now a family room.¹⁰

The swimming pool area has had some refurbishment since, particularly in its integration with the family room, the south extension and the courtyard, and with later glass fencing.¹¹ This, and the main garden area, are hidden from the footpath gate by a recent concrete screen (c. 1989)¹² juxtaposed with the cypress hedge opening. That screen also blocks views of the main garden space. Most planting in the east side garden is more recent, though well-established. A number of the trees appear quite old, and the agapanthus lining the drive could have been there for decades.

Historical Context

Conveniently located between Camberwell Road and Burke Road, this pocket of Camberwell area underwent significant development in the late Victorian period. This was one of a number of villa residences which had been constructed in Alma Road by the end of the 1880s.

Comparative Analysis

Given its size and cost, the *Thomas Gaggin House* was a clearly restrained, visibly disciplined design by late 1880s Italianate standards. Its verandah lacework was enclosed (and compositionally restrained in turn) by oblong timber frames, as in 15 and 36 Alma Road nearby. The rear vestibule, like an enclosed kitchen court, was unusual, the most obvious Boroondara counterpart being *Montserrat* at 26A Wandsworth Road, Surrey Hills (q.v., B-graded).

At the time of this commission, Oakden, Addison and Kemp were reaching their peak as an 1880s architectural partnership; this house was designed shortly after Kemp's 'skyscraper' Australia Building in central Melbourne and just before Addison's proto-Federation houses and Queensland Exhibition Building.¹³ Henry Kemp was working on a series of Melbourne houses in 1889; however, this is a conservative design by Kemp's standards and may be attributable to Percy Oakden, the older partner in the practice.¹⁴ The verandah, originally circling the house on three sides and punctuated by a pediment over the front door steps, hints at Queensland stump house influence, not surprising given GHM Addison's prominence as an architect in Queensland.¹⁵ The palette of materials, slate roof, Hawthorn brick with cream patterning, and cast iron lace, were quite late outcomes of a synthesis seen much earlier, as in Reed's *Ripponlea* of 1867. This palette of forms and components typified many 1880s houses in the Melbourne area, including 36 Alma Road Camberwell, diagonally opposite. At the same time medium-large versions of polychrome or dichromatic brick Italianate were relatively rare in Camberwell. The visual address of the house, to be read diagonally across the garden, is more accentuated than in earlier Italianate, and anticipated Federation in its site placement and emphasis,

and in its accentuated move away from frontality in physical conception. Addison's house at Hendra in Queensland, one of the clear announcements of a Federation synthesis of forms, followed this house by only a year.

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.

The *Thomas Gaggin House* is a representative and externally relatively intact example of a substantial late Victorian Italianate villa, at a size comparatively rare in Camberwell.

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.

The *Thomas Gaggin House* is a skilled example of design in a dichrome brick Italianate style, typifying contemporary work by the prominent Melbourne architects Oakden, Addison and Kemp. The areas visible from the street are fairly conservative for their period, but its encircling and pedimented verandah is interesting in its hint at Queensland houses and with the growing emphasis on climatic suitability that accompanied the emergence of Federation architecture.

Statement of Significance

The *Thomas Gaggin House* is of local historical and architectural significance a representative and externally generally intact example of a substantial late Victorian Italianate villa, at a size comparatively rare in Camberwell. The *Thomas Gaggin House* is a skilled example of design in a two-toned brick Italianate style, typifying contemporary work by the prominent Melbourne architects Oakden, Addison and Kemp. The house is relatively conservative for their period, but its encircling and pedimented verandah hints at Queensland houses and reflects the growing emphasis on climatic suitability that accompanied the emergence of Federation architecture. The house has a rear vestibule resembling an enclosed kitchen court: this is quite rare in Camberwell (compare 28 Wandsworth Road, Surrey Hills). Though extensive alterations and additions have been made, other than for the modification of the front bay, these generally do not impact on the principal views to the house from the street.

Grading Review

Unchanged.

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.

¹ Shire of Boroondara Rate Books, 1887-8, # 71; 1888-9, # 78; 1889-90, # 81

² Oakden, Addison and Kemp call tenders for a house in Camberwell for Thomas Gaggin, *Building Engineering & Mining Journal*, 21 July 1888, supplement p. 5, cited in Miles Lewis Index of Australian Architecture.

³ Details sourced from City of Camberwell Building Index, # 8666, dated 13 September 1937, # 68033, dated 18 November 1980.

⁴ *Weekly Times*, February 13th, 1904, p.12.

⁵ Shown in existing conditions plan with planned additions by O M Jorgensen, architect, dated 31 August 1937, Details sourced from the City of Camberwell Building Index, #8616, dated 3 September 1937; #8666, dated 13 September 1937. 25 Alma Road Camberwell has no alterations or additions permits indexed earlier.

⁶ OH Jorgenson, working drawings for north side bay replacement, dated 31 August 1937, held in the Boroondara plan archives. City of Camberwell building index, dated 3 September 1937.

⁷ City of Camberwell Building File 40/408/0087, #BA 87954, 1989.

⁸ OH Jorgensen, working drawings, dated 10 September 1937, held in the Boroondara plan archives. Permit 8666, sourced from City of Camberwell Building Index, dated 13 September 1937.

⁹ V Pyke drawing 1e, 28 11 1980, Details sourced from the City of Camberwell Building Index, #68033, dated 28 November 1980.

¹⁰ For this alteration see the City of Camberwell Building Index, #68033, dated 28 November 1980, and Pike's working drawing, 1e, dated 16 October 1980.

¹¹ Details sourced from City of Camberwell Building Index, #41969, dated 1 November 1967.

¹² The screen appears to have been part of the decking works. Details sourced from Camberwell Building Index #87955, dated 20 April 1969.

¹³ See, esp., Don Watson and Judith McKay, *Queensland Architects of the Nineteenth Century*, Brisbane: Museum of Queensland, Brisbane, 1994.

¹⁴ Kemp's role in the Melbourne work by this partnership is discussed by George Tibbits in Ch. 4 of Trevor Howells, ed., contrib., *Towards the Dawn: Federation architecture in Australia, 1890-1915*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1989, p. 56 esp.

¹⁵ Addison's house at Hendra in Brisbane's north was nearing completion at this time; it was later given publicity in the building journals. See also Don Watson and Judith McKay, *A Biographical Index of Queensland Architects*, Museum of Queensland, Brisbane, 1994.