
Name	House	Reference No	
Address	158 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury	Survey Date	17 November 2005
Building Type	Residence	Grading	B
Date	1920	Previous Grading	B



Extent of Overlay

To title boundaries.

Intactness Good Fair Poor

Heritage Status HV AHC NT Rec. BPS Heritage Overlay

History

Prolific Melbourne Architects, Gawler and Drummond designed this house for Robert R. Ross formerly of View Street, Canterbury in 1919.¹ After Ross's short tenure, Duncan S. Smith was an occupier in the 1920s and later Catherine Stobie (c1932) who had previously resided at 19 Victoria Avenue.² David G. Stobie had been among the first Boroondara Road Board members (1956-7) and served as the superintendent and secretary of the giant Benevolent Asylum in North Melbourne.³

Alterations and additions to the house and cabana-garage were in the course of being carried out at the time of survey.

(G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, 2001, additional research by Lovell Chen, 2005)

Description & Integrity

158 Mont Albert Road was a house and detached cabana-garage, designed in 1919 and completed the following year.⁴ The house is two-storey in rendered brick, with a shallow hipped roof with deep bracketed eaves (reading almost as a cornice element) and simple cuboid central massing, broken by a rectangular balcony on the east side and a canted bay on the west, both two-storeyed. The east side balcony has a sheltered terrace underneath with tiled flooring. The house is surfaced in stucco, smooth for the expressed structure in the piers and pilasters, and textured on the wall surfaces in between. Compositionally the house reads as broadly asymmetrical, the regularity of its pilaster and voussoir details interrupted by an off-centre stair window with two tall arched lights and circular window at the top, in between. This drives through to the ground floor, interrupting the awning on the north side. The flanking windows are fairly plain sashes, with small panes in their upper facets. The most distinctive detail in the house, though, is the commercial touch suggested by the awnings, which were thick iron shop awnings braced with tension rods from the first floor, and seem to have transplanted a CBD retailing form.

The cabana/garage block is asymmetrical, with a two-storey lodge at one end and originally a lower run of garage spaces at the other. This was later converted into a pool house.⁵

The house appears to be broadly intact as viewed from the street (other than for the overpainting of the stucco noted by Graeme Butler in 1991, and the introduction of cedar planking for new awning soffits). Both house and cabana/garage are undergoing renovation at the time of writing. The current works appear to be focused on the rear sections of the house where some demolition and new building works are occurring. The one exception is that a section of the front awning (at the north-west corner) appears to be identified for demolition.⁶

A swimming pool was installed in 1986; this is now being rebuilt. A tennis court was placed alongside, and this is now being resurfaced as a piazza. The mature trees in the front garden remain; Butler notes a Canary Island palm among them. The Renaissance-derived facade details on both the house and outbuilding have the stylization and exaggeration associated with the Edwardian Baroque. Graeme Butler has suggested that the existing high rendered brick fence may be original.⁷

Historical Context

As shown on the MMBW Detail Plan no. 70 of c. 1905, several large villa estates were located in the area north of Mont Albert Road and east of the railway line at the turn of the twentieth century. These were generally oriented northward to take advantage of the views. Villas included *Roystead*, *Kaleno* (to its west), *Highton*, *Myambert* and *Nowa Nowa* to the east and *Belmont* and *Larino* to the north facing Whitehorse Road. The south side of Mont Albert Road also has some large villas with some smaller residences set up closer to the street frontage. Subsequent development along Mont Albert Road occurred in the interwar period.⁸

Comparative Analysis

The architects for this residence were Gawler and Drummond, designers of a number of interwar buildings at the University of Melbourne, as well as churches such as St Bartholomew's Anglican, Burnley. This house is one of the practice's livelier and more inventive efforts. It has affinities with the broad, fairly rectangular houses being designed in the US around this time: by Charles Platt, Robert McGoodwin, Herbert Langford Warren and others in various levels of free reference- either to Renaissance or more free style forms, but sometimes mixing them. This is a mixture of both, being a rather skilful asymmetrical 'Renaissance' in its details facing Mont Albert Road, and comparatively freer on its side elevation and balcony, which is a simple column and beam structure with shingled spandrels. The Renaissance touches are relatively free too, with the exaggerated voussoirs and oversize pilaster capitals of the Edwardian Baroque, then just starting to wane as a mode in public buildings. The round-arched stair window is a bold and whimsical idea, emphasizing the asymmetrical internal plan and answered well with the asymmetrically placed canted bay on the west side. The Baroque qualities compare with houses designed by Howard Joseland, Walter Vernon and John Sulman in Sydney suburbs around 1909-14, and more locally with Harold Desbrowe Annear's MH Baillieu and Kaye houses, both in Toorak, both of 1925, and the Merfield house, completed the following year.⁹ Annear favoured Palladian over the Baroque, however, and his houses lack the vigorous commercial note intruded in the awnings to 158 Mont Albert Road.

Assessment Against Criteria

Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria

CRITERION A: The historical importance, association with or relationship to Boroondara's history of the place or object.

The historical association with the Stobie family is of interest but is not considered to elevate the significance of the building.

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.

158 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury is a fine and relatively intact example of a generously proportioned society house of the interwar period influenced by contemporary design in the United States. It retains an original cabana-garage and a fence which may be original or early.

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 building has a bold asymmetry, particularly in its north elevation, that works well in bringing a sense of informality to a design otherwise marked by imposing Renaissance components. The use of a heavy commercial awning is a vigorous and successful gesture, enlivening the presence of the house.

Statement of Significance

158 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury is of local historical and architectural significance as a fine and relatively intact example of a generously proportioned society house of the interwar period influenced by contemporary design in the United States. It retains an original cabana-garage and a fence which may be original or early. The building has a bold asymmetry, particularly in its north elevation, that works well in bringing a sense of informality to a design otherwise marked by imposing Renaissance components. The use of a heavy commercial awning is a vigorous and successful gesture, enlivening the presence of the house.

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.

Specific:

¹ MMBW Drainage Plan Application, # 115486.

² *Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria* 1925; D1935; MMBW Drainage Plan Application, # 115486.

³ WD Wise (publisher), *Victoria Post Office Directory*, 1893-4; Blainey, *A History of Camberwell*, pp. 13-14, 121.

⁴ Details sourced from Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, v. 4, p. 201-2. Butler remarks that the stucco walls were unpainted until shortly before he made his study.

⁵ Based on site observations.

⁶ Drawings by Catt Architects dated March 2005. sourced from City of Boroondara Building File #40/408/26852.

⁷ G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, v. 4, p. 202.

⁸ Refer G Butler, Camberwell Conservation Study 1991, citation for Precinct 18, v. 2.

⁹ The Sydney houses were illustrated in both *Art and Architecture* and *The Salon*, and found Melbourne counterparts in some outer suburban public buildings, such as Box Hill Post Office. For Desbrowe-Annear, see Harriet Edquist, *Harold Desbrowe-Annear: a Life in Architecture*, Miegunyah, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 143-6, 153-4.