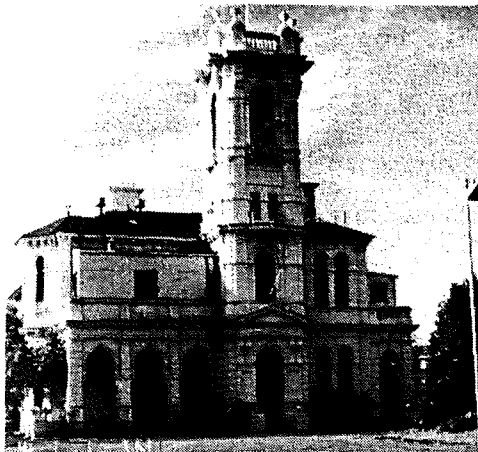


Camberwell Conservation Study 1991  
**BUILDING CITATION**

**Frognall,  
54 Mont Albert Road**



Historic Buildings Register R  
National Trust of Australia (Class/Rec.):  
Classified

NTA File Number: 1516  
Study Grading: A Precinct: 24.00  
Construction Date: 1888-89  
First Owner: Hicks, Clarence  
Architect: Gall, James  
Builder: Gamlin, Robert

**History**

Clarence Hicks acquired 7.5 acres here in 1887 and, with architect James Gall and contractor Robert Gamlin, commenced erecting this 16 room mansion in 1888<sup>1</sup>.

Financial difficulties during the early 1890's predictably led to Frognall's mortgage and foreclosure by the National Bank of Australasia, in 1896, and meant lease hold to such as Louise Gubbins as a ladies' college and privately to James Warne<sup>2</sup>. Burdett Laycock purchased the property in 1901, residing there until his death in 1941, after which Frognall was offered for use during World War II, becoming a major RAAF Communication Centre<sup>3</sup>.

The Australian Commonwealth compulsorily acquired the house after the war and it became the Melbourne Telecommunications Unit until 1976, then housing diploma cadet training<sup>4</sup>.

Clarence Hicks owned the Junction Timber Yards, saw and moulding mills, at the Burwood and Camberwell Roads intersection in the era of Frognall's construction<sup>1</sup>. He was also a shire councillor (1888-93) which perhaps explains architect, Gall's commissions for both Camberwell's new shire hall and Frognall.

Burdett Laycock shared with George Laycock the administration of Laycock, Son and Nettleton, wire mattress makers of Normanby Road, South Melbourne<sup>2</sup>. The firm had commenced under Frederick Laycock in Brunswick during 1879, moving to Collins Street and later Flinders Street with expansion of machinery and new premises at South Melbourne. This matched the commencement of a Sydney branch under Nettleton, employing in total 160 persons in the late 1880's. Unlike Hicks, Laycock did not venture into municipal politics (however one James Nettleton did, as mayor in 1932-4).

The architect, James Gall, created many similar but generally less grand designs to that of Frognall (see 54 Jolimont Terrace, Jolimont, 1877) with the exception of the Winter Irving mansion, Noorilim, which matches the scale but not the vigour of Frognall's design. Gall's Boroondara Shire Hall (Camberwell) has a similar dynamic composition to Frognall, the massive towers of both buildings being the key elements. J M Barry's Rostella (1868, dem.) was among the first examples of this towered Italianate style in Melbourne, followed by major examples like Werribee Park (1873-8): creating the style for mansion architecture to which Gall added the exuberance of the late 19th century.

**Description**

Sited on an elevated part of the estate, the house is off-centre in its original block and has two main facades, the north and the west. The north facade addressed the winding carriage drive from Mont Albert Road and the west looked towards the distant city of Melbourne, surmounted by its observation tower which marks the entry to the house. Presumably the design expected arrivals from Melbourne to be more important and numerous than by travelers going in the opposite direction. Frognall was then at the limits of

1 NTA FN1516; RB 1887-8, 1381; CLF H52  
2 NTA FN1516; RB 1895-6, 9; RB 1896-7, 10; RB 1898-9, 10  
3 NTA FN1516; CLF H52; RB 1901-2, 10  
4 CLF H52; NTA FN1516

1 D1891  
2 WD 1900-1899

## Camberwell Conservation Study 1991 BUILDING CITATION (Continued)

suburbia.

Deriving from the Italianate Renaissance in a similar manner to the numerous suburban villas which were to follow at a lesser scale, the stuccoed detail on the house is profuse but always secondary to the dramatic massing of the elevations and tower. The massing and void of open terraces and loggias, set within a trabeated framework on the main facades, are echoed in visual effect by the successive viewing points from each tower level which are expressed with good effect on the tower elevation. Pediments, deep eaves brackets, ornamented string moulds and friezes, and decorated panels set within tower piers which, on the main building, are smooth-rusticated, all contribute to a grand design.

Of note is the use of stilted segmental arches on the upper level windows, seen by some as the English influence on the Italian Renaissance inspiration. Other details include the iron finials and balconette balustrading, the encaustic mosaic tiling both inside and out, and the swags and fruit achieved in pressed cement in the French manner on the tower, consoles and pilasters<sup>3</sup>.

The internal layout of 31 rooms (half of them service areas) probably consisted of a large drawing room, entered from the west end of the hall, followed by a breakfast room, and a dining room close to the grand main staircase at the east end of the hall. Opposite these rooms were the library and billiard room: rooms which were evidently not intended to benefit from the views over the incoming driveway and garden. The near self-contained service wing stretched to the south, invisible from the drive, heading towards the four-stall stable block with its groom's room, coach house and bricked yard. Upstairs there were the bedrooms (4), the main bedroom relatively gigantic and linked to a sitting room on its east side. The maids' rooms wrapped around the back stair which led down to the service wing<sup>4</sup>.

Ornament varies from the ornate plaster, free-standing hall columns, polished joinery and encaustic floor tiling of the original concept, to the Art Nouveau pattern anaglypta wallpaper dado of works early this century which also saw the installation of internal water closets on each level.

A similar style of pressed metal ceiling lining is used on only one other room in the house. Original window glass in the stair hall was created by William Montgomery, the noted 19th century Melbourne decorator. Fine marble fireplaces exist in most main rooms but some plaster ceiling roses have been removed or covered over.

The garden, disposed to the north and west of the house, was and is dominated by lawn with shaped bedding perhaps originally filled with brightly coloured annuals in the gardenesque manner.

### Comparative Examples

The following Camberwell sites may be compared with this site being of the same period but most differ markedly in scale except for Veralum, Parlington Street. Other examples outside of Camberwell include: Werribee Park, 54 Jolimont Terrace, Jolimont, Mintaro at Monegeeta and Norrilim near Murchison.

- 35, PROSPECT HILL ROAD, 1881
- 630, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1882
- 2, BERWICK STREET, 1885c
- 53, PROSPECT HILL ROAD, 1886-7
- 320, CAMBERWELL ROAD, 1886
- 3, FERMANACH ROAD, 1887
- 57, SEYMOUR GROVE, 1887
- 33, ALMA ROAD, 1888
- 19, CANTERBURY ROAD, 1888
- 46, PARLINGTON STREET, 1888
- 635, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1888
- 89, UNION ROAD, 1888
- 2, PEPPIN STREET, 1889 (?)
- 25, ALMA ROAD, 1889(?)
- 36, ALMA ROAD, 1889
- 208, CANTERBURY ROAD, 1889
- 15, IRILBARRA ROAD, 1889
- 21, IRILBARRA ROAD, 1889
- 43, KENT ROAD, 1889
- 2, MOLESWORTH STREET, 1889
- 137, MONT ALBERT ROAD, 1889
- 32, PROSPECT HILL ROAD, 1889
- 10, TRAFALGAR ROAD, 1889
- 26A, WANDSWORTH ROAD, 1889
- 50, WANDSWORTH ROAD, 1889
- 42, WARRICAL ROAD, 1889
- 322-394, CAMBERWELL ROAD, 1890-1
- 262, UNION ROAD, 1890/1900
- 15, ALMA ROAD, 1890
- 544, BURKE ROAD, 1890
- 27, INGLEBY ROAD, 1890
- 7, VICTORIA AVENUE, 1890
- 13, VICTORIA AVENUE, 1890
- 57, YARRBAT AVENUE, 1890c?
- 7A, ALMA ROAD, 1891-2
- 13, BALWYN ROAD, 1891-4
- 73-79, BALWYN ROAD, 1891
- 320, CAMBERWELL ROAD, 1892
- 622, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1892

3 see Allom Lovell Sanderson, Conservation Management Plan  
Frognaill Canterbury Victoria, p.66 (for Dept. Housing  
& Construction, 1984)

4 *ibid.*

## Camberwell Conservation Study 1991 BUILDING CITATION (Continued)

6, TRAFALGAR ROAD, 1892  
125, WATTLE VALLEY ROAD, 1892  
136, CANTERBURY ROAD, 1893  
668-670, BURKE ROAD, 1895  
680, BURKE ROAD, 1895  
816-822, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1895  
30, HOWARD STREET, 1895c  
29, CANTERBURY ROAD, 1897  
52, PROSPECT HILL ROAD, 1897  
15, KASOUKA ROAD, 1898  
150, MONT ALBERT ROAD, 1899  
26, VICTORIA AVENUE, 1899

### External Integrity

Generally original except for the enclosure of upper-level terrace, internal detailed alterations and the addition of numerous defence-related structures in the grounds, general elimination of ornamental landscape elements including fences<sup>1</sup>.

### Significance

Frognall is significant for:  
historically,

its retention of most of its original grounds and some of its landscaping, compared to the subdivision of most similarly scaled properties in the metropolitan area;

its high integrity to its construction date, evoking both the boom era lifestyle generally and the individual lives of at least two distinguished families, by the retention of service areas and stable block as well as the opulent architecture of the main rooms;

the grandness afforded for a suburban timber dealer's residence of the 1880's also locally notable as built for a local businessman and councillor and later the residence for businessmen with metropolitan wide interests.

architecturally,

its architectural quality which promotes the designer, James Gall, as among the foremost creators of grand Italian Renaissance derived towered mansions in the state and is of special interest to Camberwell because of Gall's design of the Boroondara Shire hall; and

its detailing which provides in a superior way examples of the full vocabulary of decorative iron, stucco and coloured glass used in the late 19th century.

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<sup>1</sup> see Allom Lovell report for detailed analysis

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#### Send Feedback

#### Frognall, 54 Mont Albert Rd, Canterbury, VIC

**Photographs:** None  
**List:** Register of the National Estate  
**Class:** Historic  
**Legal Status:** Identified through State processes  
**Place ID:** 14277  
**Place File No:** 2/15/008/0012

#### **Statement of Significance:**

Frognall, built 1889-91 to a design by James Gall, is significant as a substantially intact 1880s Italianate residence of grand proportions. Together with its service wing and rear stable block, the property is a physical reflection of a prosperous lifestyle enjoyed during the boom period (Criteria A.4 and D.2). The property is significant for retaining nearly its whole subdivision lot of 1859 within an area now closely subdivided (Criterion B.2). Frognall is historically significant for the important role it played in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) communications network during the Second World War (Criterion A.4).

This place is entered in the Victorian Heritage Register. The Australian Heritage Commission recognises the standards of historic assessment of Heritage Victoria and acknowledges that this place has national estate historic values. Enquiries concerning the assessment or conservation of this place should be directed in the first instance to Heritage Victoria.

Commonwealth authorities and bodies should contact the Australian Heritage Commission directly if any Commonwealth action is proposed in relation to this place.

**Official Values:** Not Available

#### **Description:**

##### History:

In 1859 land in the Canterbury region was surveyed and subdivided and the land on which Frognall now stands was designated as Lot 19. The property passed through three owners before being purchased in 1887 by Clarence Hicks, a timber merchant, who apparently rose to wealth from modest beginnings as his business expanded during the boom years of the 1880s. Frognall was built in 1889-91 to the design of James Gall, with stables and other secondary structures at the rear of the building. It is likely that the core of the decorative garden was also laid out in this period. By 1893 however, the Hicks were experiencing financial difficulties and three years later the Bank foreclosed on their mortgage and the house was let to tenants. Frognall then passed through the hands of a number of owners, eventually being retained by the Laycock family in 1901. Laycock was the owner of a wool weaving business and the residence remained as the Laycock family home for over forty years. Very few changes appear to have been made during that time. It is likely that the tennis court and conservatory (now both demolished) were constructed, some deciduous trees were planted in the north lawn area and minor changes were made to the interior of Frognall in an Art Nouveau style. The area of land was slightly reduced

with the construction of Torrington Street along the southern boundary in 1915. In 1942 the property was purchased by the Commonwealth and it became the RAAF Wireless Telecommunications Station in 1943. One notable aspect of this period is that the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAF) played an increasing role in carrying out signals duties as manpower shortages became acute. Communication services continued to operate from Frognall after the war, eventually phasing out in 1976. The facilities were then utilised by RAAF engineer cadets. The RAAF occupancy had a marked effect on the property, with over buildings being erected on the site. James Gall created many similar but generally less grand designs to that of Frognall, including several large terraces in Jolimont, Mintaro at Lancefield and Boroondara Shire Hall. Frognall is comparable in achievement to another Gall building, the Winter Irving mansion Noorilim. The Camberwell area contains a number of grand houses erected in the 1870s and 1880s, reflecting the prosperity of Melbourne during this boom period. The towered Italianate style of Frognall had been used previously throughout Melbourne in buildings such as Toorak House (1848-51), Rostella (1868, now demolished), Werribee Park (1873-78) and Verulam (1888, now named Parlinton), the latter being built on the land next to Frognall.

Description:

Sited on an elevated part of the estate, Frognall is off centre in its original block and has two main facades. The north facade addressed the winding carriage drive from Mont Albert Road and the west facade, surmounted by its observation tower which marks the entry to the house, looked towards the distant city of Melbourne. Frognall displays the characteristics of the Victorian Italianate style in an asymmetrical design. The ground floor is composed of an arcaded loggia on two sides, broken on the north face by a projecting two storey bay and on the west face by a frontispiece which extends beyond the roof line to form a tower. Both features are placed off centre. The first floor originally incorporated terraces, but these were converted into rooms by the RAAF during World War Two. Stilted segmental arches are used on the original upper level windows. The slate roof is a U shaped hipped roof, with projections over the canted bay to the north and the original billiard room. The exterior walls are constructed of load bearing brickwork finished with grey render. Frognall's exterior is decorated with pediments, moulded string courses, swags, bracketed eaves, iron finials and balconette balustrading, all contributing to a grand design. The internal layout of thirty-one rooms (half of them service areas) probably consisted of a large drawing room, entered from the west end of the hall, followed by a breakfast room and a dining room close to the grand main staircase at the east end of the hall. Opposite these rooms were the library and billiard room. The near self-contained service wing stretched to the south, invisible from the drive, heading toward the four stall stable block with its groom's room, coach house and bricked yard. Upstairs were the four bedrooms, the main one relatively gigantic and linked to a sitting room on its east side. The interior features decorative encaustic tiling, leadlight windows, carved joinery, foliage decorated ironwork balusters, glazing to the front door surrounds and fine plasterwork swags, cornices and pilasters. The rooms in the service areas of the house are smaller and comparatively plain. The stables are an L shaped single storey structure constructed of brick and finished in render, with a skillion roof comprised of two intersecting gables. At the end of each gable are timber lined eaves supported on decorative timber brackets. The stables were substantially altered during the RAAF period of occupancy, with changes to the internal space and to the floor, doors and windows, but the overall plan and roof form is intact. The area to the north and west of the house appears to have always been set aside for use as a garden, while the southern zone was separated by a fence abutting the stable block and was used as an orchard and cow pasture. Frognall's garden is typical of the Federation style of garden design popular at the turn of the century, with a dominant lawn area dotted randomly with picturesque garden beds, but is of a scale that is uncommonly large. The present form of the garden reflects the original layout, with the beds and curving driveway still intact. However, many evergreens that formed a border to the east have been removed, some deciduous trees have been

introduced and the cypresses along the Mont Albert Road boundary have changed in character from forming a hedge to being a dominantly high line. As well, the tennis court and conservatory have been demolished. All these changes have altered the form and aspect of the garden. Twentieth century RAAF buildings covered the remainder of the Frognall lot until they were demolished in the 1980s. They were architecturally unremarkable, being examples of standard RAAF designs. The earlier structures were predominantly of composite weatherboard and fibrous sheet construction, the more recent were brick.

**History:** Not Available

**Condition and Integrity:**

Frognall is in very good condition, retaining most of its original features. The most intrusive alterations have been the enclosure of upper level terraces and the extension of the service wing. The stables have been substantially modified internally. The garden partly retains its original form, although elements of the garden have been altered, including the general elimination of ornamental landscape features including fences. The twentieth century RAAF buildings were demolished in the 1980s and a small plot was subdivided and separated from the original lot. (1991)

Lack of maintenance and incomplete and inadequate repair works to roof and drainage system, following demolition of the balcony enclosures have resulted in deterioration of the structure. Serious water ingress has occurred, causing extensive damage to the billiard room ceiling and deterioration of plasterwork and finishes in the drawing room and the room directly above. Rising damp has also caused considerable damage. (1994)  
The property was surrounded by a double fence topped with barbed wire. A guard box prevented entry to the site. Nothing of the building or grounds could be seen from the road. (1996)

**Location:**

54 Mount Albert Road, Canterbury.

**Bibliography:**

Conservation Management Plan: Frognall. Canterbury Victoria. Allom Lovell Sanderson Pty Ltd.

Department of Housing and Construction, December 1984.

Allom Lovell and Associates, 1994. Frognall. Report on Roof and Drainage Works.

Heritage Victoria File 603198

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) FN 1516

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