

Camberwell Conservation Study 1991
BUILDING CITATION

**Tourmont, now Fintona Girls School
79 Balwyn Road**



Study Grading: A

Precinct: 25.00 Streetscape: 2

Construction Date: 1891

First Owner: Syme, David York

Architect: Beswicke, John

History

Andrew Murray, editor of the *Argus*, the *Economist* and *Murray's Prices Current* reputedly purchased the land surrounding this house in the 1850's. He established a large vineyard and built a house which he called Balwyn¹. Melbourne Steamship Company co-founder and Manager, David York Syme, was however, the first owner-occupier of this eighteen room brick house in 1891, occupying allotments 28-9, 18-19 of a recent subdivision². Peter Watts, in his undergraduate thesis on John Beswicke cites him as Syme's architect. Syme resided there until his death in 1932.

Apprenticed as a surgeon and apothecary in Bushmills, Ireland, Syme left for Australia aged 18 (c1862) and eventually gained a commission in the Royal Sydney Artillery. After an unsuccessful period growing cotton in Fiji he returned to Melbourne in 1893 and was appointed manager of the Hobson's Bay Floating Dock Co. and engineering works at Williamstown, by his brother-in-law and former Williamstown pilot, Hugh Reid. Reid's firm combined with the Melbourne Coal Co. and James Deane and Co. and, together with their proprietors (Deane and

McIntyre) formed the Melbourne Coal, Shipping and Engineering Co. Ltd. in 1884.

Syme outlasted the other partners, serving on the Marine Board, a trustee of the Pilots' Superannuation Fund and Shipwrecked Mariners' Fund also as vice president of the Employers' Federation. His son David Syme Jnr. was 15 when Tourmont was built. He later became managing director of the Melbourne Steamship Co., in 1919, and a director of other associated companies. He was appointed the Deputy Controller of Shipping also serving on the Melbourne Hospital Committee^{1, 2}.

A plan of Tourmont, dated 1927, shows the house as it stands (minus new wings), with a carriage sweep to its frontage, a tennis court to the north and a stable yard to the west.

Fintona school began as William and Annie Hughston's college in the late 19th century, moving from one large house to another until, under Margaret Cunningham, the school purchased Tourmont in 1934³. Architect, R.W. Appleford and builder Yuncken prepared the house for commencement as a school in 1936⁴. A new wing was linked to the house on the south leaving the original extent of the house clearly visible. Other wings followed. Beswicke, John

Description

Tourmont appears to consist of two buildings of three-colour face brick: one a two-storey, iron verandahed house; the other a French chateaux with a dash of English Tudor. This duality is pronounced by the central placement of a trussed gable set into the upper verandah of the northern wing which, with its sparse detail, differs markedly from the other ornate and Tudoresque half-timbered and trussed gable to the south. Ribbed chimneys, the pressed metal cladding and fretted detail of the southern gable and the turned verandah posts of the northern wing are all common attributes of the Melbourne Queen Anne villa style of the Edwardian era. Late Victorian period detail and finishes are also apparent given the cast iron friezes and balustrading, polychrome brickwork, the pointed arched openings and

¹ Blaney, p.23
² D1892; RB 1891-2, 1310; RB 1892-3, 657

¹ *The Age*, December 21st, 1935
² Marine Board
³ Blaney, p.72; Gillison, *J. Margaret Cunningham of Fintona*, p.36
⁴ op. cit. p.75

Camberwell Conservation Study 1991 BUILDING CITATION (Continued)

general two-storey towered form (see 13 Victoria Road), which may also be seen in Italianate villas such as Parlington (q.v.). The Queen Anne styled villa adjoining highlights this contrast.

The picket fence and mature trees (elms) are sympathetic to the house construction date, whilst added wings, to the west and south, match in general form and materials to that of the original.

Comparative Examples

The following Camberwell sites may be compared with this site.

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, c1889
25, ALMA ROAD, c1889
54, MONT ALBERT ROAD, 1889-9
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, INGLESBY ROAD, 1890
7, VICTORIA AVENUE, 1890
13, VICTORIA AVENUE, 1890
57, YARRBAT AVENUE, 1890c?
7A, ALMA ROAD, 1891-2
13, BALWYN ROAD, 1891-4
320, CAMBERWELL ROAD, 1892
622, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1892
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

The building is generally original (elevations visible from Balwyn Road) with the exception of school additions to the south and west. It is possible that the section south of the tower was added early this century.

Streetscape

Set on a hill and within a large exotic garden the house is prominent, physically, and as an obvious pre-subdivision property. It adjoins houses from the Queen Anne style and Bungalow type which relate with gabled roof forms and brick colour.

Significance

Architecturally, a highly successful and picturesque design, using European Medieval motifs in a manner characteristic of John Beswicke's work, and a prelude to the medieval emphasis adopted by the prolific Queen Anne villa style in Victoria: of state importance.

Historically, created for and the home of David Symes, an important Victorian business figure. Both Murray, the original purchaser, and Syme, the first resident are critical figures in the history of Victoria if not Australia. Murray combined his newspaper interest with wine-growing and service in local municipal politics; Syme was an influential member of the Victorian corporate world. They were probably a cut above other Camberwell residents in political and economic influence. Tourmont reflects some of this local standing. The building's later career as a private girls' school indicates another phase in the history of Camberwell, when its mansions were turned to new uses, private schools in particular; of state importance.