

Camberwell Conservation Study 1991  
**BUILDING CITATION**

**Wanganella formerly St. John's Wood,  
8 Aird Street**



Australian Heritage Commission: Registered  
National Trust of Australia (Class/Rec.):  
Classified

NTA File Number: 1140

Study Grading: A

Construction Date: 1870

First Owner: McDonald, John

#### History

Shown as a minute dot on the *Plan of the Shire of Boroondara* (c1872), St. John's Wood was centred on the Riversdale Road frontage of Mr. J. McDonald's four acre Crown Portion 120. His east boundary aligned with Palmerston Street, the west with Avenue Road, and on the south, Crescent Road. John McDonald was at that time serving the second of a four year council tenure (1871-4). He appears to have aided, not always successfully, the irascible pursuits of Edward Dillon in Dillon's contentious path through council politics to his eventual presidency in 1874, the year McDonald retired.

McDonald, a Collins Street estate agent and secretary to the Irish-Australian Permanent Building Society<sup>3</sup>, followed one J. McConnell, as the second owner of this Crown Portion, in 1869<sup>4</sup>. He had previously resided in Carlton and later Fitzroy<sup>5</sup>, having conducted his agency since the early 1860s.

St. John's Wood was placed on the market mid 1877 being described as a handsome, commodious and elegantly finished FAMILY RESIDENCE set in four acres of 'park land' laid out in pleasure gardens and grass paddocks. Drawing and dining rooms, each 30 x 17 feet, occupied the ground floor and six good bedrooms were on the upper floor. A man's servant room and kitchen accommodation were also supplied.

Meanwhile in 1858, one George Peppin and his sons George Junior and Frederick had purchased South Wanganella station on the Riverina where, in the 1860s, they commenced breeding a robust type of merino sheep more suitable for the area, culminating in five awards in the Echuca Agricultural Show of 1864. George Junior managed Wanganella (his father and brother residing on other properties acquired since) until his death in 1876, three years short of the station's winning of the 'most valuable ewe fleece' prize at the Sydney International Exhibition. Today it is estimated that, as a result of the brothers' careful breeding, over 60% of merinos in Australia have Wanganella blood.

Frederick sold Wanganella and their other Riverina properties in 1878, reinvesting in Queensland property, and began a successful and influential period of residence in Orrong Road, Caulfield. George Junior's widow, Maria (nee Brown-Smith), joined him in Melbourne, going to live at St. John's Wood, then 20 acres, with George's four daughters and two sons, and providing the house with its present name<sup>1</sup>. One G. Peppin appears to have carried on his father's name as partner in the firm Aird & Peppin: the name "Aird" reputedly arising from his wife Elsie's maiden name.

By May 1888 (probably after Maria's demise), forty eight suburban allotments were created around the house, surveyed by John S. Jenkins as the Wanganella Estate. The family names, Peppin and Aird Streets, were the major avenues terminating, to the south, on a right-of-way. The Richmond Solicitor C.S. Scheele was, for a brief period, the nominal owner of the house and lots 22, 23 & 28, by 1888-9. The address was then Peppin Street, rather than the previous Riversdale Road. Brand Willis, a contractor, became the next owner of what was described as an eleven room brick house,

3 D1870  
4 CLF H21  
5 D1870

1 CLF H21

## Camberwell Conservation Study 1991 BUILDING CITATION (Continued)

succeeded by his executors (and presumed children) Annie, James and Samuel<sup>2</sup>. Miss Annie Willis continued to reside there; Gordon Nicholson purchasing and further subdividing after 1956<sup>3</sup>.

During the Willis period, in 1904, a site plan of the house shows a generous gateway to Peppin Street, lining with a carriage sweep fronting the west elevation; the stables were 20 metres to the south of the house.

### **Description**

Today locked in by subdivision, the house bravely faces Riversdale Road and a dozen or so villas between. The house's entrance faces the former Peppin Street driveway whilst the formidable iron carriage gates (once in Peppin Street) now face Aird.

In the tradition of Camberwell's large homes of the 1860s -1870s the house is parapeted (part), two-storey, stuccoed and has a Doric order colonnade. A distinctive aspect of this colonnade is that it supports an open, balustraded terrace, with connotations of Tara (1859) and its contemporary, Dr. Fitzgerald's house (Rostella), both designed by architect, J. M. Barry. As a trio, these are all grand houses, styled after the Italian Renaissance manner, which are surprisingly substantial given their distance from Melbourne and their early construction dates.

St. John's Wood foregoes the pronounced symmetry of its north elevation, with a two-level room bay on the west, which adjoins a one-level porch, with an inaccessible balustraded terrace. A lofty hall, set behind this porch, has a stair which ascends to the south immediately at the doorway, suggesting that the stair may have been once approached from a different direction. The grand north colonnade appears more suited to cover a central entrance, although the existence of the two large dining and drawing rooms across the front does not support this. A minor entrance to the dining room has been provided onto the verandah presumably for after dinner smoking. Another internal anomaly is the narrow width of the hallway which divides the bedrooms on the upper level.

The main M-hip roof line of the house falls to a deep protruding eaves line, with paired brackets and a cornice moulding, but the western room bay attempts this symmetry, needing a balustraded parapet to screen the change in roof line. A similar device is used over a much shallower bay set into the north facade.

Other comparable examples include Oberwyl, St. Kilda and Merchiston Hall, Geelong (1856).

### **Comparative Examples**

The following Camberwell sites may be compared with this site.

2, BERWICK STREET, 1859  
19, CANTERBURY ROAD, 1860  
9, BARNSBURY ROAD, 1861  
18, BALWYN ROAD, 1863  
290, CAMBERWELL ROAD, 1868-  
35, PROSPECT HILL ROAD, 1873-4

### **External Integrity**

Generally externally original, excepting alterations to the rear former servants wing and replacement of the verandah's timber floors; the basalt fence to Aird Street is inappropriate.

Internally, folding doors have been removed, new cornices and ceiling roses installed.

### **Streetscape**

Set in a mixed streetscape which represents the Edwardian era at its northern end, also identifiable by its detail and orientation as having preceded the present subdivision.

### **Significance**

Architecturally, one of four Camberwell houses from the early Victorian period which possess open cement colonnaded terraces attached to a conservative Renaissance revival base also a near original and successful early use of the Italian manner, more impressive given its distance from a major township: of state importance.

Historically, linked for a decade with the renowned pastoralist and merino sheep breeding Peppin family but otherwise, with its distinctive scale and orientation, is a visible reminder of the first wave of house building in Camberwell: of local importance and regional interest.

2 RB 1905-6, 277; CLF H21; MMBW DPA 50431  
3 CLF H21

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### Place Details

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#### Wanganella, 8 Aird St, Camberwell, VIC

#### Photographs:



**List:** Register of the National Estate

**Class:** Historic

**Legal Status:** Registered (21/03/1978)

**Place ID:** 5638

**Place File No:** 2/15/008/0008

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

Wanganella, 8 Aird Street, Camberwell, is representative of the Italianate style and is of architectural note for its unusual planning and its detailing. The building is also part of a townscape of interest. The absence of any substantial hallway is most unusual, as is the location of the stairs behind the entrance facade. The detailing of a parapet to a bay window abutting a broad eaves overhang is most uncommon. The Doric columns are particularly substantial. The window's shapes are distinctive.

(The Commission is in the process of developing and/or upgrading official statements for places listed prior to 1991. The above data was mainly provided by the nominator and has not yet been revised by the Commission.)

**Official Values:** Not Available

#### **Description:**

Wanganella, 8 Aird Street, Camberwell, is a two storey house built in 1870 for John McDonald. In stuccoed brickwork, with quoins and hood mouldings, the asymmetrically arranged house sits on a bluestone plinth and has a slate roof with paired eaves brackets. The entrance facade has a double storey bay window with parapet and a shingle storey porch on Doric columns. A single storey Doric colonnade with balustrade faces the symmetrical north facade.

**History:** Not Available

#### **Condition and Integrity:**

Wanganella, 8 Aird Street, Camberwell, was able to be inspected from the street only. The house appears to be intact externally.

#### **Location:**

8 Aird Street, Camberwell.

#### **Bibliography:**

PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION 1. BEILMARZ, ELIZABETH & DOUGLAS,

ANNE. 'CAMBERWELL MANSIONS', HISTORY RESEARCH ESSAY, DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, UNDATED. 2. MAPLE, ROBERT & WEBBER, JOHN. 'A SURVEY & DISCUSSION OF NOTABLE DOMESTIC PRE BOOM ARCHITECTURE IN THE CAMBERWELL AREA', HISTORY

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**File Number:** B1140

**Location:** 8 Aird Street CAMBERWELL

**Other/Formal Names:** FORMER ST JOHN'S WOOD

**Address:** 8 Aird Street CAMBERWELL 3124 VIC 8

**Statement of Cultural Heritage Significance:**

Statement of Significance A two-storey Georgian mansion of 1870 (originally named St Jc columnar porticos surmounted by balustraded balconies and with elaborately worked iron

**Level:** Local

**Category:** Mansion

**Group:** Residential buildings (private)

**Type:** Heritage place

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