

Barwon

INDIVIDUAL HERITAGE PLACE – CITATION TEMPLATE

Currently protected
under HO29

NAME OF PLACE: Barwon.

OTHER NAMES OF PLACE: Formerly Cromwell House

ADDRESS / LOCATION: 38 Cromwell Road , South Yarra, VIC 3141.

PROPERTY INFORMATION: Not available.

EXISTING LISTINGS: HO29. VHR H0825

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State

ASSESSED BY: John Statham, Heritage Advisor, City of Stonnington.

ASSESSMENT DATE: March 2012.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

Barwon (formerly Cromwell House) was constructed on land made available through the draining of swampy land near Surrey Road and made more desirable through the construction of the Hawksburn Railway Station in 1879 and the ensuing land boom (3.3.3. *Speculators and land boomers*). It is a substantial two-storey rendered brick residence combining Italianate and Georgian influences. It is notable for verandahs to its key facades but is otherwise a straightforward, two-storey volume beneath a low-pitched hipped roof and prominent chimneys. It was built in 1881 for the architect Edmund G Ovey, who is believed to be its designer.

How is it significant?

Barwon is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria and the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Barwon is of architectural significance at a State level for its internal decorative treatment. It contains extant painted decoration of a very high quality. Of particular note is the drawing room with ceiling and walls that are considered a quite exceptional and rare treatment for houses after the mid-1880s. The front hall contains compositional painting in the scenic panels painted in the frieze, as distinct from stencilling, a very unusual feature in Australia. These painted interiors provide a remarkable example of high quality late-19th century interior decoration. These elements are not protected under the City of Stonnington Planning Scheme.

Externally, Barwon is of architectural significance for its unusual form, incorporating two notable verandahs, and providing one of the best examples of a distinctive feature of Melbourne houses from this period. (8.4.1 *Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion*).

Barwon is of architectural significance for its associations with Edmund Ovey. Ovey designed many buildings in and around Prahran in the period from the 1870s to the early 1890s. These include timber and brick residences, shops in nearby Chapel Street and Toorak Road and, most notably, St Martins Church and parsonage in nearby Surrey Road. His contribution to the profession was recognised in 1892 when he was made a fellow of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. The house is of particular interest as the architect's own residence (8.4.3 *Architects and their houses*).

Barwon is of historical significance as a fine example of a substantial suburban house which demonstrates the growth of the more privileged areas of Melbourne (8.2 *Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal*), and the successful living that could be obtained by architects in the burgeoning colony.

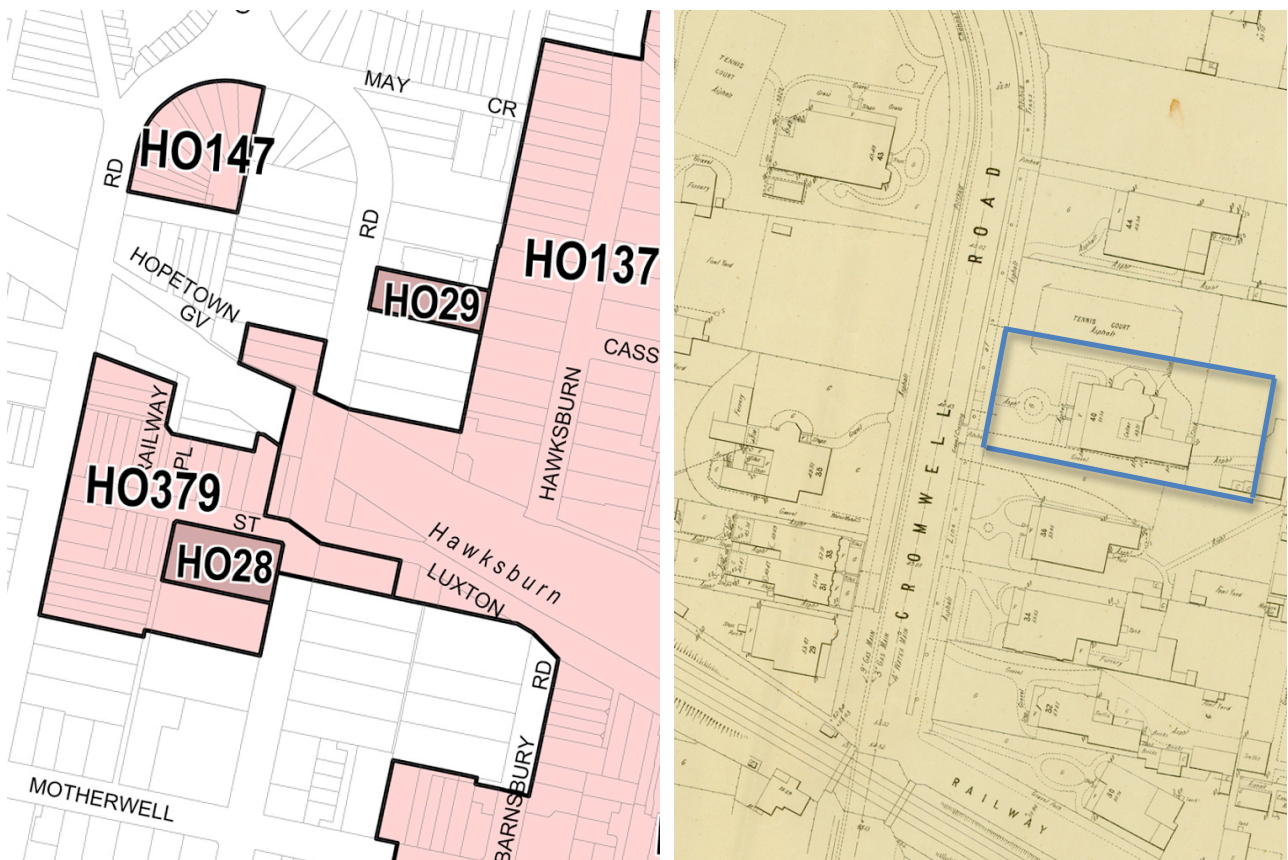


Figure 1 Barwon, HO29, from Victorian Planning Schemes Online

Figure 2 MMBW detail Plan 970, City of Prahran, 1896

DESCRIPTION

Barwon (formerly Cromwell House) is located on land made available when swampy ground near Surrey Road was drained. It is a substantial two-storey rendered brick residence combining Italianate and Georgian influences. The facade comprises a simple symmetrical arrangement of square-headed windows with an ornate semi secular highlight window above the principle ground floor entry. The residence is notable for verandahs to its key facades. The two-storey verandah to the street adopts an arcaded form with circular motifs throughout its cast iron lacework. A secondary verandah to the northern elevation provides a small trafficable area above a canted bay window. Despite these adornments the building is otherwise a straightforward two-storey volume beneath a low-pitched hipped roof and prominent chimneys.



Figure 3 Barwon (formerly Cromwell House), 38 Cromwell Road, South Yarra

The interior of the building was not examined in the preparation of this brief report. It is understood to contain extant painted decoration of a very high quality.

HISTORY

Lots 33 34 and 35, each of about 52 acres, were offered for sale at the auction of Crown Land in June 1849 (1). Lot 35, the most desirable land along the eastern side of Chapel Street, attracted the highest prices. It was purchased by GA Robinson, Protector of Aborigines. Lot 34 to its east, in the vicinity of present day Surrey and Cromwell Roads, was purchased by the Estate of late Dr EC Hobson. The Lot was beset with drainage problems and attracted the lowest prices. A stream running east-west through swampy land in the north of the Lot and another running north-south in the vicinity of present day Surrey Road rendered all but the highest ground impenetrable after rains(2). Robinson subdivided Lot 35 into smaller lots of 7 to 15 acres, each with a frontage to Chapel Street. Blocks extended to the eastern boundary of the lot adjacent to the swampy ground in Lot 34. In the northern sections of Lot 35, near the intersection of Chapel Street and Toorak Road, the Palermo Estate was created. To its south a ten acre block was purchased by Albert Terry who set up the Victoria Brewery on the corner of Garden Street. In the 1870s, the northern sections of Terry's block were sold to the Railways Department to allow the construction of the Oakleigh railway line(3). The block to the south of the brewery was purchased by Joseph Wilson who ran a general store on Chapel

Street(4). Wilson subdivided his land around 1861(5), providing modest residential allotments to either side of Wilson Street, a narrow *cul de sac* extending to the eastern boundary of Lot 33.

The swamp remained a barrier to the eastward extension of Wilson Street. While Prahran more broadly developed rapidly during the 1850s and 1860s, little attempt was made to develop Hobson's Lot 34. The southern sections had been cleared and Kearney's map of 1857 shows some subdivision into farming allotments. However, the central section of Lot 34 at the eastern end of Wilson Street remained uncleared except for a small farm or market garden(7). A handful of larger houses including *Vaucluse House* had been constructed on the higher ground near Toorak Road, well away from the creeks(8).

With improvements to drainage in the area, undertaken through the 1860s, the southern three quarters of Lot 34 was surveyed and Cromwell and Surrey Roads were created and surfaced. They extended northwards from Malvern Road, terminating at the southern boundary of *Vaucluse House*. The roads appear to have followed the routes of earlier bush tracks as they are noted in directories as early as 1865(9). Allotments along these two roads were made available for sale in 1871(10).

Through the 1870s, a number of new houses such as *Monkton* and *Dunster House* were constructed on the large allotments in Surrey and Cromwell Roads. However, much of the land made available in the subdivision of 1871 remained unsold. The Railways Department was able to purchase a tract through the northern sections of the subdivision to allow the construction of the Oakleigh Railway in 1879. Cromwell Road was particularly slow in selling. In the early 1880s, when the Presbyterian and Anglican Churches were seeking land in the area, both found good allotments in Cromwell Road(11). St Martin's Anglican Church at the intersection of Wilson Street and Cromwell Road was opened in 1883 to designs by EG Ovey.

Ovey was a notable architect who worked throughout the local area. He had lived and worked from Clara Street, South Yarra before moving to Cromwell House in Cromwell Road. He is generally credited with its design.

With the advent of the railway, the construction of St Martin's Church and the Presbyterian Church a little to the south and the boom more generally, development in the central sections of Lot 34 commenced in earnest. Large allotments, unsold since their release during the 1870s, were purchased and subdivided. This provided opportunities for the construction of the polite villas visible in the MMBW plan of 1896.

Ovey undertook an extensive world trip in the late 1880s and undertook little architectural work on his return. By the turn of the century, the house had been sold to Annie Mabel Lorimer who appears to have rented the property to others. She was a Glen Iris resident. In 1900, she undertook some modest works to the rear of the property with the assistance of architect Percy Oakden. At that time the building survived on a large block with a tennis court to its north. This was subdivided from the subject property and a modest bungalow was constructed c.1920. By 1958, the property was owned by EM Eugster.(14)

(1) Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area 3*, p.34

(2) Malone, p.34

(3) Malone, pp.51-3

(4) Malone, p.53

(5) *The Property of Mr Joseph Wilson*, Subdivision Plan, 1861, City of Stonnington History Collection, Reg. No 11916.

(6) Sands and Mc Dougall, *Postal Directory*, 1875

(7) Malone, p.42

(8) Malone p.43

(9) Malone p.43.

(10) *Dunster Estate*, Subdivision Plan, 1871, City of Stonnington History Collection, Reg. No 11046.

(11) Malone, p.43

(12) Miles Lewis (ed), *Victorian Churches: Their origins, their story and their architecture*, p.79.

(13) *Plan of Drainage no. 0020031*. South East Water..

(14) *Plan of Drainage no. 20031*. South East Water.

ANALYSIS

Thematic context

Barwon illustrates the following Historical themes

3.3.3. *Speculators and land boomers.*

8.4.1 *Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion.*

8.4.3 *Architects and their houses.*

8.2 *Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal.*

Comparative analysis

George Edmund Ovey

The following is drawn from various periodical entries noted in Miles Lewis, Australian Architectural Index.

George Edmund Ovey worked in Melbourne and its suburbs in the period from the late 1870s to the early 1890s. Through the late 1870s, he was engaged by Alexander Davidson and Co, Architects, working on the Presbyterian Church, in Clarendon Street South Melbourne and the Temperance Hall in North Fitzroy. He subsequently set up on his own practice, working from premises in Collins Street West. Ovey lived in South Yarra and largely practised in the local area. His practice centred on residential works, designing and constructing a range of dwellings from modest cottages to substantial villas. He was mainly active in the Cities of Prahran, Malvern and St Kilda where his work included shops in Chapel Street and Toorak Road. He is primarily remembered for St Martin's Church, at the intersection of Cromwell Rd. and Wilson St, South Yarra (from 1883) and for the associated parsonage completed a few years later and for his own residence, Cromwell House in nearby Cromwell Road (1881). Ovey undertook an extensive world trip in the late 1880s and undertook little architectural work on his return. He died in 1936.

Grand suburban Houses

Although many single-storey villas were built in Melbourne during the nineteenth century, after the 1840s the grandest Melbourne houses were always of two storeys, or occasionally of three storeys as was the case for Government House and *Cliveden*. Owners often added a storey to their single storey houses as their fortunes improved, for example, Como at South Yarra had added a second storey by 1855. Towards the end of the century, there was an increasing tendency to prefer the higher status of a two-storey house over one of a single storey.

The *City of Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* describes the 1880s as a 'period of unprecedented prosperity growth and development. Urban boundaries were pushed out as people, sharing in the general prosperity and the new ideal of home ownership, sought new residential lands'. South Yarra had developed as a small polite suburb through the 1860s and 1870s. However, from about 1880, a wave of new development spread from South Yarra, across the City of Prahran and beyond, as affluent city workers set out in search of the suburban ideal of the *rus en urbe*. Although much of this development was of a single storey, each of these areas attracted their share of wealthy residents and grand two storey houses. Buildings such as 30 Darling Street South Yarra (HO32), 1 Hawksburn Road (part HO137), 1043 Malvern Road, Toorak (HO324), or Montrose House in Mercer Road, Armadale (HO367), are typical of houses seeking to demonstrate the stature of their occupants through their scale and sophisticated design. *Barwon*, as Ovey's own house, not only demonstrates the wealth and taste of its owner and his capabilities as an architect, but the successful living available to architects in the burgeoning colony.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The existing Heritage Overlay should be retained unaltered.

A more detailed review of George Edmund Ovey's body of work should be undertaken to better place the building within his oeuvre.

A review of early Council ratebooks should be undertaken to determine any notable owners or occupiers after Ovey's occupation of the building.

REFERENCES

Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area 3*.

Miles Lewis (ed), *Victorian Churches. Their origins, their story and their architecture*.

Miles Lewis, *Australian Architectural Index online*.

Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, *Detail Plan 970, City of Prahran*, 1896.

Context Pty Ltd, *City of Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006 with upgrades 2009.