

## NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)

## CLASSIFICATION REPORT

## 1. NAME OF PLACE

Pensford.

## 2. OTHER NAME

None.

## 3. LOCATION

528 Orrong Road, corner of Orrong Road and Avalon Road, Armadale.

## 4. DATE

Built c 1903

## 5. TYPE OF PLACE

Residence.

## 6. LISTING DETAILS

Proposed for Classification at regional level.

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Pensford is of regional significance as an example of the work of the important Victorian architect Walter Richmond Butler and as an early and relatively uncommon instance of Art Nouveau influence on domestic architecture in Melbourne.

Butler was a notable member of the group of architects in Melbourne who promoted a range of red-brick styles from the 1880s until the 1900s, all based on Arts and Crafts ideals and deriving ultimately from English Domestic Revival sources. These styles included the Melbourne domestic Queen Anne style. Butler's domestic work was generally for wealthy clients and much was in the Toorak and Armidale areas. His work was always distinctive and his houses before about 1905 in particular reflect strongly his English training and association with the leading English Arts and Crafts designers Ernest Gimson and W R Lethaby. His later houses display increasing American influence, and the simplified manner of Pensford appears to be transitional between the largely English Vernacular Revival style of his earlier houses and the later American influences.

The stylised plant form decorations on the west parapet and chimneys at Pensford are early

## 9. DESCRIPTION

### 9.1 PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Pensford, a two storey house of brick construction, has a basically rectangular plan with projecting bays on the south, west and north elevations. The south elevation, facing Avalon Road, has a central two-storey gabled bay and a single storey gabled kitchen wing projecting to the east. The west elevation, facing Orrong Road, has a two storey gable to the south and a parapeted projecting bay to the north with a pitched roof behind. The north elevation has a pair of gables to the projecting centre bay, with a larger gable set back to the west. A smaller gable terminates the east end of the north elevation. Polygonal and rectangular bay windows are cantilevered at first floor level on the north and east elevations respectively. A lean-to porch to the front door, to the south elevation, is supported on turned quasi-Tuscan columns on brick piers. There is a verandah on the north side with a flat roof with wide overhanging eaves supported on timber posts with a pierced timber frieze.

The walls are mostly exposed red brick with a band of painted roughcast below the eaves terminated by a moulded string course. The centre projecting bay to the north has another band of roughcast with string courses top and bottom above the ground floor windows. The gables are roughcasted with applied half-timbering. The top of the roughcasted parapet to the west elevation has a sinuous Art Nouveau form, arched upwards to the centre with reverse curves at each end swept up to flat topped piers at the corners. The parapet is decorated with tendril-like sinuous mouldings to the centre and corners.

The roof has projecting eaves with exposed rafters and moulded timber bargeboards to the gables. The roof is covered with Marseilles pattern clay tiles.

Windows are banked generally in groups of two or three lights with side hung casement opening lights. The glazing is leaded in small rectangular panes. Most of the windows are set to the outside face of the walls with architraves and projecting timber sills. A three-sided timber-framed bay window is cantilevered out at first floor level to the left of the north elevation.

The 1904 Board of Works plan shows several differences with the existing form of the building, and may indicate that the form of the building has been altered in some areas. A porch appears to be indicated within the parapeted bay to the west elevation, and the verandah to the north is not shown. This suggests that the external doors to the living room may have been moved from the west elevation to their present location on the north elevation. The plan also shows a service yard attached to the south-east corner. This has been removed. The existing projection of the kitchen wing on the south elevation is not shown on the 1904 plan and may be a later addition. The double French window and steel balconette to the first floor on the north side appears to be relatively recent. Breaks in the brickwork bond pattern and mortar colour on the west elevation to the south of the parapeted bay and to the right of the first floor bay window on the north elevation possibly indicate that alterations have occurred in these areas.

Internally, there is a large entry hall and wide central passage running east-west with a single flight stair rising to the first floor landing. The ground floor living rooms and dining room

These English characteristics also appear in houses in Victoria in the Domestic Queen Anne and other red brick styles by contemporary architects such as Henry Kemp and Butler's former partner Beverley Ussher.<sup>5</sup> These houses also incorporated in different degrees elements of American styles and were notable as attempts to create a distinctly Australian genre. Many of Butler's houses of this period, and particularly his Western District houses, similarly modified their English characteristics by their expansive planning and use of Australian elements such as verandahs and balconies. Thurla, built next door to Pensford apparently the year before, has a virtually identical brick, roughcasted and half-timbered treatment, but is planned as bungalow. Although in terms of rateable value a smaller house than Pensford, it occupies a significantly larger land area. In this context, the compact double storeyed form of Pensford makes it one of Butler's most English designs of this period, and one of the least adapted to local styles.

The relatively simplified form and decorative details of Pensford, in comparison with Butler's earlier houses and the domestic Queen Anne style, are early manifestations of the post-Federation shift to more plain and 'natural' styles. Reaction to earlier styles was signalled by Butler's complaint in 1902 of being 'heartily sick of Queen Anne' and by Beverley Ussher's call in 1907 for a 'stronger type of house'.<sup>6</sup> The shift in styles included a new range of American influences, seen for example in Butler's later houses such as Warrawee (1906), Studley (1910) and Kamillaroi (1909). In comparison with these houses, Pensford can be seen as transitional between the largely English Vernacular Revival style of the earlier houses and the later American influences.

Pensford and Thurla are together notable as early examples of Butler's apparently shortlived interest in Art Nouveau decoration. These two buildings appear to be his first use of this style. In both buildings, the Art Nouveau elements are isolated decorative features. At Thurla, paired oculi vents above the windows in the front gable are surrounded by characteristically sinuous leaf forms growing out of stylised trunks and roots. The Art Nouveau elements of Pensford are seen mainly in the west elevation parapet, in the rendered leaf and flower decorations to the tops of the chimneys, and in the pierced tulips in the north verandah frieze. The parapet has a curved top and is decorated with stylised representations of plant forms with characteristic whiplash form.

Art Nouveau in Butler's work culminated in his remodelling in 1905, the year after Pensford was built, of Billilla, Halifax Street, Brighton. This large Italianate house of 1876 was refaced and enlarged, and extensive use was made of Art Nouveau decorative forms in the rendered wall surfaces, particularly to the tower and the parapets to the main building, and to the stylised Corinthian columns to the front porch.<sup>7</sup>

Use of Art Nouveau decoration on buildings in Australia appears to date from the late 1890s, as for example in the Friendly Societies' Dispensary, Geelong by Laird and Barlow, 1898.<sup>8</sup> Art Nouveau elements, both in metalwork and relief mouldings, were used in buildings predating Pensford, including Milton House (25 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, c 1900) and Eastbourne House (Wellington Parade, East Melbourne, c 1900), both by Sydney

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5 Tibbits, *op cit*, *passim*.

6 George Tibbits, 'The so-called Melbourne domestic Queen Anne', *Historic Environment*, 2, 2, 1982.

7 Alsop, *op cit*.