
Sherren House (St. Catherine's School), 17 Heyington Place, Toorak



History and Description

Mars Buckley (1825? - 1905), prominent retailer and founder of Buckley and Nunn's which became one of Victoria's major drapery stores, owned a house on this site from 1863. It was a substantial building described in that year as a 15-roomed brick and slate dwelling with extensive outbuildings on 6.75 acres of land.⁸⁹ In February 1871 tenders were called by John Barry for 'extensive Additions to Villa at Toorak, for Mars Buckley Esq'.⁹⁰ Later, in 1881, the well-known colonial decorator, S. A. Paterson, called tenders for decorations to the interior of the residence.⁹¹

It is not known how much, if any, of the 1860s house was incorporated into the later building. However, a large jump in valuation occurred in the 1880s, when it increased from 400 pounds in 1877 to 1,200 pounds in 1884. From this date, Buckley's house was described as a 30-roomed house.⁹² It seems most likely that the residence remaining today dates substantially from the early 1880s. An 1895 MMBW drainage plan shows the property extending as far south as Toorak Road. There are many outbuildings and a large garden.⁹³ Three years later, the garden was described in these words:

89. Prahran Rate Book 1863 No. 375.

90. *Argus*, 3 Feb. 1871, p.3.

91. *Argus*, 4 Aug. 1881.

92. Prahran Rate Book 1877 Vol. 1 No. 500; 1884 Vol. 1 No. 588.

93. MMBW drainage plan No. 43.

'Passing out of Lansell - road into Heyington - place we come on the fine mansion and grounds of Beaulieu, owned by Mr. Mars Buckley. The garden is always a grand sight, and at all seasons is full of the choicest flowers. The interior is very comfortable and artistic, and the entrance-gates are extremely handsome'.⁹⁴

A later, 1904 article, described the interior decoration on which 'no item of expense had been spared to make this home one of the finest in the Southern Hemisphere'.⁹⁵ Recent restoration in the drawing room has been based on the design from this period including ornate plaster cornices in the ceiling and timber panelling in the walls. A visitor to the house in 1904 described the drawing room as 'a precursor of the Georgian Revival Style in Australia'.⁹⁶

Mars Buckley, the owner of Beaulieu, lived there until his death in 1905. Born at Mallow, County Cork, Ireland, he sailed to Victoria in 1851 with his wife, Elizabeth, one child, and goods to sell. After some success on the goldfields, he returned to Melbourne. Buckley went into partnership with Crumpton John Nunn. Their firm, Buckley and Nunn's, was described in 1900 as 'The Oldest-Established Draper Houses in Victoria and the Most Fashionable Resort for Shopping in Australia'. Buckley also helped found the Commercial Bank of Australia in 1866.⁹⁷

After Buckley's death, his widow lived at Beaulieu for several years.⁹⁸ The next owner in 1911 was Lachlan Scobie MacKinnon (1848-1925), newspaper proprietor and manager. He was associated with the *Argus* and *Sydney Morning Herald* and was knighted in 1916.⁹⁹ Major internal refurbishments were carried out for MacKinnon in 1915 by the architects Klingender and Alsop.¹⁰⁰ Vaulted ceilings in the vestibule, side passages and stairwell remain intact from this period. The staircase was also rebuilt at this time. This work destroyed most of the earlier Buckley fittings and internal finishes. It seems possible at this time Buckley's billiard room was converted into a ballroom.¹⁰¹

In 1922, Kilbride, as MacKinnon renamed the mansion, was purchased by the Misses Flora Templeton and Minnie Langley for 17,000 pounds.¹⁰² The property was then run as a girl's school, St. Catherine's, founded in Castlemaine in 1903.¹⁰³

Some minor alterations were made to the building in the 1920s, including some limited infilling on the upper level of the loggias. The architects were Clegg and Morrow of Ballarat.¹⁰⁴ A masterplan prepared in 1950 by Melbourne architects, Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths and Simpson, showed sports fields and courts in front of the former mansion with new school buildings confined to the south west

94. *Australasian*, 30 July 1892 p. 323.

95. *Victoria's Representative Men at Home*, 1904, pp. 78-79.

96. Terry Lane and Jessie Searle, *Australians at Home*, pp.289-290 quoted in Lewis and Aitken.

97. *ADB*, Vol. 3 p.290.

98. *ADB*, Vol. 3 p.290.

99. *ADB*, Vol. 10, p.316.

100. MMBW House Cover No. 61201.

101. Nigel Lewis & Richard Aitken, 'Sherren House St. Catherine's School, 17 Heyington Place, Toorak'.

102. Prahran Rate Book 1922-23 Toorak Ward No. 1293.

103. Jane Chatham, *Across the Slate. Prahran's Schools. 1850s - 1985*, p.58.

104. Lewis & Aitken report.

corner of the site.¹⁰⁵ In 1964, Melbourne architects Mockridge Stahle and Mitchell prepared plans for infilling the remainder of the loggias. There was more extensive work in 1978 by the architects, McGlashan and Everist, which included the construction of an upper storey over the former billiard/ballroom.¹⁰⁶

However, the exterior of Sherren House is substantially intact from c1881-84. The natural cement render finish has been retained, which is unusual for a 19th century suburban mansion. External render is currently being repaired. The major alterations are the infilling of the loggias to provide increased accommodation, major extensions to the south for new service areas, and extension on the first floor over sections that were originally single storey.¹⁰⁷

Today, externally, the mansion retains its Italianate detailing, extensive two storey loggias, intact cement render finish and early granite entrance gates. The c1915 extensive internal alterations by the architects Klingender and Alsop survive partly intact. The landscaping, although severely reduced in size, 'still allows the residence to be viewed in isolation; retains the original entry drive; and permits views from the upper floor windows over the Yarra River and Gardiner's Creek Valley'.¹⁰⁸



Significance

Sherren House (formerly known as Beaulieu and Kilbride) is of state significance as one of a small number of surviving 19th century Toorak mansions. The building's exterior, which most probably dates from the early 1880s, has historical importance for its associations with the ownership of prominent retailer, Mars Buckley.

105. Lewis & Aitken report.

106. Lewis & Aitken report.

107. Lewis & Aitken report.

108. Lewis & Aitken report.

Important architectural features are the Italianate detailing, extensive two storey loggias, intact cement render finish, the front fence and early granite gates. The c1915 extensive internal alterations for L. S. MacKinnon, newspaper proprietor and manager, survive largely intact and contribute to the state level of architectural significance. They include the decorated ceiling in the vestibule, stairwell and side passages and maintain the reputation of the building as a benchmark of decorative taste among Melbourne mansions.



Sources

Argus, 3 Feb. 1871, p.3.

Argus, 4 Aug. 1881

Australasian, 30 July 1892, p.323.

Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 3. p.290 (Buckley); Vol. 10, p.316 (MacKinnon).

Chatham, Jane, *Across the Slate. Prahran's Schools, 1850s-1985*.

City of Prahran Rate Books.

Terry Lane and Jessie Serle, *Australians at Home*, Melb., 1990 pp. 289-290.

Nigel Lewis & Richard Aitken, 'Sherren House, St. Catherine's School, 17 Heyington place, Toorak', 26 Nov. 1990.

MMBW Drainage Plan No. 43.

Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended that this property be retained at A1 level.