

Bona Vista, 59 Kensington Road, South Yarra



History and Description

This brick mansion dates from 1884 when it was built for Margaret, widow of Dr. Edward Charles Hobson, physician and naturalist. It was rated in that year as a brick house of 14 rooms.¹⁸⁷ Its site is part of Crown Allotment 10, adjoining the Yarra River in South Yarra, purchased in July 1844 by Dr. Hobson. On this land, at the end of Kensington Road, Hobson built his home Bona Vista, now known as Grantham at 69 (now 63) Kensington Road.¹⁸⁸

Margaret Hobson's neighbouring 1884 house was known originally as Buena Vista. Here she lived until her death in 1894 when the house became the property of her son, Charles P. Hobson. It was subsequently owned by William Knox and, more recently, until 1951, Sir Richard Linton. It is currently owned by the Commonwealth of Australia.¹⁸⁹

An 1896 MMBW drainage plan shows the former Buena Vista (then listed as 41 Kensington Road) on a large allotment with curving drives, a fountain, and within the house, a fernery and conservatory.¹⁹⁰

During the 1920s an addition was made at the western side of the building, accommodating a large ballroom and lounge. As a result, the verandah adjacent to the corner tower was demolished. The architect for the additions may have been

187. Prahran Rate Book 1884-85 No. 389.

188. National Trust File No. 2665.

189. National Trust File No. 2665.

190. National Trust File No. 2665.

Hawking, who practised in partnership with Grainger, Little, Barlow and Hawking in 1923.¹⁹¹

The owner at this time, and until 1951, was Sir Richard Linton, an important figure in ophthalmology. He became President of the Ophthalmology Society of Australia (now the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmology) after the Second World War. (6. Report prepared for Department of Housing and Construction).

Bona Vista represents a combination of architectural styles. It is an early example of a style in which classical and medieval elements are combined. Its overall Italianate form with its square plan and hipped roof is adorned with a Tudor gabled porch. The corner tower suggests the French Renaissance and the windows vary from multiple pane tudor type to the flat arched classical type. It has been remarked that, although no one style is given full rein, an overall picturesque effect is achieved.¹⁹² The 1880s designing architect is unknown.¹⁹³

Although the exterior of Bona Vista remains largely intact, internally little survives from the Linton or earlier era. The 1980s garden, although new, has been judged as of local significance as one of the few properties in Prahran which continue the tradition of mansion gardens. It contains some significant plantings from the previous garden and the new lake is located on the site of the original fountain shown in the 1895 drainage plan.¹⁹⁴

Significance

Bona Vista is of state historical significance as an example of a 19th century suburban mansion with a tower still in a garden setting, although of later date. It has high architectural significance as an example of one of the earliest known examples of the use of the Queen Ann Revival style in Victoria, displaying an unusual combination of stylistic influences. Located in spacious grounds (recently designed and planted), it is of aesthetic significance and has additional historical importance for its associations with the original Bona Vista (now named Grantham) which was also owned by the famous Hobson family.

Sources

'Bona Vista', *South Yarra*, Report prepared for the Department of Housing and Construction.

City of Prahran Rate Books.

City of Prahran, *Significant Tree and Garden Study*.

Lewis, Miles, *Australian Architectural Index*, Univ. of Melb., 1990.

National Trust File No. 2665.

MMBW 1895 Drainage Plan.

191. Report prepared for the Department of Housing and Construction, 'Bona Vista', *S. Yarra*.

192. National Trust File No. 2665.

193. Miles Lewis, *Australian Architectural Index* searched.

194. City of Prahran *Significant Tree and Garden Study*.

Analysis & Recommendations

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