

## 24 MURPHY STREET SOUTH YARRA

### INTRODUCTION

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This report has been prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd with Di Foster, historian, to investigate the significance of the property at 24 Murphy Street, South Yarra, and to determine the appropriateness of its inclusion within the schedule to the Heritage Overlay within the planning scheme. The report builds on work carried out by Context Pty Ltd in the *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993.

The *City of Prahran Conservation Review* graded the building as A2+ (almost certainly of regional significance). It is not presently listed on the Victorian Heritage Register or the Register of the National Estate, nor is it classified by the National Trust.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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This report finds that 24 Murphy Street is of regional significance and should be added to the schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the local section of the Stonnington Planning Scheme and nominated to the Australian Heritage Commission for inclusion in the register of the National Estate.

## HISTORY

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Six Crown allotments, bounded by the Yarra River, Gardiners Creek (now Toorak) Road, Punt Road and Chapel Street, were sold at the first Crown land sales in June 1840. Each had a frontage to Gardiners Creek Road and stretched to the Yarra River. River frontages meant prices were relatively high and most blocks were bought by speculators.<sup>1</sup>

Subdivision of these early properties in the 1850s created housing allotments between Domain Road and Toorak Road, leaving the earlier homes on large sites close to the river. Kearney's map of 1855 shows the new subdivisions which featured wide streets and large allotments reflecting the area's affluence. The area developed from the 1850s and some of South Yarra's earliest houses remain in this area.<sup>2</sup> South Yarra railway station opened in 1860, further stimulating development in the area.

Lot 3, consisting of 20 acres, was purchased by G.R. Griffiths who soon sold it to John Robert Murphy, brewer and wine and spirits merchant. Murphy planted a vineyard on the northern slopes above the river and from 1847, the land was leased to Swiss vigneron and became known as Murphy's vineyard and Murphy's Paddock.

Although Murphy Street was created in the 1850s, it was not declared a public road until 1871. Kearney's map of 1855 shows a number of houses on the eastern side of the street. Allotments in Murphy Street had generous frontages and several large houses soon appeared on the high ground. However, speculators bought much of the land and from the 1870s frontages were reduced. By the 1890s, as shown in the 1895 MMBW plan, detached villas and terrace houses lined both sides of the street.

In 1865 merchant James Nation owned land on the east side of Murphy Street<sup>3</sup> and the following year, in 1866,<sup>4</sup> the land was divided into three allotments and a brick house was built on each block. Merchant, William Crosby was the first occupier of one of these houses, which was numbered 16 (24) Murphy Street. In 1868 the house was described as having nine rooms of brick and slate construction.<sup>5</sup> From 1870 Nation owned vacant land with a frontage of 48 feet, next door to the house at 16 Murphy Street, which had increased in size to eleven rooms.<sup>6</sup> In 1875 Nations' house was described as brick and

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<sup>1</sup> Betty Malone, 'The north-west corner of Prahran (South Yarra) Punt Hill to Daly Town. Unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Context Pty. Ltd. Conservation Review, City of Prahran, Vol. 3. 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Prahran Rate Book, Toorak Ward, 1865, no. 152.

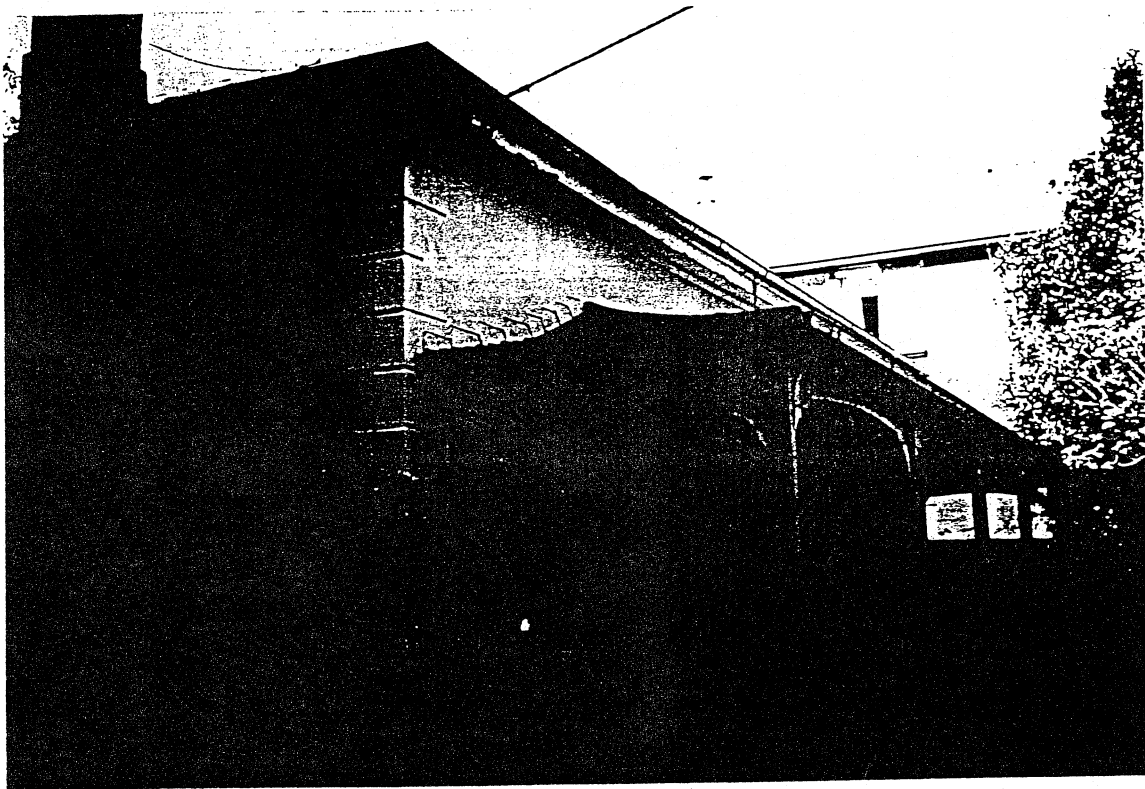
<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1866, no. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1868, no. 159.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1870, no. 152.

weatherboard.<sup>7</sup> Franklin R. Kendall, agent for the P. & O. Co. occupied Nations' house and adjacent land in 1880.<sup>8</sup> The house and land were then leased to Professor Edward Ellis Morris, scholar, educator and author, followed by merchant Henry Piggott.<sup>9</sup> The house was re-numbered 24 Murphy Street in 1888.<sup>10</sup>

The London Bank of Australia took possession of Nation's Murphy Street properties in 1905.<sup>11</sup> By 1915 Helen Sexton is rated as the owner and Sara Welch the occupier of number 24.<sup>12</sup> Owners Ethel and Mary Norman converted the house into three flats, each of four rooms, in the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> The house was owned by Mary Norman in her own right in 1933 and returned to a single residence.<sup>14</sup> The 1940s saw another change of ownership when Miss F. A. Anderson purchased the property.<sup>15</sup> In 1952 Miss Anderson converted the house into four flats. Aileen Anderson remained as one of the tenants.<sup>16</sup>



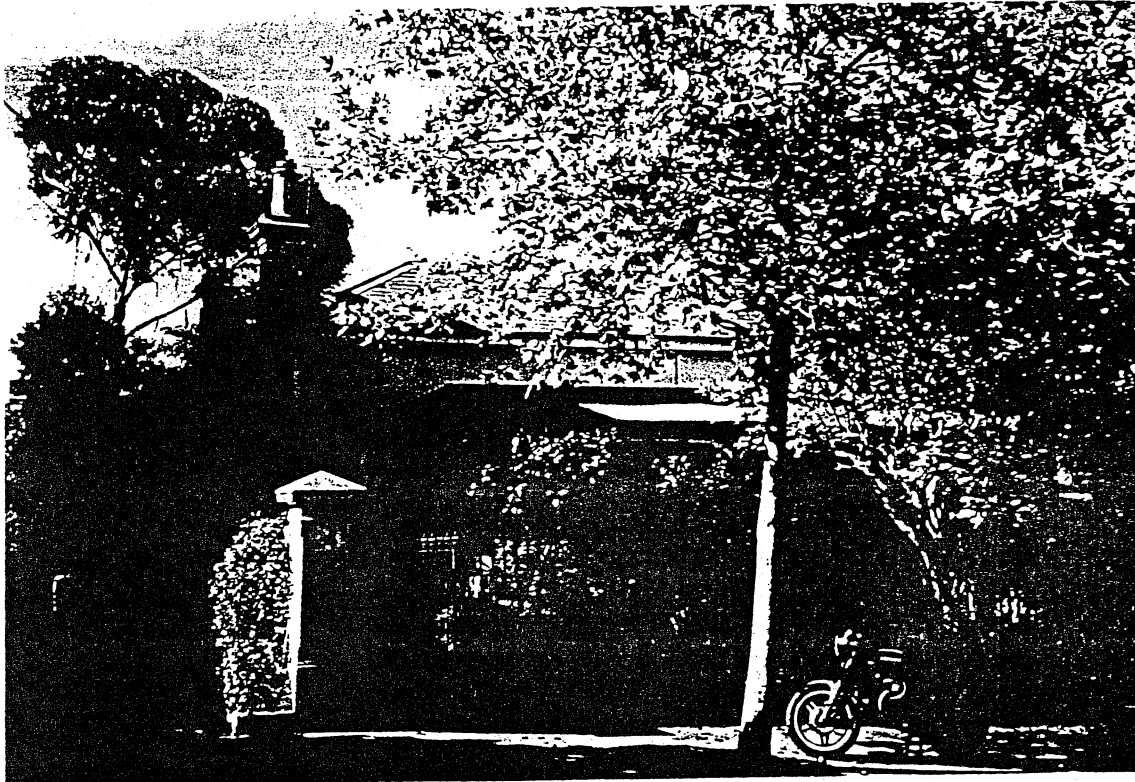
*Illustration 1*      24 Murphy Street, 1998.

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- 7      Ibid., 1875, no. 169.  
8      Ibid., 1880, no. 174.  
9      Ibid., 1886, no. 185.  
10      Ibid., 1888/9, no. 201.  
11      Ibid., 1905/6, no. 203-5.  
12      Ibid., 1915/16, no. 214.  
13      Ibid., 1925, no. 299-301.  
14      Ibid., 1933, no. 355.  
15      Ibid., 1946/7, no. 551.  
16      Ibid., 1952. no. 564 ff.

## DESCRIPTION

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Murphy Street is situated on a steeply graded section of South Yarra Hill just north of Toorak Road. It is among the last remnants of the original building stock which has been largely overwritten by twentieth century development. 24 Murphy Street is flanked by blocks of multi-storey flats which date from the 1970s.



*Illustration 2*      *24 Murphy Street, 1998.*

The house nestles into a small garden and is isolated from the street by an early cast iron fence on a basalt base, which is stepped to follow the grade of the hill. The house is of brick construction with tall chimneys and low-pitched slate roof above a simple rectilinear, rendered building mass. Stylistically, the structure recalls the simplicity and refinement of the Regency architecture of England and Colonial Australia. The facade is more or less symmetrical, with one double hung window opening to the south side and what appear to be three original or early French windows sheltered under the concave profile verandah. The floor of the verandah is of timber, and the main entry appears to be on the north side of the house. The facade is without ornament except for understated modelling of the verandah valences, ruled lines to the stucco and quoins at the corners of the building.

To the rear the building is of two storeys, with a substantial verandah, partially enclosed. Although it is difficult to accurately assess the age and integrity of the verandah joinery, as with the verandah to the facade, it is not unlikely that it is at least in part quite early, with some elements repaired or replaced.

24 Murphy Street appears externally to be in good and possibly original condition, although it appears possible that the verandah posts and possibly its valences have been rebuilt in the twentieth century. Its architect is not known.

## ANALYSIS

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Architecturally, 24 Murphy Street is an interesting example of the continued interest in the Georgian and Regency styles for domestic construction into the 1860s. From 1850 onwards, architectural trends moved away from these early colonial styles which were felt to be 'a semi-military mannerism'<sup>17</sup> in favour of the Gothic style for ecclesiastical work and schools, Classical for public buildings and a 'frivolously impure version of either'<sup>18</sup> for residential work. However the earlier styles persisted. This was partially due to the unchanging nature of the idiom which appealed to speculative builders who found its simplicity easy to exploit,<sup>19</sup> and partially because:

*In nineteenth century Britain and Australia, those who upheld the virtues of refinement and simple elegance fought a protracted rearguard action against what they saw as Victorian vulgarity<sup>20</sup>*

Buildings of this type were once common in South Yarra but are becoming increasingly rare. The best comparable example in the immediate area is perhaps 75 Caroline Street.

24 Murphy Street forms part of a network of local buildings which have survived from the earliest permanent European settlement of the area. In terms of age, it compares with Richmond House at 56 Avoca Street (1859-68) and the residence at 64 Avoca Street (1856), both of which are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. In conjunction with these and other local properties such as the early terraces that remain at 62-68 Caroline Street, 92-94 Caroline Street and 6-18 Avoca Street, and villas such as 74 and 76 Caroline Street, the residence helps retain some of the early flavour of the area.

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17 Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, p. 123.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Apperly et al, *Identifying Australian Architecture*, p. 46.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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The house at 24 Murphy Street is of regional significance as an example of a medium size villa from the 1860s which appear to retain much of its original character and fabric, and which makes an important contribution to the character of its area.

## REFERENCES

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Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture*, North Ryde, 1989.

Context Pty Ltd, City of Prahran Conservation Review, 1993

J M Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, Melbourne, 1968.

Malone Betty, 'The north-west corner of Prahran (South Yarra)' unpublished manuscript

Prahran Rate Book, South Yarra Ward, 1865-1959.

Sands & McDougall Directories 1865-1953.