

(Former Am L47D-2)

NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)

CLASSIFICATION REPORT

FAWKNER MANSIONS

1. NAME OF PLACE

Fawkner Mansions.

2. OTHER/CURRENT NAME

N/A.

3. LOCATION

250

242 Punt Road (Cnr Commercial Road), Prahran.

4. DATE

1909/10.

5. TYPE OF PLACE

Flats.

6. LISTING DETAILS

Classified at State level.

7. EXTENT OF DESIGNATION

All buildings and land.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fawkner Mansions is of architectural and historical significance at a State level as the earliest major block of flats extant in Melbourne. Constructed in early 1910 for the owner George Fairbairn to the designs of architect Ernest H Willis, it helped to introduce a new style of living and new architectural forms. The massive symmetrical red-brick form is imposing, yet includes domestic references. The twenty-seven small self-contained flats provided a popular alternative to boarding house accommodation for the middle and professional classes.

Fawkner Mansions is undoubtedly one of the most significant buildings in the State, principally for being the earliest extant block of flats in Melbourne. It could be considered as the first "real" block built because of the unusual nature of the known earlier blocks.

Fawkner Mansions, with its severe, red-brick construction, loggias, and minimal Arts and Crafts/Art Nouveau details, is the leader of the highly unusual group of early flats in Melbourne.

9. HISTORY

Prahran Rate Books show that Fawkner Mansions were constructed in the period 1909/10, and that by the middle of 1911, all flats were occupied.

The owner and developer was George Fairbairn (Jnr), son of pioneer Victoria pastoralist George Fairbairn (Snr). George Junior was born in 1855, established his own pastoral empire, and entered Victorian politics in 1903. In 1906 he entered the new Federal Parliament as the member for the seat of Fawkner, which he held until 1917. He was also active in Victorian commercial life, and was involved in Dalgety & Co, the Union Trustee Co, AMP Society, and a member of the Committee of Management for the Alfred Hospital.

His involvement in the Hospital, and his Parliamentary seat help to explain both the location and the name of his major property investment, though of course, Fawkner Park is also nearby.

A Building Magazine report of 12 February 1912 notes the architect as Ernest H Willis, and includes a photograph of the completed building; and a report of 11 November 1907 notes the builder to be a Mr A O'Leary. In 1912, the tenants were middle-class professionals and managers; for instance Captain John R King, a Mr John Lysaght (a merchant's agent), a shipping agent, two clerks, a solicitor, and engineer and a surgeon.

In 1920 the block was purchased by a Mr R. Di Gilis Exon, and in 1933 sold to Mr Henry Gibson, and finally in 1950 purchased by the Alfred Hospital for use as a Nurses Home, at which time it had twenty-seven flats (presumably the original number). In 1959/60, extensive internal alterations created single and two-room suites suitable for nurses. It is perhaps at this time that the central open loggia/balconies were glazed in (in a manner sympathetic to the original) and small windows were inserted on each side facade.

The building has a number of significant associations attached to it, notably that it is reputed to be "Melbourne's first real block of flats". Walter Burley Griffin is reputed to have lived there, and the site is continually threatened by both the expansion plans of the Alfred Hospital, and a possible road-widening of Punt Road. (The building is currently vacant.) The unusual austere styling was viewed unfavourably for a long time, even by Mary Turner Shaw, architect, as late as 1982.

## 10. DESCRIPTION

### 10.1 Physical

Externally, the building dominates the immediate environment. The building is set back substantially from Punt Road, the main frontage, but built right up to the Commercial Road boundary. All facades are characterised by large areas of plain red-brickwork, punctuated by small vertical windows, which in the first two floors are set back within the thickness of the load-bearing brick walls. The massing of

the building is varied by squat tower elements at the corners and flanking the central entrance, and small vertical areas of what is effectively timber-framed curtain-walling.

Variation is provided by decorative brickwork coursing and piers which are concentrated in the top half of the building, and around the entrance, which is also marked by a bracketed classical pediment over the doorway. (It is possible that some of the brick decoration was originally intended to have been cement rendered.) Despite the symmetrical composition, the skyline is quite varied through the use of expressed corner pier elements, low bracketed tiled roofs to the central towers, and to a pair of small, high towers to the rear.

#### 10.2 Context

Fawkner Mansions is by far the dominant structure at the intersection, which is characterised by open space on the other three corners (Hospital Grounds, Petrol Station, and building site). It is also a prominent structure along Punt Road, which is characterised by medium to large Victorian villas, and interwar two to three storey blocks of flats. The bulk of the building, and the use of brickwork, compares with the earlier parts of the Alfred Hospital across Punt Road, but the site coverage is much greater.

#### 10.3 Present Use

The building is presently empty. The Hospital no longer requires nurses' accommodation, but they are undecided as to future uses or disposal.

#### 10.4 Present Condition

From external appearances, the building is sound. Internally, it is much altered but the extent is not known.

### 11. **EVALUATION AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

The only comparable earlier blocks were Melbourne Mansions (1906-1959) at 101 Collins Street, accommodating the well-to-do, and Whitehall (1906) in Bank Place, which was early on converted to offices. Later flat development in the 1910s was generally smaller (with the exception of the Majestic Mansions, Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, 1912), and followed the lead of Fawkner Mansions in both architectural style and often in level of accommodation.

A building that included self-contained units (ie with separate kitchens and baths) was rare in Melbourne until the 1920s, and probably none existed that were not conversions before the 1900s. For instance, Queen Bess Row in East Melbourne was constructed in 1887 as a row of three and four storey terraces, but in the style of the large apartment blocks then being erected in London by Norman Shaw and others. By 1897, one of the houses was run as a boarding house/serviced flats, an arrangement that was not formalised as three separate flats until 1916.

The first fully fledged purpose-built apartment complex in Melbourne was undoubtedly Melbourne Mansions (1906), designed by Inskip & Butler at 101 Collins Street, in the "Paris End". This building was exclusive, elegant, and occupied by leaders of society. Its thirty-two flats included a variety of accommodation, ranging from suites with no kitchens and shared servants, with meals obtainable in or from a common dining room, through to entirely self-contained spacious units.

Another early block described as flats was a seven storey building known as Whitehall (1906), in Bank Place, off Little Collins Street. This may, however, have been an almost multi-purpose building, suitable as professional rooms, offices or flats, and mostly used for non-residential purposes.

Fawkner Mansions was the first "block of flats" in Melbourne in the standard form that the term is now understood. While Melbourne Mansions (1906) offered services similar to a hotel, and Whitehall (1906) as offices, Fawkner Mansions was entirely made up of self-contained flats, and can be regarded as the first of this type.

Many other similar developments soon followed. Notably Cliveden Mansions (a conversion of the Clarke family's Cliveden House in East Melbourne in 1911), and the Majestic Mansions in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda (1912), which had only fourteen flats that were fully self-contained, and Lister House in 1915 on the south east corner of Collins and Exhibition Streets, which also had significant office/professional suite components.

Only a few other flats developed were constructed before WWI. Victoria House, Clarendon House and the Maisonettes, all small developments of 1913/14 and all in East Melbourne, are stylistically comparable to Fawkner Mansions.

Fawkner Mansions is also comparable to Edwardian Free-style public buildings of the period, particularly IJ & JJ Clarke's Queen Victoria Hospital (1910-1916), especially in the use of square, capped, corner tower elements. (See attached list of early flat development in Melbourne.)

## 12. REFERENCES

Residential Flats in Melbourne: The Development of a Building Type to 1950. Research Report by Terry Sawyer, University of Melbourne, 1982.

Notes on file.

# LIST OF EARLY FLATS IN MELBOURNE (UP TO 1915)

DATE	NAME	ADDRESS	NOTES
1897	Queen Bess Row (Altered)	72 Hotham Street East Melbourne	One of 3 large terraces constructed 1887, then used together as a Coffee Palace (Hotel), then separated. Use as self-contained flats not certain until 1916. Presently separate terraces.
1906	Melbourne Mansions (Demolished)	101 Collins St	Architects Inskip & Butler. 28 Suites, 4-14 fully self-contained. Demolished c.1960.
1906	Whitehall (Altered)	Bank Place	Sir John Monash was engineering consultant to the architects Tunbridge & Tunbridge. Does not appear to have had significant residential use.
1910	Fawcner Mansions (Altered)	242 Punt Road South Yarra	Architect Ernest H Willis. Owner George Fairbairn. Included about 27 self-contained flats
1911	Cliveden Mansions (Demolished)	Wellington Pde (cnr Clarendon St) East Melbourne	Conversion of Clarke family mansion. Communal kitchen and staff - no self-contained units. Demolished c.1969.
1912	Majestic Mansions (Demolished/Altered)	Fitzroy Street St Kilda	Combined flats and boarding house. 3 suites/floor over 5 floors at the front were fully self-contained. Converted to hotel c.1935, and partly demolished 1992.
1912	Alexandra Mansions (Demolished)	Aikman Street (Yarrabank Rd) South Melbourne	Architect Robert Haddon. Converted from factory. Demolished c.1960.

1913/14	Victoria House Clarendon House The Maisonettes	220 Clarendon St East Melbourne } ? } 82 Vale Street	All similar. Small severe red brick style. Victoria House converted to offices c.1990. Present condition of others unknown.
1913	Nelson Square	Simpson Street East Melbourne	Constructed as a row of 2-storey terraces with 1 flat/floor each.
1914	The Canterbury	236 Canterbury Rd  St Kilda West	4th floor added in 1917 One flat/floor. Edwardian free style
1915	Lister House (Demolished)	SE Cnr Collins & Exhibition Streets	Large development later fully used as professional suites. Solid Edwardian free style with large projecting balconies Demolished c.1969.
1915	Florida Mansions (Demolished)	601 St Kilda Road	Architect Nahum Barret. 5 2-storey flats. Demolished 1982.