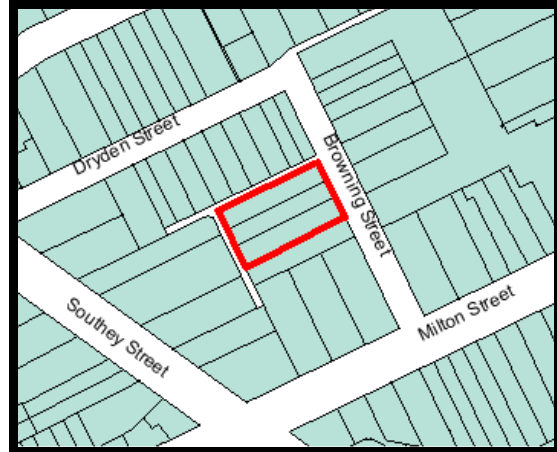


Identifier Houses
Formerly unknown



Not within a HO area

Address 2, 4 & 6 Browning Street
 ELWOOD

Category Residential: row

Constructed 1912-13

Designer Unknown

Significance

What is Significant?

The three houses at 2-6 Browning Street are single-storey double-fronted late Edwardian hip-roofed villas, of concrete construction with a roughcast finish. They were erected in 1912 (Nos 2 and 4) and 1913 (No 6) for Verney Wilson, building contractor, who subsequently rented them to a succession of tenants.

How is it Significant?

The houses are of scientific (technological) and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip

Why is it Significant?

Technologically, the houses are significant as notably early examples of reinforced concrete houses in Victoria. Such houses, which first appeared in Australia (initially Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne) from c.1907, were initially experimental and remained anomalous until at least the late 1910s. While there are a perhaps surprising number of early concrete houses in the City of Port Phillip, most of these are of slightly later date (c.1915-16)

Aesthetically, the houses are significant for their unusual form and detailing, simultaneously displaying both cohesion (in terms of common scale, fenestration and finishes) and variety (in terms of individual façade composition and verandah detailing). As such, the houses represent a contrast to the contemporaneous red brick houses that proliferate in the area. Collectively, this row of three unusual villas forms a highly distinctive element in the streetscape.

Description

The houses at 2-6 Browning Street comprise three single-storey double-fronted late Edwardian hip-roofed villas, of concrete construction with a roughcast finish. Their asymmetrical frontages each have a gabled bay to the right, with a verandah beside. The houses are similar, but not quite identical, in composition and detailing. Common elements include roughcast chimneys with moulded coping, timber fretwork verandah friezes, and rectangular bay windows with tripartite timber-framed casement sashes and highlights. Otherwise, there are subtle differences. No 2 has a mock half-timbered gable end with plain timber bargeboards, while No 4 has a plain gable end with scalloped bargeboards. No 2 also retains ripple iron awnings to bay window, and green glass highlight windows. This house, attached to No 4 by a common party wall, has a narrow skillion-roofed porch with a squat fluted pier and rendered dwarf wall. The front door, to the north end of the verandah, opens off an enclosed space with a half-round window. The two other houses have return verandahs, with the front door set into a splayed corner.

History

The City of St Kilda ratebook for 1911-12 (dated 27 November 1911) records that John King owned vacant land with a 90' frontage to Browning Street, valued at £9. A scrawled amendment to this entry further notes that King's land was subsequently acquired by Verney A Wilson of 189 Fitzroy Street, identified in electoral rolls as a contractor. The 1912-13 ratebook (dated 29 November 1912) records that Wilson owned a 30' wide vacant lot (NAV £4), a vacant six-roomed concrete house "in course of erection" (NAV £20) and a completed five-roomed concrete house (NAV £32) occupied by Harry Beyer. A year later, Wilson was listed as the owner of three concrete houses, designated as 2, 4 and 6 Browning Street and occupied, respectively, by Catherine Bromley (domestic duties), Harry Beyer (builder) and Leslie Jordan (artist).

The *Sands & McDougall Directory* records that all three houses had new occupants by 1918: Albert Peach (No 2), Albert Bryant (No 4) and William Dyer (No 6). The house at No 2 remained occupied by Peach until the late 1920s, and thence by a succession of short-term tenants. No 6 had a similar series of short-term tenants until the 1930s, when it became home to Ernest Lewis, who was still there in the mid-1960s. The most persistent residents, however, were the Bryant family at No 4; Albert Bryant, a clerk, lived there from 1918 until his death in 1940, and it was subsequently occupied by his widow, Mrs S C Bryant, until at least the mid-1960s.

Comparative Analysis

Reinforced concrete houses began to appear in Australia from c.1907. Several pioneer examples were built in Adelaide around that time by builder W C Torode, who developed a method of *in situ* concrete cavity walling. A Melbourne builder, H R Crawford, patented his own system in 1907, and, over the next seven years, erected concrete houses at Camberwell, Canterbury, East Malvern and Balwyn. Another important early example was that built by John Monash at 4 Ray Street Beaumaris in 1912, but unfortunately demolished in 1999.

There appear to be an unusually large number of early concrete houses in the City of Port Phillip. The earliest appears to be a house at 4 Blessington Street, erected in 1911 in the highly unusual form of a Victorian villa, with mock ashlar façade. Later examples include those houses at 200 Alma Road, East St Kilda; 52 Clark Street, Port Melbourne, and 21 Mozart Street, St Kilda. All three were erected in 1915, in the form of otherwise conventional double-fronted asymmetrical late Edwardian villas, their concrete walls enlivened with a roughcast finish. The examples in Browning Street are comparable in style, but are distinguished by their slightly earlier date and by the fact that there are three of them, forming a cohesive row.

Recommendations

recommended inclusions:

Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the City of Port Phillip Planning Scheme

References

City of St Kilda Rate Book. South Ward. 1911-12, 1912-13, 1913-14.

Sands & McDougall Directory. 1913 onwards.

Miles Lewis. *Australian Building: A Cultural Investigation*. On-line publication, 2000.

