

Identifier "Antigone" Flats
Formerly unknown



Not within a HO area

Address 34 Docker Street
ELWOOD

Category Residential: apartment

Constructed c.1937

Designer J H Esmond Dorney

Significance

What is Significant?

The *Antigone* flats at 34 Docker Street are a three-storey flat-roofed rendered brick building in the Functionalist style, enlivened by curved balconies and windows. Erected c.1937, the flats were one of a number of speculative apartment projects commissioned by local resident Mrs Marie Louise Dorney, and designed by her son, notable architect J H Esmond Dorney.

How is it Significant?

The *Antigone* flats are of architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it Significant?

Aesthetically, the *Antigone* flats are significant as a fine and intact example of a substantial block of flats in the inter-war Functionalist style, characterised in this instance by flat roof, curved window bays and balconies, ribbon windows and a vertical emphasis.

Architecturally, the *Antigone* flats are significant as one of the best examples in Elwood of the work of J H Esmond Dorney, a prolific local architect and one-time employee of Walter Burley Griffin who became a leading exponent of the Functionalist style in Melbourne in the 1930s and, after the War, a highly regarded modern architect in Tasmania.

Description

Antigone at 34 Docker Street comprises six flats in a three-storey flat-roofed rendered brick Functionalist-style building. The triple-fronted asymmetrical façade has a projecting off-centre wing, with central painted brick spandrel flanked by curving metal-framed multi-paned windows. To the left is a row of curved balconies with rendered balustrade walls and simple steel railings. Here, each flat has a vertical ribbon window; those to first two floors retain original opaque glazing. At the right side of the façade, each flat has a wide tripartite metal-framed window, with painted brick spandrels between; the balconies for these flats project from the side elevation. The central main entry has a doorway with distinctive panelled timber door and cantilevered concrete slab sunhood. Above, the stairwell is indicated by two ribbon windows; originally open, these now contain blue Perspex. The flat roof, encircled by a parapet with low steel railing, has a small structure forming a partial fourth storey, added in 1999. This has its own flat roof, with narrow eaves and timber fascia, and a row of small square windows above the stairwell bay. The latter, part of the original 1937 fabric, were formerly decorative openings in the parapet.

History

This building was first recorded in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* in 1938, listed as “flats being built”. From 1939, they are listed simply as *Antigone* Flats, with no individual occupants. The flats were a speculative venture commissioned by Mrs Marie Louise Dorney, local resident and Classical scholar (hence the name of the flats, an allusion to the heroine of a Greek drama by Sophocles). She initiated several apartment projects in Elwood in the late 1930s, all designed by her son, prolific local architect J H Esmond Dorney. This association began when Dorney converted his former family home, *Chenier*, into flats in 1934, which prompted his mother to engage him to design the *Antigone* flats at 34 Docker Street (1937), the *St Kiernan’s Flats* at 51 Ormond Esplanade (1940) and another block at 57 Ormond Esplanade.

James Henry Esmond Dorney (1906-91) trained in the office of Walter Burley Griffin in the mid-1920s but, unlike Griffin’s other employees, entirely rejected the Prairie School aesthetic and, on commencing his own practice in 1930, designed in conventional styles such as Tudor Revival before developing his own variation of the Functionalist style in the later 1930s. A resident of Elwood since a teenager, Dorney designed numerous buildings in the area, including several speculative apartment projects for his mother and his father-in-law. After the War, Dorney moved to Tasmania, where he became an innovative and highly-regarded modern architect.

Comparative Analysis

As epicentres for inter-war flat development, Elwood and St Kilda are well represented by examples in the Functionalist style, popular in the second half of the 1930s. While the idiom was characterised by pure expression of function, with flat roofs and ribbon windows, there was still variety among local manifestations: at one end of the spectrum were those buildings realised as stark volumes (often face brick), and, at the other, those buildings (often rendered) in a less severe style, enlivened with curving corners or balconies and stylised ornament. *Antigone* falls into the latter group. Elwood’s best example is the Windermere Flats at 49 Broadway (1939), another Dorney design, included on the *Victorian Heritage Register* for its superlative Functionalist style. *Antigone* compares well to lesser local examples such as 229 Brighton Road (1936), 4 Leonards Avenue (1938) and 17 Victoria Street (1936), all with similar asymmetrical facades but somewhat starker detailing. Flats at 1a Dickens Street have similar detailing, (*viz* a central stairwell/entry bay and flanking curved balconies) but with a symmetrical façade. *Devon Court* flats at 45-47 Chapel Street (1936) are similar in form, but closer in detailing to the more decorative Art Deco idiom, while flats at 13 Hughenden Road (c.1940) are similar in detailing, but otherwise quite different in form, with hipped roof and a U-shaped footprint.

Recommendations

recommended inclusions:

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

References

Sands & McDougall Directory. Various.

Information provided by Helen Graham, resident of 34 Docker Street

