

IDA VILLA

Address	234 Neerim Road, Carnegie
Significance	Local
Construction Dates	Circa 1891-98
Period	Late Victorian
Date Inspected	Early 2019



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The late Victorian period house, known as *Ida Villa*, at 234 Neerim Road, Carnegie, is significant, especially its rectangular form, hip roof clad in slate, rendered chimneys, polychrome brick walls, and verandah with cast iron detailing and tessellated tiled deck.

The single storey extension to the rear of the villa and front basalt fence are later additions and not significant.

How is it Significant?

Ida Villa is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Glen Eira.

Why is it Significant?

Ida Villa is of historical significance as one of the few intact buildings surviving in Carnegie from the Victorian period and a rare example of an Italianate style, suburban villa in polychrome brick in the suburb. Located within the 1888 'Grand Central Caulfield Estate' subdivision, one of the first subdivisions in the area, the residence was either constructed by its initial purchasers, the Rispins (1891) or prior to the arrival of its first occupants, William T Mobbs, and wife, Helen (1899). It is one of a small number of

houses erected in the subdivision during the late 19th century (as most houses date to the Federation period), though is the only intact example. (Criterion A)

Ida Villa is of aesthetic significance as a good example of the Italianate style as applied to a suburban villa, an idiom that is strongly associated with the late Victorian period. The house is distinguished by its high level of intactness (including chimneys and verandah), defined entry component of the verandah, and general quality of the brickwork such as the herringbone panels below the arched windows. (Criterion E)

Description

The freestanding, single storey villa extends across much of the width of the allotment (approximately 407m²) at a short setback from the street. It is partly obscured behind a high, late 20th century, basalt fence with a retractable metal gate in front of a paved parking area. There is limited front garden.

Similar to much late Victorian villa design, the house has an asymmetric form with a medium-pitched hip roof with an M-profile to the rear, clad in slate, and a bullnose verandah roof of corrugated metal sheeting. A short eave overhang, timber soffits, bracketed cornice with red bricks set in a diaper pattern and a string course are also evident to the frontage. To the main roof, there are also three rendered chimney shafts with moulded capping. The face brick chimney situated near the junction of the original roof and rear addition may be a later alteration.

The house is constructed of polychrome brick in Flemish bond, with remnants of white tuck-pointing to the façade. To the projecting bay, there is a basalt plinth, with brick to the base of the recessed verandah wall. Cream brick quoining to the door, windows and corners further articulate the façade.



Detail of façade

The verandah is supported by two fluted cast iron columns with Corinthian order capitals and a deck of original tessellated tiles, edged in basalt. Defining the main entrance, is a flat-roofed vertical section. Both it and the verandah have a cast iron frieze, characterised by two elaborate floral patterns and curvilinear brackets. The multi-panelled timber door and sidelights, which have leadlight and stained glass detailing, appear to be original.

The front windows are double-hung sashes with those to the projecting bay being arched with brick voussoirs whereas those to the verandah are squared. The sills have all been painted but are probably basalt. Below the arched windows are recessed spandrels of herringbone brickwork (also overpainted).



Detail of bay



Main entry with flat-roofed entry bay indicated by the red arrow

A single storey brick addition has been provided to the rear of the dwelling.

History

The subject site formed part of Crown Allotment 104 of the Parish of Prahran, which was acquired by W Smith, who held considerable property either side of Neerim Road.¹ Only sparsely developed from the mid-1850s, most of this locality consisted of orchard, market gardens, 'heath-dotted' paddocks, and natural swamp at the time it was incorporated into the extensive holding of William Murray Ross in 1874.²

An English migrant and merchant-cum-speculator, Ross held ambitions to establish a private suburb in the district, a project he promoted as 'Rosstown'. It was intended that this development be centred on his sugar beet processing mill (constructed 1875) that was to be connected to Elsternwick by a dedicated railway (redundant at its completion in 1888).³ With his focus on the western and southern reaches of the area, Ross sold Allotment 104 (and the southern section of 105) to William Josiah Jabey Barnett, a market gardener, only several months after his initial purchase (1875).⁴

The 'Rosstown' venture faltered, derailed by the failing mill and sluggish land sales. From the late 1870s, its creditors began to offer large sections of the estate for sale and subdivision. Barnett held onto his purchase, conceivably cultivating it as a market garden, until near the height of the land boom, when he sold it to the well-known Malvern councillor and speculator, Edward Sidney Edsall in May 1888.⁵

Moving swiftly, Edsall placed his acquisition on the market in October that year, advertised as a superior villa subdivision, the

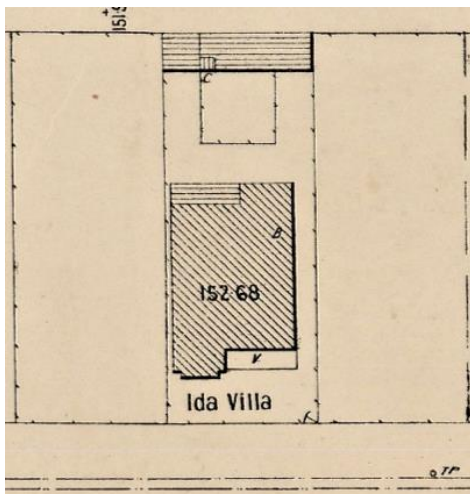
- ¹ Initial dates of purchase are not provided on the Prahran Parish Plan (VPRS 16171, P1, Plans Ne-R); however, it is known that Crown land was purchased in the Caulfield area, close to Kooyong and Balaclava Roads, from the early 1850s and then progressively sold in large blocks to the east and south until the mid-1860s, by which point much of the Carnegie area had been alienated (Peter R Murray and John C Wells, *From sand, swamp and heath – A History of Caulfield*, Melbourne, 1980, p2)
- ² D F Jowett and I G Weickhardt, *Return to Rosstown: Railways, land sales and sugar beet ventures in Caulfield*, Rosstown Historical Research Group, Mordialloc, Victoria, 1978, p16; 'Carnegie', *Victorian Places*, 2014, <www.victorianplaces.com.au/carnegie>, accessed 22 February 2019; and Certificate of Title, vol.695, folio 963
- ³ 'Special Advertisements: The New Suburb of Rosstown', *Argus*, 31 March 1875, p4; and Jowett and Weickhardt, *Return to Rosstown*, pp16-20
- ⁴ Certificate of Title, vol.800, folio 930
- ⁵ Certificate of Title, vol.800, folio 930

'Grand Central Caulfield Estate'.⁶ While most of the offered allotments had been sold by 1891, a review of the *Sands & McDougall's Directory* shows that only ten dwellings were listed as occupied by 1900, out of the estate's originally 102 advertised allotments. This was likely a reflection of the dampening effect of the 1890s Depression. The pace of construction activity would not quicken across the precinct until the 1910s, in parallel with the wider suburb (renamed Carnegie in 1909).

The construction of *Ida Villa* is associated with the estate's initial development phase. The subject allotment was acquired by the 'contractors' (builders), John and Thomas Rispin (trading as 'J Rispin and Son'), in February 1891.⁷ By June that year, the City of Melbourne Building Society had taken ownership, possibly due to the Rispins' published financial difficulties.⁸ However, also buffeted by the Depression, the Society entered voluntary liquidation in 1892 and began to offload its assets.⁹ Within these circumstances, the Commercial Bank of Australia (CBA) acquired the site in 1898 and, by the following year, was renting out the extant house to family, William T and Helen Mobbs.¹⁰

It is not known whether the dwelling had been erected by the Rispins in the early 1890s and left unoccupied for several years – a common occurrence during the depression – or if it built on behalf of the Society or the CBA prior at a later date, prior to its occupation by the Mobbs. Accordingly, a construction range between 1891-98 is provided.¹¹ *Ida Villa* is typical of a 19th century speculative builder development in a newly divided estate.

William T Mobbs was an English immigrant, whose livelihood was provided as a 'laborer'.¹² Both he and his wife had previously resided at nearby Bambra Road, Caulfield.¹³ In 1910, Helen purchased *Ida Villa* from the CBA.¹⁴ Following William's death in 1916, Helen retained ownership until 1942, with intermittent appearances of other individuals in the *Sands & McDougall's Directory* likely the result of renting.¹⁵



The subject site in 1915, with Neerim Road in the foreground
(Source: MMBW detail plan 2542, Caulfield, dated 1915, SLV, 1203028)



1945 aerial photograph with *Ida Villa* indicated by the red outline
(Source: Melbourne and Metropolitan Area Project, Proj. no. 5, Run 14, Frame 57711, Landata)

⁶ 'Councillor Edsall', *Prahran Telegraph*, 8 September 1888, p5; and 'Advertising', *Argus*, 23 October 1888, p3

⁷ 'Advertising', *Age*, 9 April 1892, p8

⁸ 'Judicial and law Notices', *Argus*, 9 April 1892, p14

⁹ The Society was virtually defunct by 1900: 'Of all the boom failures, the "City of Melbourne Building Society" has proved to be about the most disastrous to both shareholders and depositors.' ('Fizzling Out', *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 10 November 1900, p4) *Sands & McDougall's Directory*, 1899

¹¹ While the Italianate character of the building is more suggestive of an early 1890s date, for from the middle of the decade, Federation-era styles gained in popularity, dating by idioms alone is complex, particularly in transitional periods.

¹² City of Caulfield Rate Book, 1912-13, p32; and 'Dance at Kyneton', *Table Talk*, 30 August 1923, p26

¹³ 'Family Notices', *Argus*, 6 October 1916, p1; and Certificate of Title, vol.2336, folio 130

¹⁴ Certificate of Title, vol. 2336/folio 130

¹⁵ 'Family Notices', *The Argus*, 6 October 1916, p1; 'Dance at Kyneton', *Table Talk*, 30 August 1923, p26; and City of Caulfield rate books, 1944

The dwelling, provided with the name *Ida Villa* – seemingly a reference to the Mobb's only daughter¹⁶ – is shown in the 1915 MMBW plan, with the footprint of the extant dwelling, minus rear additions, its brick construction (diagonal hatching), projecting square bay, front verandah ('v') and internal bathroom ('B') apparent. The timber (straight lines) additions and outbuildings have since been removed. The 1945 aerial photograph depicts the subject building, at that point, as largely unchanged.

Thematic Context/Comparative Analysis

City of Glen Eira Heritage Management Plan – vol. 1 (Historical Background):

- Proclamation of Shires and Land Boom (1870s-1890s)

Known comparable places in the City of Glen Eira:

Within Carnegie's negligible array of Victorian period housing, *Ida Villa* manifests as a remarkably intact Italianate polychrome brick villa, perhaps the only example of its type in the suburb. In Elsternwick and Caulfield, numerous late Victorian dwellings survive, reflective of their more intensive and affluent late 19th century development. However, comparative to the subject site, such single storey examples are often more substantial and richly detailed, while two storey versions are a different typology, that of mansions. While certain elements are typical of late Victorian residential development in the municipality – for instance, hip roofs of slate, asymmetrical compositions, cast iron ornamentation and often polychrome brickwork – *Ida Villa* is nonetheless a distinctive example of the Italianate style.

Comparable places include:

- *Kooroowa* (part of HO72), 20 Sandham Street, Elsternwick – larger corner, single storey Italianate villa, polychrome brick with a return verandah. Also built at a comparatively late date (1899).
- *Fresch* (part of HO22), 11 Gladstone Parade, Elsternwick – relatively narrow fronted two storey Italianate mansion with bi-chrome brickwork and projecting faceted bay with arched windows.
- *Swibiton* (part of HO22), 28 Gladstone Parade, Elsternwick – single storey villa displaying a transitional design, with late Victorian elements, such as form with projecting bay and return verandah festooned with cast iron, alongside Queen Anne style gable end and contrasting cream brick banding. Constructed 1890.
- *Athole* (HO80), 18 Poplar Street, Carnegie – rambling one storey rendered villa with eclectic late Victorian character apparently inspired by Indian design and including multiple bays and a return verandah with turned timber posts. Constructed in 1889 to a design of its owner, J T Kelleher, a noted architect for the Victorian Public Works Department.
- 32 Murray Street, Elsternwick (HO130) – single storey, rendered Italianate villa with faceted bay and a return verandah, erected 1888-89. Comparable in scale to the subject site but rendered.
- *Rothsay/Gunyah* (HO38), 283 Kooyong Road, Elsternwick – a broader, rendered single storey Italianate with a return verandah (concave roof), constructed in 1888.
- Buckley Street and Hollywood Grove, Carnegie – four cottages within the 'Grand Central Caulfield Estate' date to the late 19th century. Their roofs are clad in corrugated metal sheeting. Of the two to the north side of Buckley Street, no. 5 is a weatherboard cottage and no. 9 may have been indicative of the Italianate style but has been much degraded by later modifications. No. 22 on the south side of Buckley Street (within the proposed *Carnegie Residential Precinct*, recommended for a HO) has a gable roof but has been altered and presents as a bungalow. 58 Hollywood Grove also has a gable roof but has been partly altered and is dominated by the rear additions.

Condition

Good.

Integrity

Largely intact.

Previous Assessment

C+ (local significance) – Andrew Ward, *City of Caulfield Urban Conservation Study*, field survey sheet 30, 1990

¹⁶ 'Family Notices', *Argus*, 5 January 1949, p9

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and/or Fences	No

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent of the heritage overlay would be the parcel of land associated with 234 Neerim Road, Carnegie.



Recommended extent of Heritage Overlay.
(Source: Nearmap, January 2019)