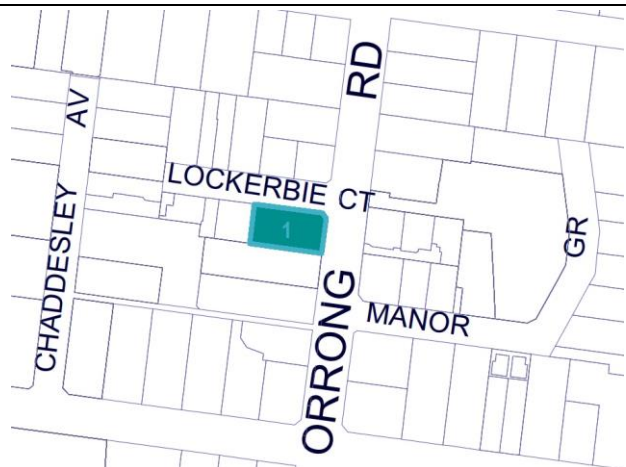


IDENTIFIER	FLATS	Citation No	HG08
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 H11
Address	1 Lockerbie Court ST KILDA EAST	Date/s	1936-37
Designer/s	W H Merritt	Builder/s	Frank Butt



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Good
Heritage Category	Flats	Intactness	Excellent
Thematic context	6.7 Making homes for Victorians		
Recommendation	Include on heritage overlay schedule as an individual heritage place		
Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> External Paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The building at 1 Lockerbie Court, St Kilda East, is a double-storey rendered brick block of flats in a bold Functionalist style, starkly expressed with parapeted roof and unadorned street elevations incorporating stepped planes, curved balconies, clinker brick entry bays and a sweeping curve at the corner. Built in 1936-37 for a Polish-born businessman, who briefly lived there himself before moving to Sydney, the flats were designed by architect W H Merritt.

The significant fabric is defined as the exterior of the entire building.

How is it significant?

The flats satisfy the following criteria for inclusion on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Glen Eira planning scheme:

- Criterion B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history.
- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

Why is it Significant?

The flats are aesthetically significant as a fine example of modernist residential architecture of the later 1930s in the stark European-influenced mode described at the time as “Continental” but now generally referred to as the Functionalist style. With a parapeted roofline defining elongated street façades in plain rendered brick, with stepping planes, rounded balconies, contrasting manganese brick entry bays with vertical strip windows, and a bold sweeping curve at the corner, the building potently evokes the spartan Functionalist tradition. While contemporaneous buildings in the more embellished Jazz Moderne and Streamlined Moderne styles are common in what is now the City of Glen Eira (and especially the former City of Caulfield), this block of flats is rare as one of very few local manifestations of the unadorned Functionalist style. (*Criterion B, Criterion E*)

History

Note: Identifying details of property owners and their families have been deleted as per Council direction

The flats at 1 Lockerbie Court, St Kilda East, were erected in 1937 to a design by architect W H Merritt. The client was a Polish-born businessman who had migrated to Australia by the late 1920s, when he took a position as director of a leading Melbourne firm of fur and skin merchants. After marrying in Sydney in the early 1930s, he and his wife returned to Melbourne and lived in cul-de-sac estates in Elwood and then St Kilda East. During 1934, he undertook a five-month business trip, travelling to Great Britain and back via the USA, passing through New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco (*Herald* 31/07/1934:21). On his return, he and his wife moved into a flat at Hampden Road, Armadale. Seeking to provide themselves with a purpose-built home of their own, they acquired land in the newly-formed cul-de-sac of Lockerbie Court. This comprised part of the *Chaddesley Estate*, a new subdivision created from the grounds of the eponymous mansion on the north-west corner of Orrong and Balaclava Roads. Conceived in early 1936, the new estate was laid out according to “the most modern methods of town planning”, with old timber paling fences replaced by new clinker brick walls and a “handsome newly constructed steel gateway” at the estate’s entry on Lockerbie Court (*Herald* 20/02/1936:20). Before the end of the year, the Polish businessman had purchased the prime corner block fronting Orrong Road and engaged architect W H Merritt to design a block of flats.

London-born, William Henry Merritt (1898-1955) studied carpentry at the Working Men’s College (later MTC, now RMIT) and joined the building firm of Clements Langford as an apprentice joiner. By the early 1920s, he had begun private practice in partnership as Merritt & Slevin, architects and designers, with offices in Melbourne and Geelong. Married in 1924, Merritt and his wife Mary settled in Elsternwick; by the end of the decade, he was in sole practice and had already fostered a reputation for several well-received blocks of flats in St Kilda. During the peak of his practice in the 1930s, he continued to specialise in apartment blocks but also designed numerous (generally large-scale) single dwellings, several hotels and hotel renovations, and other projects including a factory, guest house and church hall. His office appears to have closed around 1941, presumably due to WW2. Having briefly been attached to the Australian Flying Corps during WW1, he served as a Flying Officer with the RAAF during WW2. Afterwards, Merritt and his wife moved to Toorak. Subsequently maintaining a lower professional profile, he retired in 1954 due to ill health and died the following year, aged only 57 years.

While it is unconfirmed how the Polish businessman came to engage Merritt to design the building, it seems more than coincidental that, shortly beforehand, the architect had completed a particularly eye-catching Moderne-style house at 35 Hampden Road, Armadale, just up the street from where Merritt’s future client was living at No 29. Towards the end of 1936, Merritt called tenders for “erection of block of flats at Orrong Road, East St Kilda” (*Age* 07/11/1936:20) and, early the next year, the contract for “four brick flats, Orrong Road and Lockerbie Crescent [*sic*]”, was awarded to builder Frank Butt of Punt Road, Richmond.

The project was reportedly nearing completion in late May, when it was subject to a detailed write-up in a daily newspaper. Entitled “Continental design in East St Kilda Flats”, the article focused on the progressive planning and fitout of the block, which included a central cooling system (described as “an overseas system of air-conditioning”), built-in cocktail bars and radio units, sound-proof floors and stairwells, bathrooms with heated towel rails, and “completely equipped kitchens with electric exhaust fans in place of the old fashioned chimney” (*Herald*, 19/05/1937:25). Such innovations, not to mention the purportedly “Continental” design, clearly reflected the forward-thinking inclinations of a client who was both a European émigré and a much-travelled businessman who had spent time interstate and overseas.

While electoral rolls confirm that the Polish businessman and his wife had taken up residence in one of the new flats in 1937, they were to remain there for a relatively short period. During 1939, he resigned from his directorship to become the Australian manager for a rival firm. In December, he embarked upon a three-month overseas tour, visiting fur sales in the USA, Canada, China and Japan (*Adelaide Advertiser* 04/11/1939:19). By 1940, the family had settled in Sydney.

Description

The building at 1 Lockerbie Court is a double-storey rendered brick block of flats in a bold Functionalist style, with a tile-clad hipped roof concealed by a parapet. Occupying a corner site, the building is laid out on an L-shaped footprint; its two street elevations, starkly articulated with plain rendered walls and a narrow clinker brick plinth, are expressed continuously, with a sweeping curve at the junction. On the Orrong Road side, the façade is divided into a series of stepping bays, dominated by an entrance bay in clinker Roman brick, which projects high above the parapet line. This bay has a recessed porch, with curved reveals and a soldier-course lintel, and a multi-paned vertical strip window to the stairwell within. Between the stairwell window and the porch is a decorative motif of three projecting rendered chevrons, as well as metal numerals stating the property’s original Orrong Road street number, 263.

The longer north elevation, to Lockerbie Court, is expressed as a series of slightly recessed and projecting bays, incorporating an off-centre clinker brick entrance bay that is virtually identical to that on Orrong Road, but with a conventional rectangular window at the upper level rather than a vertical strip window. Instead of metal numerals, the street address of this frontage (1 Lockerbie Court) is indicated by a narrow metal-framed light box set into the right side of the curved door reveal. Along the Lockerbie Court facade, the recessed bays incorporate curved balconies at each level, with low black-painted metal balustrades. All of the windows, and the glazed doors to the north-facing balconies, contained multi-paned metal-framed sashes.

Comparisons

Broadly speaking, the flats at 1 Lockerbie Court provide evidence of the local boom of pre-war apartment building that emerged slowly and gradually from the mid-1920s, burgeoned from the early 1930s, and then reached its peak towards the end of that decade before tailing off as wartime restrictions took hold from the early 1940s. As an example of a block of flats from the peak era, spanning the years from 1937 to 1941, the building has countless local comparators, many of which are indicative, to a greater or lesser degree, of the prevailing Moderne style. The curving corner, a defining characteristic of the idiom, is evident in such examples as *Toolangi Court* at 500-506 Glenhuntly Road, Elsternwick (1936), *Elster Court* at 83 Orrong Road, Elsternwick (c1937), *Otira* at 440 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North (1940) and an unnamed block at 237 Glen Eira Road, Caulfield (c1939). In all of these cases, and generally speaking, curved corners are used to accentuate part of the façade (eg a projecting bay), and tend to be enlivened by incised grooves, or stringcourses of contrasting brick or moulded render, to heighten the sense of horizontality.

By contrast, the building at Lockerbie Court stands out for its starker articulation, with no applied ornament, and the fact that its curved corner creates a continuous sweep between the two street facades, with the roof entirely hidden by a parapet. In this sense, the building is perhaps most comparable to the similarly slick, if somewhat more ornamented, *Linden* flats at 575 Inkerman Road, Caulfield North (1937). The bold Functionalist expression of the Lockerbie Court flats is (as noted in the contemporary write-up) more evocative of Continental European antecedents. Even outside the specific realm of apartment blocks, this Functionalist style is an uncommon presence in what is now the City of Glen Eira. Very few truly comparable examples have yet been identified, such as the two similarly spartan semi-detached pairs of maisonettes at 317-317a and 319-319a Bambra Road, Caulfield South (c1941), and a house at 162 Orrong Road, St Kilda East (c1939), with a sweeping cream brick façade, and rounded corner with curving window.

W H Merritt designed a number of buildings in what is now the City of Glen Eira and, with the notable exception of *Craigellachie* flats at 273 Orrong Road (1934-37), in the Tudor Revival mode, his work is largely represented by single residences in the Moderne idiom. While a one-storey house in Kambea Grove, Caulfield North (1938) has evidently been demolished, larger two-storey houses still survive at 1 Grimwade Court, Caulfield North (1936), 7 Lempriere Avenue, St Kilda East (1937) and 430-432 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North (1940). All three are similar in date, scale, form and expression of typical Moderne features such as curved corners, first-floor sun terraces and large windows with steel-framed sashes. With their exposed hipped roofs, these houses are more conventionally domestic in character than Merritt's Lockerbie Court flats, with their sweeping curved and stepped façade, concealed roofline and clinker brick entry bays. As an example of his work in a bolder Functionalist mode, they are comparable to two other apartment blocks that he designed in the former City of St Kilda. Still standing at 1a Dickens Street, Elwood, and 17 Victoria Street, St Kilda, these are distinguished by a minimalist expression with stark rendered facades and curved corner balconies, with the Elwood example having a contrasting clinker brick entry bay, as seen at Lockerbie Court. Both dating from 1936 (ie, slightly predating Lockerbie Court), these two St Kilda projects were similarly described at the time of construction as being "Continental" in derivation (*Herald* 13/05/1936:20; 23/09/1936:24).

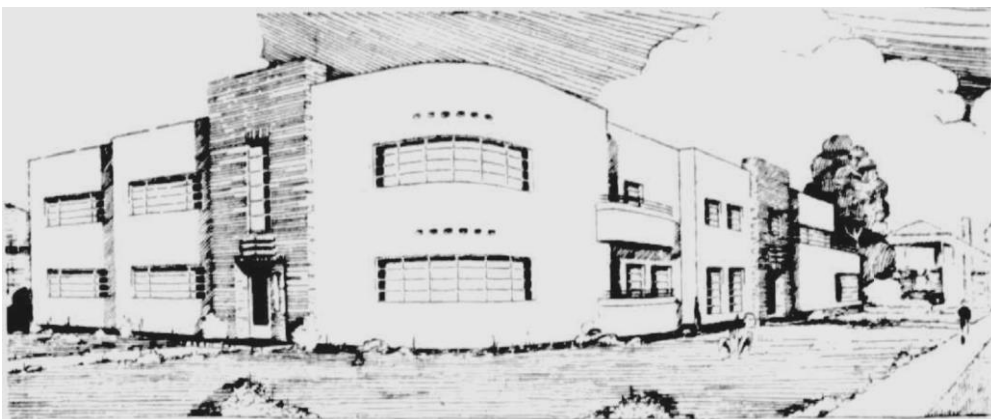
References

"Continental design in East St Kilda Flats", *Herald*, 19 May 1937, p 25.

ARBV file for William Henry Merritt. Unit 10, VPRS 8838/P1
(Individual Architects Registration Files), PROV.

Identified by

Andrew Ward (C graded list)



Original perspective drawing (*Herald*, 19 May 1937, p 25)