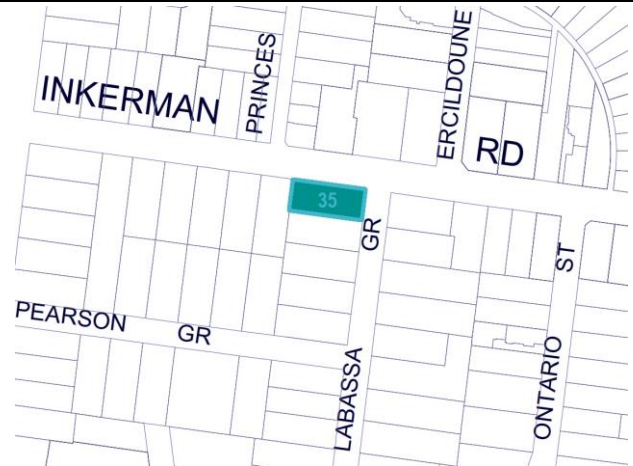


|                     |                                     |                    |         |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| <b>IDENTIFIER</b>   | HOUSE                               | <b>Citation No</b> | HG07    |
| <b>Other name/s</b> | Meldrum House (former)              | <b>Melway ref</b>  | 58 J11  |
| <b>Address</b>      | 35 Labassa Grove<br>CAULFIELD NORTH | <b>Date/s</b>      | 1917-18 |
| <b>Designer/s</b>   | William Meldrum                     | <b>Builder/s</b>   | Unknown |



Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

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

## Statement of Significance

### *What is significant?*

The former Meldrum House at 35 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North, is an attic-storey Arts & Crafts bungalow of ashlar stone construction with fish-scale slate roof. It has a prominent gabled façade to Labassa Grove, incorporating bracketed eaves and projecting porch with Tuscan columns and dentillated cornice, and glass-walled sunroom, dormer windows and corner balcony to Inkerman Road. Erected in 1917-18, the house was designed by architect William Meldrum (longtime associate of Charles D'Ebros and brother of artist Max Meldrum) for his own use.

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

### *How is it significant?*

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

- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
- Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

### *Why is it significant?*

The former Meldrum House is significant as an idiosyncratic example of an early Arts & Crafts bungalow. While its attic-storeyed form, prominent gabled frontage, dormer windows, bracketed eaves and shingled infill are wholly typical of that emerging aesthetic, the use of fish-scale roof slates, ashlar stone construction and overt classical references in the projecting front porch (*in antis* Tuscan columns and dentillated cornice) are particularly rare and unusual. While use of feature stonework became more common in later bungalows, examples entirely of stone construction would remain exceptional well into the 1920s and beyond. Demonstrating a high degree of creative achievement, the sophistication of the design testifies to the fact that it was an architect's own home. Sited on a prominent corner block, the house remains an eye-catching and unusual element in the predominantly inter-war streetscape. (*Criterion E; Criterion F*)

### **History**

The house at 35 Labassa Grove, Caulfield was erected in 1917-18 for architect William Meldrum, who designed it himself. Born in Edinburgh, William Julian Templeton Meldrum (1874-1945) migrated to Australia in 1889 with his parents and three siblings, one of whom was Max Meldrum (1875-1955), later an eminent Australian painter. In 1890, Meldrum became articled to Melbourne architect Charles D'Ebro (1850-1920), late of Grainger & D'Ebro, and would remain with that office for the rest of his career. In 1894, around the time that he completed his articles, he won first prize in a student competition with a scheme for a Turkish bathhouse (*Australian Builders & Contractors News*, 24/11/1894:222). After Meldrum married in 1907, he and his wife took up residence in Marlborough Street, Caulfield North. In 1916, Meldrum and colleague H J Wagstaff were both elevated to partnership in the firm known thereafter as D'Ebro, Meldrum & Wagstaff (*Age* 12/07/1916:16). Early the next year, it was reported that he had become an associate of the RVIA (*RVIA Journal* 01/1917:443). These changes to Meldrum's professional status were almost certainly the impetus for him to decide that it was time to design a new family residence.

As a resident of Marlborough Street, Meldrum was doubtless aware of the nearby *Labassa Estate*, a subdivision created from the grounds of the eponymous mansion. Auctioned in November 1913, it comprised 46 lots with frontage to Balaclava Road and two new north-south roads, Ontario Street and Labassa Grove. Originally, these were cul-de-sacs that stopped just short of Inkerman Road before being extended through in 1916. The City of Caulfield Rate Book for 1916-1917, dated 5 December 1916, records that Lot 16, a prime block on the west corner of Labassa Grove and Inkerman Road was owned by the East St Kilda Sand Company, with a handwritten amendment noting that it had been acquired by William Meldrum on 7 September 1917. In the next year's rate book, dated 27 November 1917, the site is again rated as vacant land, owned by Meldrum, with another handwritten note, dated 15 December, recording a brick [*sic*] house on the site worth £1,000. In the volume for 1918-19, dated 10 December 1918, the new house is definitely recorded for the first time as a seven-roomed brick and stone house, with a Net Annual Value of £70.

At the time that Meldrum designed and built his new house, the office of D'Ebro, Meldrum & Wagstaff was predominantly engaged in non-residential work. Its specific area of expertise was the design of facilities for commercial freezing and refrigeration, illustrated by a number of such projects not only in Victoria but also New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. The practice would soon change direction (and name) after Wagstaff left to open his own office in 1919, and founder Charles D'Ebro committed suicide the following year. With the admission of former Melbourne Harbour Trust engineer-in-chief A C Mackenzie, the firm was rebadged as D'Ebro, Mackenzie & Meldrum and, when Mackenzie resigned in 1926, as D'Ebro, Meldrum & Pearse. In the 1920s, his practice moved away from refrigeration projects to embrace a broader remit including other industrial buildings, banks, shops and offices. Such was Meldrum's reputation during that decade that he appeared in two editions of *Who's Who in Australia*.

The firm of D'Ebro, Meldrum & Pearse appears have petered out during the Depression. In 1931, Meldrum terminated his registration as an architect "on account of adverse economic conditions". Although the practice re-emerged a few years later under the new name of Meldrum & Pearse, now located at 84 William Street, it ceased operation permanently before the end of the decade. By then, Meldrum and his family were still living at 35 Labassa Grove. After Meldrum's death on 19 September 1945, his son (by then, a commercial artist) and daughter-in-law remained at living Labassa Grove for another decade.

### Description

The former Meldrum House at 35 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North, is a gable-roofed attic-storey stone bungalow in the Arts & Crafts style. The stonework consists of a granite plinth with random coursed axe-finished freestone, while the roof has fish-scale slate cladding, terracotta ridges and timber-lined eaves with plain bargeboards and angled brackets. Occupying a corner site, the house presents a mostly symmetrical frontage to Labassa Grove, save for a slightly recessed bay that forms a sunroom across the Inkerman Road side. The principal façade is dominated by a projecting central portico with *in antis* Tuscan columns and dentillated cornice. This is flanked by a pair of tall rectangular windows at each level, with flat arched stone lintels and timber-framed double-hung sashes. At the upper level, there are also two tiny rectangular windows at the outer edge of the facade, abutting the eave bracket. The recessed bay, to the north, contains glazed timber doors with a shingled spandrel above.

The asymmetrical Inkerman Road elevation consists of a continuous row of timber-framed windows along the eaves line, with a larger stone bay at the far (west) end, containing a single window with double-hung sashes. At the upper level, this far end of the roof plane is penetrated by an asymmetrical pair of gabled dormer bays, clad with horizontal timber boarding. The smaller dormer, to the left, forms a bay window with multi-paned windows to three sides. The larger one, slightly set back to the right, has matching multi-paned french doors that open onto a small terrace with a stone balustrade wall.

### Comparisons

It is difficult to place William Meldrum's house in the context of his other architectural work, as the various incarnations of his practice, from 1916 to the late 1930s, have attracted scant scholarly attention. While his firm was prolific, in its early phase, as specialists in commercial refrigeration, little is known of its other work, especially in later years. To date, the only other example located in what is now the City of Glen Eira was a branch of the National Australia Bank at 146 Hawthorn Road, Caulfield (D'Ebro, Meldrum & Pearse, 1928), long since demolished (*Prahran Telegraph* 04/01/1929:2). Meldrum's work in the sphere of residential architecture remains tantalizingly ill-documented. A review of newspaper tender notices has failed to identify any other houses, in the City of Glen Eira or anywhere else, credited to any permutation of Meldrum's practice. While his famous brother, artist Max Meldrum, resided at 377 Kooyong Road, Elsternwick, from 1923, no evidence has been found to suggest that the house (sold when the artist moved to Europe in 1925, and since demolished) was designed by William Meldrum.

Broadly speaking, Meldrum's own house is a manifestation of the bungalow style that emerged in Australian architecture in the early twentieth century before reaching its peak of popularity during the inter-war era. As Graham Butler noted, local examples can be loosely codified according to a broad and often overlapping range of overseas influences that informed them: the Anglo-Indian bungalows of India and Ceylon, Swiss and Italian Chalets, the Arts & Crafts movement from Great Britain, and the California bungalows and New England hunting lodges of the USA.

With its attic storeyed form and prominent gabled frontage with bracketed eaves, Meldrum's house is most demonstrative of the Arts & Crafts style. In this broad sense, it can be compared to a number of contemporaneous bungalows of similar form, such as the rendered example at 284 Orrong Road, Caulfield North (Harold Desbrowe-Annear, 1916), a red brick one at 11 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North (1917), and timber and roughcast one at 29 Murrumbeena Road, Murrumbeena (1918). Such dwellings proliferated into the early 1920s, as demonstrated by the quintessential example at 40 Snowdon Avenue, Caulfield South (1921) [HO139].

What sets Meldrum's own house apart from such comparators, however, is its use of materials and details, notably the ashlar stone construction, fish-scale roof slates and the classically-detailed front porch, which represent an idiosyncratic departure from the bungalow norm. In themselves, classical columns are not uncommon in 1920s bungalow-style dwellings, and can often be seen in trabeated or arcaded front porches (eg 10, 11 and 15 Field Street, Bentleigh). However, the porch to Meldrum's house, with *in antis* columns set into a projecting rectilinear bay with dentillated cornice, represents an entirely more rigorous application of classical influences. This is rarer at a local level; one comparator was the slightly later (and recently demolished) bungalow at 91 Balaclava Road (Sydney Smith & Ogg, 1923), which had a recessed front entry porch with similar *in antis* columns, albeit of the Ionic order rather than Tuscan, and mounted on a plinth rather than freestanding.

Similarly, brick bungalows might occasionally incorporate feature stonework, typified by the aforementioned example by Sydney Smith & Ogg (with tapering pillars of river stone) or another at 448 Glen Eira Road, Caulfield North (with porch piers in rough-hewn stone blocks). However, the use of ashlar masonry as the principal construction material, as with Meldrum's own home, is exceptional. Only a few local comparators have yet been identified, all dating from the mid-1920s. Graeme Butler reports that, during that decade, the Mount Gambier Limestone Quarrying & Building Company erected a display house of limestone construction on North Road, Ormond. Newspaper references confirm that this house, promoted as "a beautiful home of white stone, artistically designed and lavishly fitted throughout" dates from 1925 and stood near the corner of Booran Road (*Argus* 21/02/1925:27). It appears to survive at 409 North Road, albeit in an altered state, now used as a medical centre. Among the few more intact and evocative example of Mount Gambier limestone construction are the attic-storey bungalow at 53 Neerim Road, Caulfield, and a more modest single-storey bungalow at 1 Frogmore Road, Carnegie (1926), with ashlar masonry in contrasting smooth and rough-hewn blocks.

## References

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Graeme Butler, *The Californian Bungalow in Australia*, South Melbourne: Lothian Books, 1992.

## Identified by

Andrew Ward (C+ graded, with basic citation, October 2000)

Additional research and assessment by Built Heritage Pty Ltd