

IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	HG14
Other name/s	<i>St Elmo</i>	Melway ref	77 G2
Address	133 Tucker Road BENTLEIGH	Date/s	1889
Designer/s	Unknown	Builder/s	Unknown



Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
Heritage Category	House	Intactness	Excellent (notably unaltered)
Thematic context	4.4 Farming 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?

St Elmo, at 133 Tucker Road, Bentleigh, is a single-storey double-fronted Late Victorian bichromatic brick villa with a hipped slate roof, prominent brick chimneys and a verandah with bullnosed corrugated steel roof on cast iron columns with lacework frieze and brackets. It was erected in 1889 for market gardener Benjamin Collins.

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

How is it significant?

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

- Criterion A: Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history.
- 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?

St Elmo is historically significant as rare evidence of early settlement in Bentleigh's eastern fringe. Dating back to 1885, it predates the minor flurry of Boom-era residential development that took place in the area in the later 1880s and early 1890s, which resulted in only a few dwellings that now constitute the bulk of surviving Victorian-era housing in the area. *St Elmo* is the oldest surviving house in Bentleigh's eastern fringe, as well as one of the oldest in the entire suburb and in that part of the municipality formerly under the auspices of the City of Moorabbin. The house retains important association with farming activities that once characterised the area: market gardening in the late nineteenth century and, subsequently, a highly-regarded poultry farm that continued to occupy the site in the first half of the twentieth century. (*Criterion A; Criterion B*)

St Elmo is aesthetically significant as an excellent, notably intact and uncommonly ornate example of a Late Victorian brick villa. While houses of this vintage are intrinsically rare south of North Road, this particular example, with its lively bichromatic brickwork, represents a marked contrast to the typically less prepossessing villas of rendered brick or block-fronted timber that survive on failed Boom-era estates in the area. With so many of its comparators altered to a greater or lesser degree by recladding of roofs, removal of verandahs or (in one case) roughcast rendering of face brickwork, this example, with a virtually unaltered street frontage that retains slate roof with terracotta ridges, canted bay window and verandah with corrugated iron roof, cast iron columns, lace frieze and tessellated floor, is exceptional at the local level (*Criterion B; Criterion E*)

History

St Elmo, at 133 Tucker Road, Bentleigh, was erected in 1889 for market gardener Benjamin Collins. Born in Brighton, Benjamin David Collins (1858-1939) married Catherine Marquis in 1879; their first child, daughter Violet, was born the following year. The family was already residing in the Bentleigh area by March 1881, when the Shire of Moorabbin Rate Book recorded Benjamin Collins, gardener, as owner and occupier of a four-roomed house on a nine acre farm fronting Brewer Road. By 1887, the family had increased with the arrival of daughter Lucy (1881) and son Charles (1884), and had relocated to a five-roomed brick house on a considerably larger 19½ acre farm on South Road, forming part of what was then known as the *Kingsland Estate*.

In July 1889, Benjamin Collins acquired the title to the present site on Tucker Road: a large block with an area of three acres, four perches and 5/10 of a perch (1.62 hectares). A new dwelling had been erected thereon by February 1890, when rate books first recorded Benjamin Collins, market gardener, as owner and occupant of a house and three acres of land on Tucker Road, with a Net Annual Value of £45. Little is currently known of the nature or extent of Collin's market gardening activities on the site, aside from a contemporary newspaper advertisement that noted "seed potatoes for sale, B Collins, Tucker Road, East Brighton" (*Oakleigh Leader*, 04/06/1892). Collins is known to have worked some additional land in the area, with the rate book for 1893 identifying him as the owner and occupant of a further five acres on Tucker Road (rated as "land & stables", NAV £20) and as occupant of a fifteen acres on Centre Road, evidently leased from Messrs Davies & Aitken (NAV £75).

While the Collins family was still residing at Tucker Road when their fourth child, daughter Ivy, was born in 1896, they would sell up and moved to Western Australia the following year. This development was thus noted in a newspaper advertisement: "owing to the departures of Mr and Mrs B D Collins, of Tucker Road, East Brighton, to WA, if any accounts are owing by them they will be settled, if application be made to Mrs Collins before the 14th instant" (*Brighton Southern Cross*, 08/05/1897:3). The family duly settled in Perth, where Benjamin Collins died in 1939 and his widow Catherine in 1951, at the age of 91 years.

After the Collinse moved to Western Australia, their former property in Bentleigh was briefly owned by Patrick Sullivan and then by Robert Molyneux, a sub-inspector of police, although neither appears to have lived there themselves. The next resident owner was Edward Clinch (“of independent means”, according to electoral rolls), who acquired the property in 1905. Five years later, it was taken over by poultry farmer Edgar Kermode Archer, who was evidently the first to use the name *St Elmo*, as per a 1912 newspaper advertisement (*Weekly Times*: 03/08/1912:14). Over the next few years, Archer achieved minor fame on the Victorian poultry scene as a regular prize-winner in egg-laying competitions, and his Tucker Road property was already well-known as the *St Elmo Poultry Farm* by 1916, when it was taken over by Robert Rintoul Christie. Two years later, Christie himself would be praised for the success of the Bentleigh farm (described as “nicely laid out, the runs surrounded with hedges and shade trees”) and the quality of his flock, which comprised 1,000 birds of the Black Orpington and White Leghorn breeds, as well as a bespoke hybrid (“with beetle green sheen running through the plumage”) that was officially known as the “St Elmo” (*Leader*, 27/07/1918:15). Under Christie’s deft management, the St Elmo Poultry Farm continue to maintain its high status during the 1920s and ‘30s.

After Robert Christie died in 1935, the poultry farm was carried on by his widow, Mina, until her own death in 1950, whereupon ownership passed to their son, Charles. Over the next couple of years, the original three-acre property would be gradually reduced by subdivision. In 1951-52, its street frontage was carved up to create two standard residential blocks (with the original Victorian-era farmhouse retained on one of them) and a larger expanse of vacant land to the rear, with a narrow frontage to allow access off Tucker Road. In 1956, this rear block was further subdivided to create more standard residential allotments, some with frontages to an extension of Jeffrey Street and others clustered around a new-cul-de-sac, Halley Court.

Description

St Elmo, at 133 Tucker Road, Bentleigh, is a single-storey bichromatic brick Late Victorian villa with hipped slate-clad roof. Predominantly of tuck pointed red brick, the house has contrasting cream brick to the plinth and eaves lines, window surrounds, and quoined corners, as well as some decorative diaperwork. The roof, which is enlivened by a strip of diagonal slates, has narrow eaves supported on curved brackets, and there are two wide bichromatic chimneys with moulded brick caps.

The asymmetrical and double fronted street façade comprises a projecting bay to the right (north) side north (right) side, with round-arched openings, and a verandah to the left (south) with a bullnosed roof of corrugated galvanized steel, supported on fluted cast iron columns with Corinthian capitals and a decorative lacework frieze, and a tessellated floor. There are two large rectangular windows opening onto the verandah; all windows have projecting stone sills and timber-framed double-hung sashes. The front entrance, set into the far right end of the verandah, has a heavily panelled timber door.

Comparisons

Today, relatively little physical fabric remains in Bentleigh and Bentleigh East to demonstrate early phases of post-contact settlement in the second half of the nineteenth century. A handful of single dwellings remain to provide evidence of a few ambitious Boom-era residential estates that sprung up in area the late 1880s (often in the vicinity of new railway stations) but which attracted limited development at the time and would not fill out until the twentieth century. This phenomenon is typified by the block-fronted timber villas that survive at 7 Lydia Street, Bentleigh East (c1890) and 9 Vickery Street, Bentleigh (c1889) [HO142], and, just a little further north, a pair of rendered brick villas at Nos 30 and 51 Carlyon Road, Ormond (c1890).

Considered more specifically as an example of a Victorian-era “farmhouse”, formerly occupying expansive acreage fronting a major roadway, *St Elmo* has a number of local comparators. The much-altered brick villa at 14 Atkinson Street, Bentleigh, and a more intact timber villa at 19 Talbot Avenue, Bentleigh, have both been ascribed with notably early dates (alleged to have been built, respectively, in the 1860s and “circa 1870”) but probably date from the 1880s. In both cases, their original frontages have long since been subdivided so that the houses are now visible only from a secondary street, presenting what would have been a side elevation as the principal frontage. By contrast, a block-fronted timber villa still standing at 22 Brady Road, Bentleigh East (1889) [HO97], erected by market gardener (and later Councillor) William George Leary, is one of few instances where the house (as with *St Elmo*) still presents its principal façade to its original street frontage. Another example of this, erected by market gardener James Lees, is known to have stood at 140 McKinnon Road, McKinnon (1889), but was demolished circa 2003.

Compared to other Victorian houses in the Bentleigh and Bentleigh East area, *St Elmo* not only stands out for the way in which it still addresses its original street frontage, but also for the fact that it is a conspicuously grander dwelling, and one that still exhibits a high degree of physical integrity. Most examples cited above are of relatively modest dwellings of timber construction, albeit with comparable wrought iron lacework friezes (eg 22 Brady Road, 7 Lydia Street and 9 Vickery Street) and one with bichromatic brick chimneys (22 Brady Road). Some retain original slate roofs (9 Vickery Street; 14 Atkinson Street) or corrugated steel sheeting (19 Talbot Avenue) while others have been reclad (7 Lydia Street, 30 Carlyon Street). Of the more substantial houses of masonry construction, all but one are rendered; the exception was originally of face brickwork but was given a roughcast rendered finish during the inter-war years. *St Elmo* on Tucker Road, with lively bichromatic brickwork in excellent condition, remains exceptional.

References

Certificate of Title, Volume 1964, Folio 774, created 14 January 1888.

Certificate of Title, Volume 3045, Folio 808, created 5 April 1905.

“St Elmo Poultry Farm”, *Australasian*, 16 February 1918, p 13.

“St Elmo Poultry Farm: Mr R R Christie of Bentleigh”, *Leader*, 27 July 1918, p 15.

Lodged Plan Nos 33,581 and 34,008, both declared 14 August 1956.

Identified by

Andrew Ward (citation, February 2001); Glen Eira Historical Society

Additional research and assessment by Built Heritage Pty Ltd.