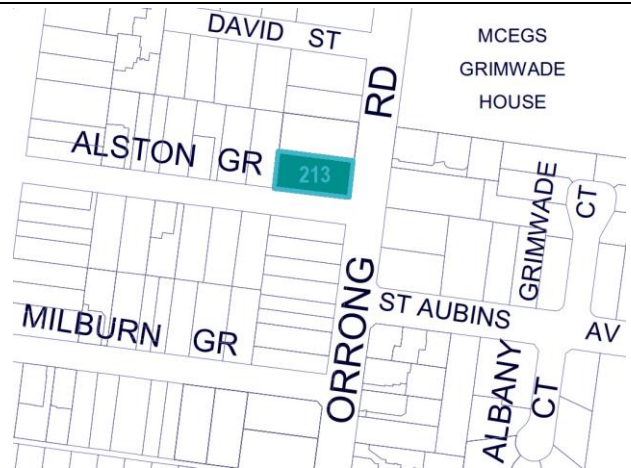


IDENTIFIER	FLATS	Citation No	HG11
Other name/s	<i>Orrong Court</i>	Melway ref	58 H12
Address	213 Orrong Road ST KILDA EAST	Date/s	1926
Designer/s	R O Goldsmith	Builder/s	T E Matthews



Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
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?

Orrong Court, at 213 Orrong Road, St Kilda East, is a two-storey block of rendered brick flats in the inter-war bungalow style, with an elongated stepped plan, hipped and gabled tile-clad roof and external staircases providing private access to upper flats. Erected in 1926 as an investment property for a Russian-born businessman and his wife, the flats were designed by architect, local resident and former City of Caulfield Builder Surveyor, R O Goldsmith.

The significant fabric is defined as the entire exterior of the main building and adjacent garage, the matching fence along both street boundaries, and the gateway/letterbox piers at the corner.

How is it significant?

Orrong Court 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 D: Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments.

Why is it significant?

The *Orrong Court* flats are significant as an early local manifestation of the modern purpose-built apartment block. Introduced into Melbourne in the early twentieth century, the typology began to proliferate in certain inner suburbs (eg St Kilda, Elwood) from the late teens, but took some time to become popular in the City of Caulfield. Although a few mansions were converted into flats in the early 1920s, this practice was discouraged and the first purpose-built examples emerged gradually during that decade. Dating from 1926, *Orrong Court* is not the oldest surviving block of flats in the City of Glen Eira, but was one of the first to be explicitly articulated as a multi-dwelling complex, in contrast to earlier examples designed to resemble a single large residence. With units expressed individually, provided with separate external entrances and open staircases for private access, *Orrong Court* is a textbook example of a distinctive form of apartment block that, while common in the former City of St Kilda, is rare in the former City of Caulfield. (*Criterion B; Criterion D*). As one of the earliest examples of modern apartment architecture in the study area, the building provides valuable evidence of a theme that was to dominate residential development of the City of Glen Eira (and particularly the former City of Caulfield) from the 1930s to the 1970s. (*Criterion A*)

History

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

The *Orrong Court* flats at 213 Orrong Road, St Kilda East, were designed by architect R O Gilbert in 1926 as an investment property for a Russian-born businessman who was born in the late 1880s and migrated to Australia in the early 1900s. He found work in the new retail outlet founded by compatriot Sydney Myer and, by 1920, held the position as manager of the ladies' underclothing department. He remained with the Myer Emporium for the rest of his career, undertaking several overseas study tours (*Herald* 04/05/1944:7). He and his wife lived in St Kilda before relocating to Orrong Road, St Kilda East, by the early 1920s. In the City of Caulfield Rate Book for 1922-23 (dated 11 December 1923), the businessman's wife is recorded as owner of a seven-roomed brick house at 215 Orrong Road, with her husband listed as occupant. A scribbled note, made during the following year, records that he had acquired the adjacent block of vacant land at the corner of Alston Grove. By 1925, ownership of the latter site had been transferred to his wife. Intending to develop this land with a small block of flats, the couple turned to architect R O Gilbert.

Born in Eaglehawk, near Bendigo, Richard Oliver Goldsmith (1891-1977) worked as a carpenter for local builders until 1912, when he became articled to Bendigo architects Keogh & Austen. After distinguished service in WW1, Goldsmith married and moved to Melbourne, where he completed his articles under his former Bendigo boss Ernest J Keogh, who had similarly moved to Melbourne, establishing sole practice in Queens Street. In 1921, Goldsmith left Keogh's office to take up the position of Building Surveyor to the City of Caulfield. He and his wife Jane, who initially lived in Middle Park, moved to St Kilda East. During his time as Building Surveyor, Goldsmith supervised construction of several council buildings, including baby health centres at Caulfield and Carnegie, and oversaw the alterations to the Town Hall. After he resigned in November 1924 to open his own architectural practice, it was reported that "he had been a conscientious officer and had saved Council a considerable amount of money by this expert advice and personal attention" (*Prahran Telegraph* 03/04/1925:6). Goldsmith, who lived in Sidwell Avenue in the later 1920s and later relocated to Elwood, remained professionally active in the local area for some time.

As an architect living in St Kilda East in the early 1920s, Goldsmith would have been keenly aware of the boom of apartment blocks in the suburb (and the broader St Kilda, Elwood and Elsternwick area) at that time. But, while such development proliferated in what was then the City of St Kilda, it was rather less apparent in the contiguous City of Caulfield. Towards the end of 1923, the latter council generated a degree of press attention after it refused several applications to convert local buildings into residential flats (*Argus* 20/09/1923:4).

Early the following year, Goldsmith chimed into the debate in his capacity as Building Surveyor, stating that these refusals did not mean that the City of Caulfield was opposed to apartment development of any kind. He was thus quoted: “we have no power to refuse to pass plans for erection of flats, provided they conform to our building regulations. But we certainly oppose makeshift alterations to houses for conversion into flats that do not reach the standard of our building and health regulations. These, I admit, have been drafted to discourage the poorer class of flats” (*Herald*, 07/01/1924:5).

In 1926, more than a year after resigning as Building Surveyor to pursue private architectural practice, Goldsmith was given the opportunity to move beyond the “poorer class of flats”. On 27 July, he called tenders for “erection of six flat building at St Kilda” and, a month later, the contract was awarded to builder T E Matthews, of Ash Grove, Caulfield, who tendered £5,790. On 25 August, a building permit was issued (by T A Constable, who took over as acting Building Surveyor after Goldsmith resigned). Construction was evidently well underway by October, when the businessman and his wife moved out of the adjacent house at No 215, taking up temporary residence in the nearby *Ardoch* flats on Dandenong Road (*Prahran Telegraph* 01/10/1926:8). The completed building is first recorded in the City of Caulfield Rate Book for 1927-28 (dated 7 December 1927) as the *Orrong Court* Flats, a 26-roomed brick house [*sic*] owned by the businessman’s wife, with a Net Annual Value of £325 and a population of nineteen. Following the death of the businessman and his wife in the mid-1940s, ownership of the *Orrong Court* flats remained vested in her estate well into the 1950s.

Description

Orrong Court, at 213 Orrong Road, East St Kilda, is a double-storey block of rendered brick flats in the inter-war bungalow style, with a hipped and gabled roof. Occupying a corner site, the building is laid out on an elongated and stepped plan, with each pair of flats articulated as a separate duplex (ie, one flat at each level, with individual external access). It thus presents an asymmetrical double-fronted elevation to Orrong Road, with a single gabled bay to the right (north) side and recessed porches to the left (south), while the elongated elevation to Alston Grove is more symmetrical, comprising two recessed bays alternating with three projecting gabled bays.

The building is otherwise expressed with a consistent palette of materials, finishes and details. It has a clinker brick plinth and roughcast rendered walls with contrasting smooth render to piers, lintels, sills and panel borders. The roof, clad in cement tiles, has boarded eaves with timber brackets. Along the Alston Grove side, gable ends are enlivened by vertical grooved motifs, while the Orrong Road side has a dormer gablet with half-timbered infill and a shingled spandrel above the half-round bow window. Windows are varied in form: there are tripartite boxed windows with bracketed sills and double-hung sashes (to both elevations), larger multi-paned picture windows (to the central bay on Alston Grove, and the partially concealed west elevation) and french doors with flanking sidelights (to the porches on the Orrong Road side). Most windows are multi-paned and contain leadlight glazing.

The Alston Grove elevation includes three prominent open staircases, with rendered balustrade walls, to provide private access to the upstairs flats. The ground floor flats are accessed via a recessed porch (on Orrong Road side) or doorways with short flights of steps (on Alston Grove side). Each elevation also incorporates a projecting box-like balcony bearing the name *Orrong Court* in raised rendered lettering. At the west end of the Alston Grove frontage is a detached double garage in a matching style with gabled roof between two party-walls and rendered walls with incised groove. The original front fence, extending along both street frontages, comprises a row of squat piers (in matching clinker brick and roughcast render) connected by chains. At the corner, a wide gateway is defined by two large canted walls, containing letterbox slots.

Comparisons

It is hard to place *Orrong Court* in the context of Goldsmith's broader oeuvre. Despite his association (personally and professionally) with what is now the City of Glen Eira, little is known of his local output. While he is credited with supervising construction of infant welfare centres at Caulfield and Carnegie (1924), it is unclear if he designed them himself. In any case, both centres (located at 254 Hawthorn Road and 17 Truganini Road) have since been demolished. A review of tender notices reveals that, in his early private practice, Goldsmith completed several projects for the municipalities that merged to form the City of Glen Eira. For the City of Caulfield, he designed a timber pavilion at East Caulfield Reserve (1928), alterations to the municipal market in Caulfield South (1928) and more renovations to the Town Hall (1929), while the City of Moorabbin engaged him to design its new Shire Offices on Point Nepean Road (1928), and convert the old Shire Offices into a baby health centre (1929). But little seems to remain of this work in Caulfield, and, while Moorabbin's former Shire Offices still stand at 977 Nepean Highway, they are outside the borders of the City of Glen Eira. Even less is recorded of Goldsmith's residential work. It can be assumed that he designed his own house at 26 Sidwell Avenue, St Kilda East (1925), and he was presumably also responsible for a house erected on land that he owned at what is now 1100 (formerly 582) Dandenong Road, Carnegie (1926). Typical of the era, both are bungalow-style dwellings with rendered walls and broad tile-clad gabled roofs. The Carnegie house, which had unusual bulbous piers with soldier brick capping and diaperwork, has only recently been demolished.

Ultimately, *Orrong Court* must be viewed in the context of early apartment development in what is now the City of Glen Eira. It has been noted that, while blocks of flats boomed in the City of St Kilda from the late teens, it took some time before they became popular in the City of Caulfield. As early as 1920, architects E J & C L Ruck called tenders for "two-storey residential flats, Caulfield", but its exact address remains unconfirmed (*Herald* 14/04/1920:2). To date, few examples of purpose-built 1920s flats have been identified in the study area. Amongst the earliest are the *Albynes* flats at 17 Tennyson Avenue, Caulfield (1923) and *Ontario* flats at 9 Manor Grove, Caulfield (1925), each designed (no doubt in deference to neighbouring residents) to resemble a large two-storey single residence, with bungalow-style detailing such as half timbering, shingles, eaves brackets and boxed windows. While *Orrong Court* exhibit stylistic influences, the building was laid out in a characteristic and unmistakable apartment topology: an elongated stepped plan with individual flats articulated more overtly, and textbook external stairs to provide private access to first floor flats. This distinctive form, while ubiquitous in the former City of St Kilda, remained rare in the City of Caulfield. Only a few later examples have yet been identified, including the *Dacre Court* flats at 372 Orrong Road (1927), the *Glenura* flats at 374 Orrong Road (c1930), the *Englefield* flats at 94 Hotham Street (1932) and the *Berwick Hall* flats at 554 Dandenong Road (c1935). The *Rothsay Court* flats at 6 Sidwell Avenue (1928-31) (HO64) represent a hybrid form, where an existing mansion (formerly *St Sidwells*) was converted into flats, supplemented by a flanking pair of purpose-built blocks with external staircases.

References

ARBV file for Richard Oliver Goldsmith. Unit 6, VPRS 8838/P1
(Individual Architects Registration Files), PROV.

Terry Sawyer, "Residential flats in Melbourne: the development of a building type to 1950",
Undergraduate thesis, BArch, University of Melbourne, 1982.

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