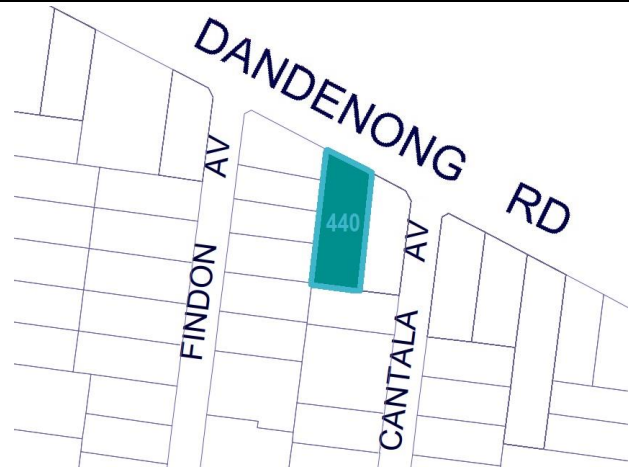


IDENTIFIER	FLATS	Citation No	HG03
Other name/s	<i>Olgita</i>	Melway ref	58 K9
Address	440 Dandenong Road CAULFIELD NORTH	Date/s	1940
Designer/s	Leslie J W Reed (attrib)	Builder/s	Unknown



Photographs 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
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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?

Olgita at 440 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North, is a double-storey rendered brick block of flats in the Streamlined Moderne style, with a stepped façade incorporating a series of curved parapeted bays with horizontal banding, a taller stairwell bay with contrasting vertical fluting, and a more conventional hip-roofed expression to the side and rear. The flats were built in 1940 as an investment property for a Russian-born hosiery manufacturer, and were probably designed by Armadale architect Leslie J W Reed, who had undertaken prior work for the same client.

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 E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

Why is it significant?

Olgita is aesthetically significant as an excellent example of a block of flats in the Streamlined Moderne style, incorporating some particular bold and striking details. Occupying a long narrow site, the large two-storey building (containing six flats of above-average size) has a stepped frontage to the north-east, with recessing curved bays incorporating rendered banding and faceted windows. Characteristically of the style, this innate horizontality is relieved by a contrasting vertical element in the form of a stair lobby that projects above the parapet, with vertical fluting, curvilinear wrought iron ornament and a projecting bulbous balcony. The bold articulation of this principal frontage contrasts with more conventionally domestic utilitarian expression of the west (rear) side, with exposed hipped roof, rectilinear massing and standard windows. (*Criterion E*)

History

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

The block of flats at 440 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North, was erected in 1940 for a sock manufacturer, initially as an investment property. The owner and his wife were both born in Russia but left, with their large family, in the early 1920s. Migrating to Australia via Palestine, they arrived in Melbourne in the mid-1920s and settled in Carlton North, where the family's sock manufacturing business was established. By 1930, the venture had expanded and would continue to do so, spreading along Lygon Street with an "ambitious building project" initiated in 1934 (*Herald* 22/08/1934:16). At the same time, the family relocated from Carlton North to St Kilda East, taking up residence in a new Moderne house in Vadlure Avenue.

The family's hosiery empire continued to thrive on the strength of its flagship product, and it was during this prosperous period that they decided to build a block of flats on Dandenong Road as an investment property. The proposed site, near the west corner of Cantala Avenue, formed part of the vast *Cantala Estate*, an ambitious pre-war subdivision created from the fourteen-acre grounds of Septimus Miller's eponymous *Cantala* mansion. The first two stages of the subdivision, auctioned in May 1933 and April 1938, attracted much interest; this remained the case when the third and final stage, encapsulating allotments in newly-formed Cantala Avenue and the adjacent frontage to Dandenong Road, was released in November 1939.

While the architect of the new block of flats has not been conclusively identified, it is likely to have been the work of Leslie J W Reed, who had already designed the family's house in Vadlure Street, St Kilda East (*Age* 13/12/1933:4) as well as the major additions to their factory in Lygon Street (*Herald* 22/08/1934:16). Born in Malvern, Leslie Joseph Whitaker Reed (1893-1964), began private practice in 1914 but would reach the peak of his professional life during the 1920s and '30s, when he flourished mostly as a designer of residential work (both houses and flats) as well as a few commercial and industrial projects. A longtime resident of Malvern East who maintained his professional offices in Armadale, Reed was notably active in that area, including South Yarra, Prahran and Caulfield. An eclectic designer, Reed worked in many of the fashionable styles of the day, embracing the progressive Moderne style and more conservative modes, such as Tudor Revival, Spanish Mission and Colonial Revival, with equal aplomb. After WW2, he gradually moved away from historicist styles toward a more conventional modernist approach. Relocating to Ringwood in the later 1950s, Reed remained in practice until his death.

The block of flats on Dandenong Road, almost certainly designed by Reed, was a large two-storey building on an elongated stepped plan, originally providing four apartments of uncommonly large size (with either two or three bedrooms) and degree of luxury. Conceived in the fashionable Streamlined Moderne style, each apartment had a front room with a vast curved window, as well as modish fireplaces, french doors, moulded cornices, and ceiling panels in lively geometric patterns. On completion, the building (originally numbered as 54 Dandenong Road) was named the *Olgita* flats, combining the forenames of two female members of the family.

Six years after the flats were completed, the owners erected a new house on the adjacent site (then No 56; now 442), which, in a broadly similar Moderne mode, was designed by architect Archibald Ikin (who appears to have supplanted Leslie Reed as the family's preferred architect, as Ikin went on to design the their hosiery mills at Williamstown, in 1949). The second house on Dandenong Road was not without controversy: the size of the dwelling prompted questions to be asked in Parliament as to whether it contravened wartime restrictions on the scale of private residential construction (*Herald* 28/05/1947:8). As it transpired, the house in fact comprised two separate flats, one of which was occupied by the owners and the other by their son and daughter-in-law. By the mid-1950s, the younger couple had relocated next door, to one of the *Olgita* flats, and would remain living there for the next two decades.

Description

Olgita, at 440 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North, is a two-storey hip-roofed brick building in a Streamlined Moderne style. Laid out on an elongated and stepped rectilinear plan, it contains six flats. While the building is expressed with a consistent palette of painted brickwork, rendered banding and large rectangular windows with multi-paned sashes, it has a somewhat hybrid elevational treatment. The Streamlined Moderne idiom is most boldly expressed to the north-east (left) side of the building, where the hipped roof is concealed by parapet with incised stringcourse, and there are curved corners with faceted windows and another curved bay containing the stairwell, with recessed entry porch, projecting half-round balcony, tall window with fishtail glazing bars, and a vertically fluted spandrel above. The north-west (right) side of the building, while incorporating similar rendered banding and steel-framed windows, is otherwise more traditionally domestic in scale, with right-angled corners and the hipped roof exposed.

Comparisons

While not conclusively proven to have been designed by architect Leslie J W Reed, the fact that he was responsible for two other projects for the same family is compelling. Stylistically, the *Olgita* flats also have much in common with other Moderne-style apartment blocks known to have been designed by Reed around the same time, such as the *Urana* flats at 202 Punt Road, Windsor (1936) and the *Taurea* flats at 90 Toorak Road West, South Yarra (1937), both of which have rendered curved bays with incised horizontal grooves and vertical fluting. Within what is now the City of Glen Eira, Reed is represented by a number of residential buildings, although few seem to survive. Among the casualties are a pair of timber houses at the corner of Bambra Road and Filbert Street, Caulfield South (1929) and a house at 326 Orrong Road, Caulfield (1935) that, with its peculiarly patterned clinker brickwork, had appeared in the *Australian Home Beautiful*.

The house that Reed had previously designed for same family, still standing at 7 Vadlure Avenue, St Kilda East (1933) [part of HO7], is an interesting proto-Moderne design: a large but fairly conventional hip-roofed single-storey rendered house, punctuated by an entry porch with unusual stepped parapet. As a resident of Malvern East who maintained his office in Armadale, Reed was notably active in the area and his output includes several surviving buildings located just outside the current study area, including a house on the opposite (north) side of Dandenong Road, on the corner of Redcourt Avenue (1937).

Considered more broadly as an example of apartment blocks in the Streamlined Moderne style, the *Olgita* flats have a number of local comparators. The use of curving rendered walls with incised stringcourses and faceted windows at the corner, coupled with an entry stairwell expressed as a contrasting vertical element with stepped parapet and moulded ornamentation, is similar to the *Linden* flats at 575 Inkerman Road, Caulfield North (1937). The use of curved corners on a stepped triple-fronted façade, with incised ornament, also anticipates the slightly later duplex at 325/325a Bambra Road, Caulfield South (1940).

The merging of such defining Streamlined Moderne characteristics with more conventionally domestic features, such as an exposed hipped roof, was not altogether unusual at the time. There are many examples where this has been attempted in an arguably less sophisticated manner, typified by the *Kingston Court* flats at 1088 Glenhuntly Road, Glen Huntly (c1937), the *Winston* flats at 2 Dorgan Street, Caulfield North (1940) and an unnamed block at 268-270 Bambra Road, Caulfield South (c1940). Counterparts where this hybrid approach has been adopted in a more assured fashion, as with the *Olgita* flats, are rarer. Examples include a semi-detached pair of dwellings at 4-6 Gladstone Parade, Elsternwick (1939) [HO22] and a two-storey single residences at 13 Kambea Grove, Caulfield North (c1938) and 705 North Road, Carnegie (1943) [HO143].

References

Archibald Ikin, "Proposed residence, Caulfield, for Mrs [redacted]", working drawings, undated [c1947]. City of Caulfield Permit No 8,522.

"Spin, dye own yarn for socks", *Argus*, 14 May 1953, p 25.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "Leslie J W Reed (1893-1964)", *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, <<www.builtheritage.com.au/dua_reed.html>>

Identified by

Andrew Ward (C grade list).