
Carn Brea - Garden

Location

5 Harcourt Street, HAWTHORN VIC 3123 - Property No G13117

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 22, 2008

Carn Brea, developed by the Beswicke family as a suburban villa from the mid 1870s, purchased by the Nicholas family in 1920, the garden considerably enlarged and enhanced, and the residence rebuilt in 1928, is of State significance:

- as a representative suburban villa garden of the late nineteenth century, skilfully and sympathetically redesigned and extended in 1920 and 1928 and largely intact from 1928; major attributes include the sweeping entry drive, mature trees, large open lawns, architectural garden features and early site planning;
- for its collection of trees characteristic of late nineteenth century gardens in Victoria;
- for its retention of garden elements and buildings including pergolas, fernery, conservatory, fountain, sundial, tennis court, front fence and gates;
- for the manner in which the garden provides an appropriate setting for a residence of considerable architectural significance; this is enhanced by the fact that architect Harry A Norris was responsible for the design of both the house and garden;
- for its links with the significant client/architect relationship that developed between Alfred Nicholas and Harry Norris and the collection of architecturally and historically important domestic, institutional and commercial commissions that followed as a result of this patronage;
- for its links with the Nicholas family, prominent in Melbourne's commercial world and noted philanthropists; Carn Brea forms a complement to the hill station properties of Alfred Nicholas (Burnham Beeches, Sherbrooke), and his brother George Nicholas (Alton, Mt Macedon);

- for the survival of plans (especially those dating from 1920 and 1928) which formed the documentation for the extant house and garden;
- for its contribution to Harcourt Street, a precinct of intact late nineteenth and early twentieth century mansions and villas probably without parallel in Melbourne; Carn Brea is enhanced in this respect by its link with the architect John Beswicke and as the first property to be developed on the north side of Harcourt Street;
- for its aesthetic qualities, derived from the sloping site with fine views to the south, intactness of the surrounding streetscape, mature trees and early garden elements such as the fence, gates and pergolas which complement the architecture of the residence.

ANALYSIS

The garden at Carn Brea, like the house, retains features from several major periods of development. Evidence of the nineteenth century garden layout is provided by the 1903-1905 MMBW plans; features retained from this early scheme include the main curving path, eastern drive, general position of tennis court, circular path/feature south of the front door, general site plan of the western portion of the residence and position of garage. The garden plan of 1920 is particularly informative although a presumed second sheet (showing the northern portion of the site) has not been sighted. The 1920 plan retained many elements from the Victorian era garden and incorporated several new features of which the following still survive; northern section of the main path, straightening of the east drive at the entrance, division of the circular garden bed into quadrants, fernery, southern pergola and extension of the lawn into the western block. The garden plan of 1928 is the only document which shows the full extent of the Nicholas era garden. Most features from the 1920 scheme were retained with the notable exception of the south-western rose garden (which may never have even been constructed). The circular feature in front of the house assumed its final form as part of the 1928 scheme (the details are shown in a Norris drawing of June 1927) and the large pergola over the eastern drive adjoining the tennis court was developed at this stage. It is assumed that the northern formal garden shown on the 1928 plan was executed and it can be argued that the garden at Carn Brea reached its peak during the second half of the Nicholas ownership (ie 1928-1937). Developments and changes since the Nicholas ownership have included the destruction of the northern formal garden through subdivision, and the construction of a swimming pool north-west of the residence (on land not apparently owned by the Nicholas family).

From analysis of early plans and the surviving landscape it can be seen that Carn Brea retains much of its layout as a late Victorian suburban villa garden. Both the Nicholas schemes of 1920 and 1928 respected the main nineteenth century layout and enhanced the landscaping by the incorporation of stylish garden elements such as pergolas and formal path system in front of the residence. These features closely related to the redesign of the Victorian residence by Harry Norris.

Attribution of the design remains conjectural although it seems highly likely that the landscape designer Hugh Linaker was involved in the 1928 scheme, if not the 1920 scheme. Linaker undertook work for Alfred Nicholas in the late 1920s and early 1930s providing advice on the Nicholas hill station Burnham Beeches. Percy Trevaskis, gardener at Burnham Beeches from 1929 to 1936, recalled that Linaker supervised bedding schemes at Carn Brea in conjunction with The Herald Garden Competition.(10)

Norris's redesign of Carn Brea extended the notion of a house and its integral connection to its garden by the sympathetic enlargement of a nineteenth century mansion to resemble a spreading and picturesque English country seat. The architectural vocabulary of the additions (half-timbered gables, tiled roofs, bay windows, leadlighting and delicate interior plasterwork) have resulted in a house that appears on the one hand as a grand version of the bungalow and on the other as a late and impressive example in the tradition of the so-called Melbourne Queen Anne.

The additions and alterations to the house and garden at Carn Brea is perhaps the earliest commission which Alfred Nicholas bestowed upon the young architect Harry Norris and marks the beginning of a fruitful patronage that arose through a common interest in tennis. (Norris gave Nicholas lessons in the game.) Norris's practice had only begun in August 1919 and was officially incorporated in July 1921. Norris became the official architect for the Nicholas Group of companies and designed the Nicholas Building, Swanston Street, Melbourne (1926), followed by Norris's most famous domestic work for the 'Aspro King', Burnham Beeches, Sherbrooke (1930-33); and various laboratories for Nicholas and Aspro. Norris's other significant works in Melbourne include Kellow House, St Kilda Road (1929); Capital Bakeries, South Yarra (1929); Coles No 4 Store, 301 Bourke Street, Melbourne (now David Jones) (1929); Melford Motors, Elizabeth Street (1929); Block Court, Collins Street (1930); Majorca

Building, Flinders Lane (1931); Wesley College, St Kilda Road, Prahran (1934) (as a result of Nicholas Family donations); Foy and Gibson's Store, Cnr Bourke & Swanston Street (1934-5); the Mission to Seamen, Port Melbourne (1937); and Mitchell House, Cnr Elizabeth & Lonsdale Street (1938).

Carn Brea relates strongly to the history of Hawthorn through its association with Rathmines Village, its pivotal role in the development of the northern side of Harcourt Street, and its links with the prominent Beswicke family. File note 18/03/2011: G13117 amalgamated & filed with B5186.

Hermes Number 70196

Property Number

Physical Description 1

DESCRIPTION

Carn Brea is set on a large sloping block (0.7 ha) with the house placed well back from the frontage in order to gain views to the south. Originally, views would have extended to the bay. The street frontage is defined by a low brick and timber fence (thought to date from 1920) although the original finish has now been covered by grey paint. The property has two main drives, the principal one leads from the centre of the frontage and sweeps in a gentle curve past the east of the house to the garage at the rear north-eastern boundary. This is entered through iron gates and its surface is now asphalt with bluestone pitcher edging, presumably replacing an earlier gravel surface. A service drive runs directly from the frontage to the garage along the eastern boundary. The main drive passes under a stone and timber pergola. Directly in front of the house is a large lily pond with a central fountain and square pergolas at the cardinal points.

REFERENCES

- (1) Throughout this classification report, the name of the property is spelt 'Carn Brea'. This is taken from the name of the Nicholas family company Carnbrea Investments Pty Ltd and differs from the spelling on both the architect's drawings and the extant name plates on the gate posts; the early history of this property is taken from the National Trust Historic Area Classification Report 'Rathmines Village (Harcourt Street)'.
- (2) Copy of ratebook research held on National Trust F.N.5186.
- (3) MMBW detail plan No.1560, 40 ft = 1 inch, lithographed May 1903.
- (4) Details of the Nicholas ownership are based on research by Georgina Whitehead, copy held on National Trust gardens file.
- (5) Copy of plan held on National Trust F.N.5186.
- (6) *ibid.*
- (7) *ibid.*
- (8) *ibid.*
- (9) Research by Georgina Whitehead, *op.cit.*
- (10) Reminiscences of Percy Trevaskis quoted in Nigel Lewis Richard Aitken Pty Ltd, 'Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens Conservation Analysis', prepared for Department of Conservation & Environment, 1991.

The house is an extremely large and luxurious residence which was extensively and sympathetically altered in 1920 and 1927. The original nineteenth century mansion was enlarged in those years to include on the ground floor: a double height timber panelled ballroom with a plaster dome and musicians gallery over, revamped kitchen and servants stair, billiard room, cloak room and guest bedroom; and on the first floor: enlarged master bedroom, three bathrooms, servants bedrooms, gymnasium and playroom. These gable roofed and half-timbered extensions (with a double height gable window to the ballroom) were located at the rear of the house. New ground floor spaces were given concrete slabs and parquet was laid in the ballroom and billiard room. Alterations to the garden front of the house took the form of a new drawing room and fireplace externally expressed by a large protruding half-timbered gable and on the first floor, large gabled dormers and an extension of the major roof gable and the verandah below. These additions give the impression of a large and spreading English country house complementing the romantic landscape of the garden in front. More recent additions include the slating of the entire roof (in place of the 1928 terracotta tiles), updating of the kitchen, the addition of a conservatory; and expansion of the first floor bathroom and laundry areas which involved the playroom and gymnasium being given over to these uses. Today, the ground floor is entirely devoted to entertaining and living spaces while upstairs contains a maze of six bedrooms of varying size. The date of the glazing-in of the front verandahs is not known.

The tennis court is hedged in *Cupressus torulosa* and the section of the drive to the east is covered by a long pergola. The rest of the front garden is given over to lawn dotted with specimen trees and bounded by shrubberies. Particularly conspicuous are two *Phoenix canariensis* on the eastern lawn, and on the western lawn, four *Populus deltoides*, two *Ficus macrophylla*, two *Cedrus deodara* and two *Ulmus glabra* 'Pendula' set on a large metal frame. There are also large specimens of *Cupressus macrocarpa* along the western boundary. Close to the street frontage are a number of inappropriate plantings, mostly of recent origin, including both Australian native species and small conifers. West of the residence is a timber pergola and large fernery, described by Peter Watts as one of the largest in the state. A large Plane tree in the fernery area and an old *Nerium oleander* underneath the large trees on the western boundary are also thought to be early plantings. A swimming pool has been developed behind the fernery and this is divided from the rear service yard of the residence by a low retaining wall. The service yard has several beds of grass and a small plot of roses but is largely of a utilitarian character. A small glazed conservatory (which was part of the original design) is attached to the eastern side of the house.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>