

'Reumah'

Prepared by: Context

Address:

1 Reumah Court, Balwyn

Name: 'Reumah'	Survey Date: December 2018
Place Type: Residential	Architect:
Grading: Significant	Builder:
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1908-1909; 1919 (reconstructed in part)



Figure 1. View of 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn. (Source: Context, October 2017)

Historical Context

Balwyn is a residential suburb situated 10 kilometres east of central Melbourne. To its south are Canterbury and Surrey Hills and to the north is Balwyn North, which is separated from Balwyn by Belmore Road. Deepdene, historically forming part of south-west Balwyn, became a separate suburb in 2008.

Development to 1914

The beginnings of post-contact settlement in the Balwyn area dates back to 1841, when the land bounded by Burke Road, Canterbury Road, Warrigal Road and the Koonung Creek was purchased by Henry Elgar under the short-lived 'special survey' provisions whereby 5120 acres could be purchased at £1 per acre if survey was carried out by the purchaser. According to a map of May

1841, there were two squatters occupying the large area known as Elgar's Special Survey at the time that he purchased it: Charles Mullins in the southeast corner and Arundel Wright in the northeast. By 1847, the *Port Phillip Directory* listed eighteen people with the address of 'Elgar's Survey', including ten 'agriculturists', two farmers, two 'artificiers' and a grazier (Gwen McWilliam cited in Built Heritage 2015:7).

In October 1853, residents of the area signed a petition calling for improvements to roads between Richmond Bridge and Bulleen. A follow-up petition specifically demanded 'a proper line of road to be laid down from the Koonung Creek to the west side of Elgar's Special Survey' (Gwen McWilliam cited in Built Heritage 2015:7). Over the next few years, several new roads were marked out across the area, including Bulleen Road, Doncaster Road, Whitehorse Road and Belmore Road (Built Heritage 2015:7).

In September 1856, allotments of land in Elgar's Survey, totalling more than 1000 acres, were offered for sale in Melbourne as the 'Boroondara Estate'. Increased settlement followed, including the establishment of the industries of viticulture and tree felling (Built Heritage 2015:8). One of the allotments for sale in the 1856 subdivision was purchased by Scots editor and journalist, Andrew Murray. He built a house near the site of the present-day Fintona Girls' School in Balwyn Road (*Australian Places* 2015). Murray planted a vineyard on the slope of the hill and named his house 'Balwyn', meaning 'home of the vine', using a compound of the Scots Gaelic 'bal (baile)' and the Saxon 'wyn' (ADB).

By the early 1860s, the village of Balwyn, centred around the intersection of Balwyn and Whitehorse roads, comprised a Congregationalist chapel on the western side of Bulleen Road, opened in 1857; a modest Catholic school-house, near the corner of Balwyn and Belmore Roads, which existed by 1858; and the Athenaeum Hall, on the west side of Balwyn Road, built in the mid-1850s. A Common School opened in 1868, and in 1872, the St Barnabas Anglican Church opened on an adjacent site to the south (the Anglican congregation had formerly met in the Athenaeum Hall, which was adapted for use as a post office c1872). By 1872, Balwyn comprised five public buildings and 14 residences in the area between Whitehorse Road and Koonung Creek (Built Heritage 2015:8-9).

During the 1880s, two significant developments in public works spurred residential settlement. A mains water supply from Yan Yean Reservoir was constructed between 1880 and 1882, from Cotham Road along Whitehorse Road, as far as Balwyn Road. In addition, the construction of the Outer Circle Railway, passing through Ashburton, Camberwell, Deepdene and Kew East, commenced in 1887. As a result, land in the Balwyn area became highly sought after by speculators who established residential estates. The subdivisions included Deepdene estate (1884), Belmore Park Estate in Deepdene (1888) and others further north, including the Kew Park Estate (1888), the Heights of Kew Estate (1888), and the Kew Vale Estate (1889) – all located on the south side of Doncaster Road in what is now Balwyn North, (Built Heritage 2015:9), and in Balwyn township itself (see Figure 1). A small number of mansion houses were also erected in the more elevated parts of Balwyn in the late 1880s and early 1890s, which took advantage of fine views to the north and east.

History

1 Reumah Court is a generous sized allotment fronting Reumah Court, a small cul-de-sac off Knutsford Street just north of Mont Albert Road.

In 1905, the very large block of land on the north-west corner of Mont Albert Road and Knutsford Street was empty (MMBW No. 71, 1905). 'Reumah' was built in the top half of this block, with its frontage extending to Mont Albert Road. By c1933 a house had been built on the south-east corner of this block (now 103 Mont Albert Road), but it is not known if this land was originally part of 'Reumah' (Figure 3).

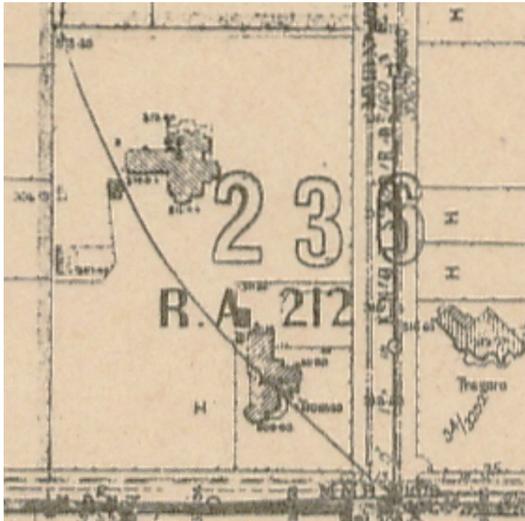


Figure 3. Detail from MMBW Plan No. 71 dated 1933?-1950?. 'Reumah' is visible just left of the number 236. (Source: State Library Victoria)

Though tender notices for the construction of the subject property do not exist, a newspaper advertisement from 1908 seeking a cook and laundress for 'Reumah', addressed then as 'Knutsford Street, off Mont Albert Road,' indicates that the subject house had been constructed the year before (*Argus* 8 January 1908:1). Built for Charles M Newman, 'Reumah' was addressed 185, then 151 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury; by 1912 it was listed again – unnumbered – as being on Knutsford Street (RB 1905; S&Mc 1910). The siting of the house, on a large allotment with views to the mountains to the east, reflects Newman's status and financial wealth. The surrounding area was not subdivided for residential development until the interwar period (S&Mc 1920, 1930; *Argus* 25 September 1917:1; *Age* 5 April 1954).

Charles Newman was a wealthy man and well known in Melbourne's business circles. Born in Sydney, there he joined the established firm of William Howard Smith and Sons Ltd., coal importers. After serving with that firm in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Fremantle, he became managing director of its successor, Howard Smith Ltd. Later, Newman was chairman of the board of directors at Robert Harper and Co. Ltd., a company that traded in tea, coffee and spices from the East Indies. He was also a member of the committee of the Alfred Hospital for many years, a member of the Australian Club, and president of the Riversdale Golf Club (*Argus* 22 February 1937:5).

'Reumah' was struck by lightning in 1919 and a significant portion of the house was gutted by the resultant fire (*Argus* 4 December 1919:8). None of the servants or members of the Newman family were injured in the blaze. A feature article on the storm described 'Reumah' as a fourteen-room house, two-storied in parts, which had suffered extensive damage from the storm and fire. It noted that 'five or six of the rooms at the back were uninjured', except for water ingress from the torrential rain, but that the greater part of the house had become a 'mere shell' (*Argus* 4 December 1919:8).

The article noted that there was the possibility of utilising surviving portions in the reconstruction of the building.

After the fire, Newman relocated to Toorak and leased 'Reumah' to short-term tenants from 1922 (RB 1922-23). He died in 1937, followed by his wife, Elizabeth, in 1944 (*Age* 22 February 1937:10; *Argus* 31 January 1944:2). By the end of the 1920s, 'Reumah' was owned by Arthur Maurice Reid (McWilliam 2010:155).

Tenders for the construction of Reumah Court were called for in 1953, and the land was subdivided into nine allotments as Reumah Estate in 1954 (*Age* 20 March 1954:2). These home sites, including the much-reduced Reumah, were sold at auction in 1954 for a combined total of £27,850 (*Argus* 12 December 1953:3; *Age* 5 April 1954). G Leggo was listed as the owner of the house in 1956. Works carried out to 'Reumah' included a partial demolition of a garage (on the northern elevation) and two small bedrooms, a bathroom and a small hall, at the rear of the building (on its western elevation) and construction of a brick garage and tool shed in the south-eastern corner of the allotment c1956 (BP 1956). In 1960 Leggo arranged for additions to be made to the house; a fence was erected in 1966, and a swimming pool installed in 1973 (BP).

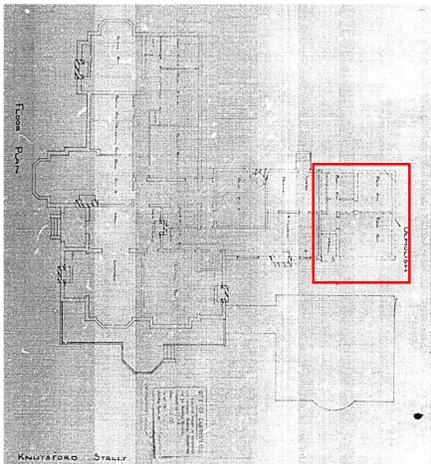


Figure 4. Extract from building permit plan showing rear section to be demolished (Source: BP 18165, held Boroondara City Council)

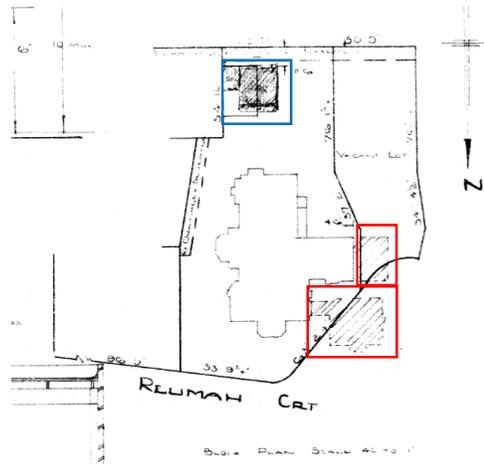


Figure 5. Extract from building plan showing proposed garage (in blue) and sections to be demolished (in red) (Source: BP 18378, held Boroondara City Council)

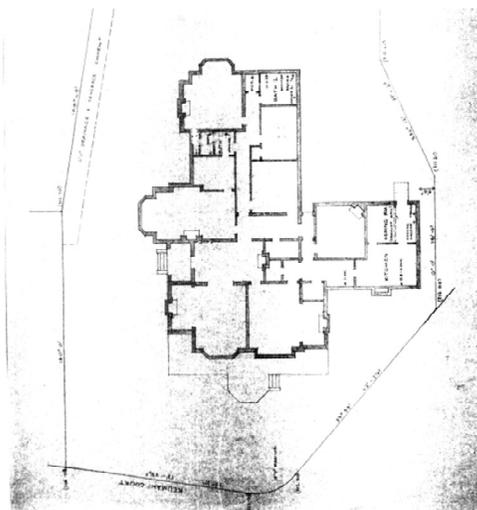


Figure 6. Extract from building permit plan (Source: BP 18378, held Boroondara City Council)

Council)

Description & Integrity

'Reumah' at 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn, is a substantial single-storey brick Federation dwelling originally built in 1909. In 1919 it was struck by lightning. Whilst exact details of the extent of the damage is unknown, a newspaper article reporting the fire at the time notes that the house was two storeys in sections and that whilst being left as a shell, portions of the original building had survived. Certainly the form of its chimneys suggests that they survive from the 1909 house, at minimum. Positioned on the south side of Reumah Court, the residence sits within an established garden of mature trees on an irregular allotment that falls north to south. Constructed in brick (now overpainted) and roughcast render, the house, which originally faced Mont Albert Road and Knutsford Street, is entered off a curved gravel drive along its eastern boundary.



Figure 7. View of the northern elevation. (Source: Context)

'Reumah' is set under a high-pitched terra-cotta shingle roof that combines both hip and gable elements and is dominated by six tall corbelled and ribbed chimneys each surmounted by a pair of terracotta chimney pots. Whilst the house is asymmetrical in plan, the current street-facing northern elevation is largely symmetrical in layout. A verandah sits under the sweep of the broken back hipped roof and incorporates a centrally placed hip-roofed canted bay. The verandah is supported by substantial turned timber posts, paired at its ends. The upper third of each post is square edged indicating that a deep timber frieze, common for the period, has been removed. The simple timber slatted balustrade is likely to be a later addition. Whilst this is now the primary elevation of the house it was originally at the rear of the property and it is unknown to what extent it has been altered.

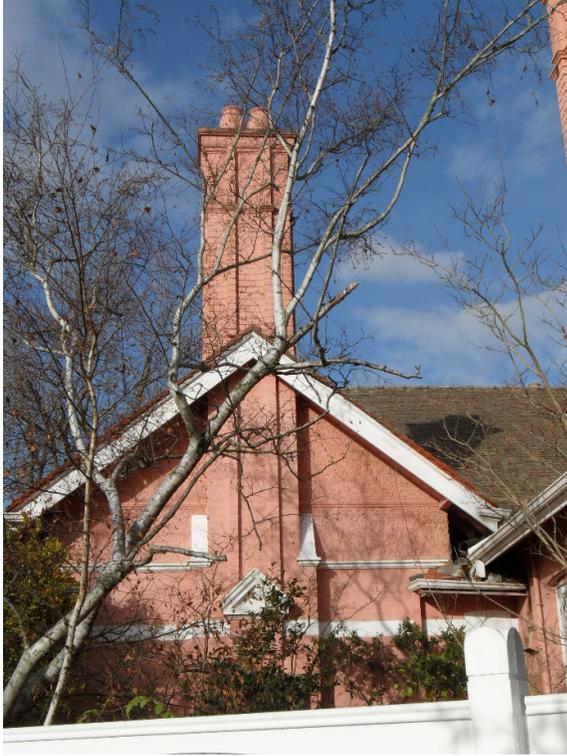


Figure 8. Tall corbelled and ribbed chimney with a small cement-rendered pediment at the southern elevation. (Source: Context)

The east (originally facing Knutsford Street) and south (originally facing Mont Albert Road) elevations are the primary and most detailed elevations of the residence. Comprising a complex interplay of steep half-timbered gable ends, hip roofed bay windows, and a small entry porch nestled under the main roof line, these elevations would have most likely been originally viewed from the corner of Mont Albert Road and Knutsford Street and designed to be read as a single cohesive façade. Along the eastern elevation a recessed porch is set behind a deep arched fretted screen. This sits alongside a substantial canted bay with double hung sash windows with multipaned upper sashes. This bay is repeated along the southern elevation. The detail of these elevations are similar to those to at 5 Willsmere Road, Kew 1903 (HO139).



Figure 9. Elevation detail at 5 Willsmere Road, Kew, 1903 (HO139). On site inspection the east, south and west elevation presented similar detailing and integrity. (Source: Federationhome.com)

The western elevation, whilst more utilitarian, still demonstrates an unusual attention to detail for a minor elevation with original fenestration and a recessed verandah under the main roof line. A west

projecting service wing sits under a gable roof and was partially demolished when the property was subdivided to create Reumah Court.



Figure 9. View of the western elevation, and detail showing intact fenestration. (Source: Context)

The house appears largely intact, however, its original setting has been much encroached upon by the surrounding development. Several tall deciduous trees enhance the remaining established garden setting and appear early. The capped timber picket fence, brick drive piers and mild steel drive gates are recent additions.

During a site inspection undertaken in December 2018 it was noted that the eastern, southern and western elevations of the property display a high level of integrity and intactness, and it is likely that the house retains a great deal of its 1908-09 fabric. While all elevations of the house were inspected up close, the current owners did not wish any photos to be taken.

While news reports note that 'Reumah' was partly two-storey prior to the 1919 fire, the elegant lines of its current roof form are entirely in keeping with a house of 1909, and appear to have remained unaltered after the 1919 fire apart from the recladding in terracotta shingles. Due to this, it is likely that the two-storey section of the house was the rear service wing on the west side of the house. As Miles Lewis notes, there are early examples of Federation-era houses whose steep spires were originally clad in terracotta shingles, while the rest of the roof was covered in the thicker Marseille tiles. He cites an 1898 example in South Australia (Lewis nd 6.07 footnote 31), with another example at 150 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury (HO224), also of 1898. An earlier example is Rippon Lea, whose original (pre-1880) roof cladding was two patterns of terracotta shingles (rectangular and scalloped) in a diaper pattern. This roof covering was reinstated in 2012. For the most part, however, Lewis notes, the flat terracotta shingle was produced in Australia by 1910 and became popular in the 1920s (Lewis nd 6.06). The form of the terracotta shingles and associated ridge cappings seen on 'Reumah' appear to be in keeping with the variety used in the interwar period, which corresponds with the necessity for extensive roof repairs after the 1919 fire.

The integrity of the place is enhanced by the high level of intactness of these main elements that include the chimneys and chimney pots, terracotta shingled roof, eaves and gable end detailing, verandahs, door and window joinery.

The integrity of the place is diminished by the subdivision of the site which has both restricted public views to and from its principal elevations, though it still retains a relatively substantial garden setting.

Comparative Analysis

Federation villas

The Federation style was common across Australia from roughly 1890 to the start of the First World War in 1914, but depending on locality and availability of materials, had many regional variations within a common design idiom.

The Federation style is commonly associated with domestic architecture and its adaption of a simple nineteenth-century building form (single- or doubled-fronted) in red brick, weatherboard, or timber block front to create a lighter and more picturesque appearance by use of timber columns and decoration, projecting gables, verandahs (often under the main roof form), mixed roof forms, and orange terracotta roof tiles. The style is closely related to the local adaptation of the Queen Anne style, adapted from examples in England and America, but given a local flavour by the integration of Queen Anne decorative details. This is evident in the incorporation of the wrap-around verandah into the main roof of early Australian homesteads.

In the Balwyn area, this period of development is under-represented when compared with Kew, Hawthorn, Canterbury and Camberwell. Places on the Heritage Overlay in Balwyn and Deepdene (either as precincts or individual places) predominantly date from the interwar or early postwar periods, representing the dominant period of development of the suburb.

The following examples are of individual significance within the City of Boroondara and demonstrate similar features:



HO139 5 Willsmere Road, Kew (1903) (Source: National Trust)

5 Willsmere Road, Kew is of significance as an intact and comprehensive example of the hipped form of the Federation house executed by the leading architectural firm of Ussher and Kemp. At ground floor level, the house has a complex interplay of bay windows, a small porch, and verandahs decorated with turned timber. The second storey of the house sits within the sweep of the terracotta tiled hip roof with large dormer windows, tall corbelled brick chimneys and a squat octagonal turret breaking up its dominant mass. It remains substantially intact and is one of the key works of the Ussher and Kemp partnership in this hipped style.



HO15 22 Berkeley Street, Hawthorn (1903-4) (Source: Meredith Gould, Conservation Architects)

22 Berkeley Street Hawthorn, while an earlier example than the subject property, is comparable as a fine example of the Queen Anne style, and unusual for its wide principal elevation. Its design has been attributed to prominent architects Ussher and Kemp. Of interest is its use of a wide verandah under a tiled roof across the front of the property with canted bay front. This is similar to that found at the former rear (north) elevation of 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn.



HO224150 Mont Albert Road, Canterbury (1898) (Source: National Trust)

A broad hipped roof is the dominant backdrop for a number of gabled roof forms, chimneys and the unusual shingle- spired look-out, with its attached chimney. Below the eaveline giant arched timber supports spring between gabled verandah or room bays, almost removing the visual support for the large roof expanses above it. The Victorian attached-verandah principal is disbanded here for the flared verandah roof-hip of the Oriental tea-house which is continuous with the main roof form.



With its broad, half-timbered and gabled main roof form and the skirt-like flared hip covering the verandah, this house approaches more than most Ussher & Kemp designs, the Far Eastern tea house prototype. Offsetting this tea-house symmetry is the gabled room bay, at the front elevation which terminates the slatted return verandah.

HO172 31 Canterbury Road, Canterbury (1909)
(Source: realestate.com)

Discussion

1 Reumah Court, Balwyn compares well to the above examples. While specific details of damage pertaining to a lightning strike in 1919 are unknown, it is likely that the house retains a great deal of its 1908-9 fabric. Newspaper articles from the period report that rebuilding sections of the house, utilising surviving elements, was a possibility (*Argus* 4 December 1919:8). During a site inspection undertaken in December 2018, it was noted that the eastern, southern and western elevations display a high level of integrity and intactness, and display a strong similarity in detail to those executed by prominent architects Ussher and Kemp. The property demonstrates key design elements of the Federation style. This includes the use of face brickwork (now overpainted), turned timber posts and decoration, projecting gables, verandahs (often under the main roof form), and mixed roof forms.

Typically, multi-bayed and verandahed in plan, 'Reumah' bears similarities to 5 Willsmere Road, Kew (HO139) in particular, an intact and comprehensive example of Ussher and Kemp's distinctive hipped genre.

In the hipped genre a dominant hip roof envelopes the whole house out of which subsidiary gables or hips and turrets emerge. The surface of the hip roof is continuous with the roofs of any verandahs and porches associated with the house. These hipped genre designs are viewed as the truly distinctive houses in the Melbourne Queen Anne manner, described as the Federation Bungalow in recent times, and considered to be 'an Australian style' (Tibbits 1992).

Whilst 5 Willsmere Road is a two-storied, or attic-storeyed, house with the second storey enveloped in the sweep of the terracotta tiled hip roof, similarities are evident in the detailing of the dominant chimneys adorned with triangular cement pediments, the recessed entry porch, hipped roofed canted bay windows and fenestration detailing. The appearance of these details suggests that either Ussher and Kemp designed 'Reumah' or their work acted as an influence on its composition. It is possible that after the fire in 1919 an original attic storey was removed.

Other examples of Ussher and Kemp's work can be found nearby at 150 Mont Albert Road Canterbury and 31 Canterbury Road, Canterbury. These houses are distinguished by the use of a flared hip roof to cover a long verandah, indicative of an eastern or oriental tea-house influence, whilst the recessed side entrance porch is nestled between a canted bay and gable end with central chimney breast. These details are repeated at 1 Reumah Court. Other details found at 1 Reumah Court and repeated across much of Ussher and Kemp's work include dominant red brick and roughcast chimneys with raised brick drops and paired chimney pots, broad fronted canted bays with distinctive joinery details and verandahs with heavy timber posts. Unusually here the roof is tiled in terracotta shingles rather than the typical Marseille patterned tile, but as noted above, this most likely occurred with the rebuild in 1919.

'Reumah' at 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn is a substantial and largely intact Federation house whose massing and details are largely a fine example of the style. It is a well-designed and carefully detailed example and bears remarkable similarities to the work of pre-eminent architects Ussher and Kemp and their hipped genre which has been identified as a distinctive Melbourne Queen Anne (or Federation) style.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in *Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay*, Department of Planning and Community Development, revised August 2018, modified for the local context.

CRITERION A: Importance to the course or pattern of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (historical significance).

N/A

CRITERION B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (rarity).

N/A

CRITERION C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (research potential).

N/A

CRITERION D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

'Reumah' at 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn is a substantial and largely intact Federation house whose massing and details are largely a fine example of the style. It is a well-designed and carefully detailed example and bears similarities to the work of pre-eminent architects of that time, particularly Ussher and Kemp and their hipped genre which has been identified as a distinctive Melbourne Queen Anne (or Federation) style. Other similar details repeated across much of Ussher and Kemp's work and other fine houses of the period include dominant brick and roughcast chimneys with raised brick drops and paired chimney pots, broad fronted canted bays with distinctive joinery details and verandahs with heavy timber posts. Unusually, the roof is tiled in terracotta shingles rather than the typical Marseille patterned tile, though this likely occurred with the work associated with rebuilding following a fire in 1919.

CRITERION E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

N/A

CRITERION F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

N/A

CRITERION G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

N/A

CRITERION H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Boroondara's history (associative significance).

N/A

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

'Reumah', 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn, originally constructed in 1908-9, and then partly rebuilt after being struck by lightning in 1919, is significant.

The remnant garden setting, including several mature deciduous trees, is also significant.

The capped timber picket fence, brick drive piers and mild steel drive gates are all recent additions and not significant.

How is it significant?

'Reumah' is of local architectural (representative) significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

'Reumah' at 1 Reumah Court, Balwyn is a substantial and largely intact Federation house whose massing and details are largely a fine example of the style. It is a well-designed and carefully detailed example and bears similarities to the work of pre-eminent architects of that time, particularly Ussher and Kemp and their hipped genre which has been identified as a distinctive Melbourne Queen Anne (or Federation) style. Other similar details repeated across much of Ussher and Kemp's work and other fine houses of the period include dominant brick and roughcast chimneys with raised brick drops and paired chimney pots, broad fronted canted bays with distinctive joinery details and verandahs with heavy timber posts. Unusually, the roof is tiled in terracotta shingles rather than the typical Marseille patterned tile, though this likely occurred with the work associated with rebuilding following a fire in 1919. (Criterion D)

Grading and Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme as an individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Boroondara Planning Scheme:

External Paint Colours <i>Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?</i>	No
Internal Alteration Controls <i>Is a permit required for internal alterations?</i>	No
Tree Controls <i>Is a permit required to remove a tree?</i>	No
Victorian Heritage Register <i>Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?</i>	No
Incorporated Plan <i>Does an Incorporated Plan apply to the site?</i>	No
Outbuildings and fences exemptions <i>Are there outbuildings and fences which are not exempt from notice and review?</i>	No
Prohibited uses may be permitted <i>Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?</i>	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place <i>Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?</i>	No

Identified By

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2015, 'Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study', prepared for the City of Boroondara.

References

Age, as cited.

Argus, as cited.

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