

Victorian Heritage Database Report
Morson Court



Location:

1683-1693 Burwood Highway BELGRAVE, YARRA RANGES SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Number: HO409

Listing Authority: Yarra Ranges Shire

Statement of Significance:

What is Significant

Morson Court was constructed in 1953 and is a two storey flat-roofed building constructed of brick, with a rendered and painted surface, and ground floor east elevation faced with local field stone. It comprises six shops at ground level with office suites above. It was built for Charles Henry Moore, descendant of William John Moore who had acquired the site in 1920. The connection with the Moore family is apparently evoked by the building's name. The original architect and builder have not been identified.

How is it Significant

Morson Court is of local aesthetic/architectural and historical significance.

Why is it Significant

Morson Court is of local aesthetic/architectural significance. Within the Belgrave township it stands out as a Modernist building of some scale and impact which occupies a prominent corner position and dominates the eastern entry point to the township. The building is particularly imposing above the awning line, with the simplicity and refinement of its composition and detailing also evident in its exposed east elevation and to its prominent corner. Although extended at first floor level in 1970, these works maintained the earlier form and fabric of the first floor facade, were well integrated with the original building, and were executed sympathetically in relation to the original building. The presentation to Main Street is therefore particularly intact to its original design concept, with some modifications at ground floor level. Other works to the building have not had a significant impact on the building's overall original form and appearance.

Morson Court presents a strongly horizontal and unusually wide frontage to Main Street, with a contrast in character between the first floor facade and the articulated shop frontages at ground level. The combination of office suites at first floor level, with a long uniform band of metal-framed windows set within a 'shadow box', and six individual ground floor shop fronts under a similarly long boxed awning, is striking and was clearly a new building form in the town when constructed.

In the context of broadly contemporary post-war development in Belgrave, Morson Court can be compared with both the Coles Variety Store (1953, 1662 Main Street) and the former Belgrave Post Office (1952, 1639 Main Street), but is more intact than either of these buildings. Morson Court's Modernist approach was also a bold departure from the more traditional Moderne rendered style of the Coles Store and the conservative cream brick form of the Post Office.

The building also manages the change of levels between its frontage and rear, with the access to the first floor office suites on a steeply sloping site being well resolved. This is in part aided by the landscaping to Terry Avenue, and the adjoining short flights of concrete steps, planters and field stone cladding (which may or may not have been part of the original setting of the building) complementing the building character to the corner. The use of local stonework in the plinth of the Terry Avenue elevation was consistent with the use of similar materials in other broadly contemporary buildings in Belgrave, with Morson Court appearing to set a precedent locally for this use which was also applied to the facade of the pair of shops to 1698- 1700 Main Street and subsequently to the modernised former bank premises at 1635 Main Street.

Morson Court is additionally of local historical significance. When constructed in 1953, the building reflected a post-war increase in population as well as a growing affluence in the community, through the provision of new commercial premises for the township, combining office and retail facilities. It came in the period after the easing of wartime restrictions. The building could also be seen as a historical 'marker' or one of the first signs of post-war development in Belgrave, in an era which heralded its transformation from a hills township to a hills suburb at the terminus of Melbourne's eastern suburban rail network. Morson Court also continues to serve its original function.

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme to the extent of the building as described, but not including the car parking area to the rear.

Description

The subject building presents as two levels to Main Street, with a single level to the rear reflecting the rise in the slope. It is constructed of brick, with a rendered and painted surface, while the ground floor elevation to Terry Avenue is faced with local field stone. The roof is flat, clad with steel decking, and has a simple cornice line to the parapet, with a painted metal weather capping.

The use of field stone cladding is evident elsewhere in the vicinity in relation to development of the post-war period; and can be seen applied to retail premises at 1698-1700 Main Street, to the modernised bank premises at 1635 Main Street, as well as to the characteristic retaining walls throughout the shopping centre, that have been faced with - or constructed of - similar stone.

The ground floor elevation of the building to Main Street is composed of six shop fronts with a shared box awning/verandah over; the majority of the shops retain their original or early form with comparatively minor alterations. The original recessed openings to the shops are generally centrally located to each elevation, with the exception of the east end shop at 1693 Main Street where the original entrance is to the side. Those which retain a higher degree of intactness are located at the east end of the building and comprise the shop fronts to 1689-1691 Main Street (Bell Real Estate) and 1693 Main Street (Kerry Kulken). The shop fronts appear to have had rendered brick piers between each shop and stallboards beneath the windows, clad in either a mosaic or square ceramic tile; the mosaic tile finish remains to the shop fronts at 1689 Main Street (Belgrave Images) and 1691 Main Street (Dry Cleaner) and a square tile finish has been applied to the other shop fronts. All but 1691 Main Street have installed signage over, or in place of the original toplights above the shop windows; the latter takes the form of a central reeded glass panel flanked by glass louvres, on an angled profile.

Other original elements include the mosaic tiling to the entry porches (1683, 1689-1693 Main Street); marble thresholds (1689-93 Main Street); chrome-plated metal window framing (1685, 1689-1693 Main Street); and timber doors with polished metal push rails (1689-1693, 1693A Main Street). The glazing to 1693 Main Street retains the original or early form of window treatment, without the addition of the corner glazing bar, evident in the adjoining shop fronts to 1689-1691 Main Street (Bell Real Estate).

The first floor elevation to Main Street is of rendered brick with a row of eleven iron framed windows, comprising a central fixed pane flanked by openable casements. The windows are divided by rendered brick piers painted in a contrasting colour, and the whole set within an elongated rendered 'shadow box' frame also painted in a contrasting colour. The window treatment extends to the east elevation to Terry Avenue, forward of the entry to the first floor suites. The name 'MORSON COURT' is formed of painted metal lettering, positioned to the top of the first floor facade, above the centre windows.

Tenancy signage is generally limited to elements fixed to the fascia of the shared awning, with some tenancies identified by painted lettering applied to the windows at both the ground floor and first floor level.

To Terry Avenue, the entry to the first floor suites is approached via two flights of concrete stairs which abut the public footpath. The entry is through a glazed timber framed door with detailing as for that to 1693 Main Street, with a glazed toplight and sidelight. Here the threshold is of concrete rather than marble. A non-original cantilever awning of cement sheet with an applied textured finish provides weather protection and extends to the north. To its south the entry adjoins two metal framed windows enclosed in a rendered 'shadow box' frame, as for the elevation facing Main Street.

To the north of the entry, the facade treatment is different which might indicate an early addition or modification to the building. The two windows in this northern section of the east facade comprise two fixed panes divided by a rendered brick pier, over stall-boarding beneath which is painted 'chipped' finish cement bricks.

The west elevation, visible to Main Street, is of smooth rendered brickwork at first floor level. The north elevation, partly obscured by vegetation and the fall of the land, comprises metal framed windows to the first floor level. A roof terrace with skylights which services the rear shop spaces below is also visible.

To the rear, the land is terraced and set at a higher level than the building. A flat gravelled car parking area is

accessed from Terry Avenue and set behind a fence with gates. To the south of the car park the wall is of cyclone wire and north of the driveway from Terry Avenue, the retaining wall is clad in field stone. The car park extends to the grassed embankment at the north boundary of the land bordering Carcoola Avenue. Between the car parking area and the rear of the building a large oak is located on the east boundary of the site. While the age of this tree is not known it is a prominent element when viewed from Terry Avenue and rises behind the eastern end of the building when viewed from Main Street.

Alterations

At an unknown date, some building works appear to have been undertaken to the north-east corner of the building, extending the first floor office suites and adjoining the entry from Terry Avenue. In 1970 the first floor office suites were extended the full length of the building, across the top of the shops to 1683 and 1685 Main Street. The works were undertaken by builder H M Keast & Sons, and it is not known if an architect was involved in this phase of works.¹¹ The extension of the facade maintained the earlier form and fabric of the first floor elevation, is well integrated with the original building, and was executed sympathetically in relation to the original building. The works also comprised the construction of an additional room to ground and first floor level behind 1683 Main Street, as well as a new fire escape stair. A new internal stair was also constructed within the northeast portion of the first floor tenancy (since removed). In 1987, further works associated with the division of the property into individual units prior to strata titling were undertaken by the architects Norris Partners. Minor in nature, these works impacted on internal fabric only.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	YARRA RANGES SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	165909
Property number	

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online