

Lee Terrace Precinct, South Yarra Statement of Significance

Heritage Place: Lee Terrace Precinct, South Yarra

PS ref no: HO641



What is significant?

'Lee Terrace' at 6-18 Avoca Street, South Yarra, built in 1889 for David Lee to a design by Wilkinson and Permewan architects, is significant.

Significant fabrics include the:

- original built form, roof form (including both front hip and rear skillion roof sections) and original fenestrations along both Avoca Street and Station Street;
- rendered brick walls;
- Italianate chimneys;
- parapet with pediments, moulded minor and major cornices, masonry eave brackets and rosettes, decorative scrolls and other applied Italianate detailing;
- original timber window and door joinery;
- cast iron verandah (including frieze, brackets, balustrades and stair at No.6); and
- palisade fence (including bluestone footings, Italianate piers and serpentine garden walls between terraces).

How is it significant?

Lee Terrace at 6-18 Avoca Street, South Yarra, is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

'Lee Terrace' is of historic significance for the evidence it provides of the middle-class suburban development of South Yarra in the 1880s prior to the economic depression of the 1890s. Its ornate architectural style and large scale provides evidence of the desirability of the suburb during the economic boom of the period. It is also historically significant for its association with David Lee, first city organist of Melbourne. In October 1866 Lee played the organ at the inaugural ceremony of the Melbourne International Exhibition, with C. E. Horsley conducting. On 8 August 1872 he opened the new Town Hall organ. In 1877 he was appointed first city organist of Melbourne by the City Council. Lee was a controversial figure in Melbourne's musical circles which resulted in him being forced out of

the Philharmonic Society in 1888. Lee married Mary McKenzie, daughter of Archibald Johnston of Toorak House, Toorak, in 1877 and commissioned the building of 'Lee Terrace' in 1899 for Mary and himself to live in. (Criterion A).

Architecturally, 'Lee Terrace' is a fine example of a substantial Victorian Italianate terrace row built in 1889 to a design by Wilkinson and Permewan architects. The group of seven two- and three-storey terraces display key design elements representative of the style. These include: rendered structural brick walls, Italianate chimneys, parapets with pediments, moulded minor and major cornices, masonry eave brackets and rosettes, decorative scrolls and other applied Italianate detailing, original timber window and door joinery, cast iron verandah (including frieze, brackets, balustrades and stair at No.6) and cast iron palisade fence (including bluestone footings, Italianate piers and serpentine garden walls between terraces). (Criterion D).

Aesthetically, 'Lee Terrace' is distinguished by its form, size and retention of a high level of ornamental detail of the Victorian Italianate style. Of particular note is the refined detailing to the parapet and cornice frieze, the cast iron stair to No. 6 and the treatment of the corner orientation at the intersection of Avoca Street and Station Street. The sophisticated modelling of the terrace row as a whole is manifest in its planning and detailing evidenced by the end terraces projecting forward towards the street and the subtle variances in detailing found across each individual terrace. Also, of particular note is the use of the double storey oriel window that wraps the corner of Station Street, giving a striking three-dimensional quality to the façade. This differs dramatically to the often two dimensionality of other terrace groups. (Criterion E)

Primary source

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