

# Allambie: the several faces of heritage

*The demolition of 'Allambie' in Strabane Avenue, Mont Albert North, raises a number of important questions about how we define, value and protect the heritage of our built and green environment. How often do we see significant houses such as Allambie succumb to the developers because they fall through the cracks in the coverage of planning and heritage legislation? Are there any legislative processes to protect heritage gardens such as those surrounding this now demolished house?*

– Hasan Hassan

In February 2021, 'Allambie', built circa 1915, was demolished and the 100 year old garden is currently under threat of being cleared. A heritage assessment of the house was not carried out; the house was not covered by a Heritage Overlay (HO). A number of objections were submitted to Whitehorse Council by local residents in regard to the proposed development. As of 23 March 2021 the Whitehorse Council has considered the application and '...determined that a notice to Refuse to Grant a Permit be issued'. The Whitehorse Council is to be commended for their decision, but it is too late for the house.

## A horticultural haven

The gardens and trees are not covered by a Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO). The site is a veritable botanical garden in miniature with trees from Australia and around the world. The garden has been a part of the local environment for over a hundred years and contains a number of 100 year old trees which were an integral setting for the house. The gardens may be overgrown but with a little attention the overall structure is still present and can be fully restored. Further investigation would probably find plants of significant heritage or horticultural value.



## Allambie's family history

In 1884, the land surrounded by what is now Strabane Avenue and Elgar, Belmore, Boondara Roads was subdivided and offered for sale as part of the Box Hill Park Estate. Robert Lormer bought 12 lots, including the two that eventually make up 32 Strabane Avenue where the now demolished house once stood.

Lormer was born in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Canada in 1843. He sailed from there as a ten year old with his parents and siblings on board the 91 tonne schooner 'Vivid' to arrive in Melbourne in 1853 via the Cape of Good Hope. In 1885 he married Mary Gourlay, a family that had close links to the Symes who founded *The Age* newspaper.



In 1922, the lot that became 32 Strabane Avenue, (then known as Seymour Road) was purchased by William V Ashmole. The lot at 33 Strabane Avenue was donated by his wife Betsy Ashmole in 1957 to 'the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of Box Hill'. The Box Hill Jaycees Club cleared the site and installed swings and slides for local children to use. It was named 'Ashmole Reserve' in recognition of the donation and the long connection the family had with Mont Albert North, and has been used as a park ever since.

## Allambie's heritage significance

The demolition of Allambie is not only a loss for Mont Albert North and Whitehorse but also for Australia. The two storey house that used to be on the site was built in an architectural style that combined elements of Arts and Crafts and Bungalow.

The roof of the house was made up of roof tiles stamped 'Blackburn' manufactured by a George Blackburn in Mitcham. There are no surviving examples of these tiles and little is known about the company or George Blackburn. The bricks used in the construction of the house were stamped 'Standard'. They were manufactured in Box Hill by the Standard Brick & Tile Co. Ltd on the corner of Canterbury and Elgar Roads. The company started as the Haughton Park Brick Company Ltd in 1880.

The 100 year old gardens at Allambie are now under threat and must be saved or Mont Albert North, Whitehorse and Australia will completely lose another piece of valuable horticultural heritage if 'moonscaping' and over development is allowed to take place.

*Hasan Hassan is a local resident who has lived in Whitehorse for over 20 years.*