

Building:	Strathdon	Significance:	B
Address:	449-465 Springvale Road, Forest Hill	Melway Map Ref:	62 E5
Building Type:	Residence	Construction Date:	1893, altered 1914
Architect:	Unknown	Builder:	Unknown



Intactness:		Condition:	
G[] F[x] P[]		G[x] F[] P[]	
Existing Heritage Listings:		Recommended Heritage Listings:	
Victorian Heritage Register	[]	Victorian Heritage Register	[]
Register of the National Estate	[]	Register of the National Estate	[x]
National Trust	[]	Heritage Overlay Controls	[x]

History

The house now known as Strathdon was built in 1893 by orchardist William John Fankhauser. Born in Forest Hill, Fankhauser studied theology and art, and after refusing to accept a scholarship to study abroad, he turned his hand to orcharding. In 1893, he married and purchased a twenty acre site in Forest Hill which he developed as an orchard. When his wife died in 1914, Fankhauser sold the property to Charles Davey Matheson, a former sailor who had studied briefly at Dookie Agricultural College. After taking over the property, Matheson married Mary Liliias McLaren, whom he had met two years earlier when he was an officer on the White Star Line and she was a passenger.¹

Matheson named the property Strathdon after a ship of whose crew he once been a member. The orchard itself thrived, and in 1920, Matheson purchased an additional nine acres of land from Fankhauser in order to extend the orchard. It continued to flourish until the 1930s, when fruit prices began to fall. After World War Two, Matheson's widow sold part of the property, and donated another portion to the Presbyterian church.² Her two sons, Charles and John, took over the farm as more of a hobby than a source of income, and conducted experiments in energy subsistence.³

The house has undergone several renovations. The original 1893 house was a single-storey symmetrical brick building with a hipped corrugate iron roof and front verandah. In 1918, the house was extended to the south and a new front door added in the new wing. The new gabled roof and front verandah were also added. The attic was built within the existing roof space in 1934, and a the requisite staircase was constructed in the vestibule.⁴

Orcharding had been prominent in the Nunawading area since the early 1870s. In 1984, the Nunawading Council felt that the acquisition of a surviving orchard would be an appropriate way to commemorate the Australian bicentenary, for which they had received a grant of \$312,000. Six orchard sites with remnant plantings were investigated in the municipality, of which only two retained their original buildings. These were 59 Surrey Road, Blackburn, and the present property. The council opted for the latter, and negotiations took place with Charles and John Matheson. The orchard, which by that time consisted of only 2.5 hectares, was purchased in 1988 for \$900,000. The Mathesons remained in occupation until the council officially took possession in 1993.

Description

Strathdon is a single-storey red brick building with an attic. Elements of the original 1893 symmetrical cottage are evident in the facade, which comprises the original front door flanked by two single double-hung windows. To the south, the new wing incorporates the new front door and additional window. There is a projecting bay on the south elevation. The transverse gabled roof is clad in terracotta tiles and is penetrated by three simple red brick chimneys. The roof extends to form a simple timber-framed front verandah. The rear elevation has a projecting dormer window in the attic.

The house's immediate garden retains an early front fence. The property includes numerous outbuildings, including a hen run, man's room, garage and packing shed. Several other outbuildings, such as the chaff room and stable, do not survive. The property retains 2.5 hectares of land, and remnant orchard plantings to the front of the house.

Comparative Examples

Wittenham, 2 Hayward Court, Vermont
Montana, 5 Longland Road, Mitcham
House, 48 Shafer Road, Blackburn North

Significance

Strathdon is of historical significance. The property is a rare surviving orchard property which retains the original house, some outbuildings and remnant fruit trees. The property has important associations with the locally prominent Fankhauser and Matheson families. Aesthetically, the house is a fascinating example of a small Victorian cottage which was extended and renovated in the Edwardian period, but which retains clear evidence of the original residence. The property is demonstrative of an early predominant industry in the area and the subsequent changes made by successive occupants and changing lifestyles.

Source

Context Pty Ltd. *City of Nunawading Heritage Survey Project*. 1994. (Graded B)

- 1 Francine Gilfedder et al. 'Nunawading Historic Orchard Conservation Analysis.' Unpublished report. August 1992.
- 2 Greg Best. 'Cloud Over Orchard.' *Nunawading Gazette*. 3 July 1996.
- 3 Francine Gilfedder. 'Nunawading Historic Orchard Study.' *Trust News*. December 1992. p 12.
- 4 Marny Matheson. *Original Orchard "Old Strathdon"*. Blackburn, 1992. pp 11-12, 26 and photographs.

