

Statement of Significance: Dwelling, 25-27 Rathdowne Street, Carlton (November, 2021)

Heritage Place:	25-27 Rathdowne Carlton	PS ref no:	HO103
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What is significant?

The brick three-storey residence at 25-27 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, constructed in 1903 is significant.

How is it significant?

The 1903 brick three-storey residence at 25-27 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, is of local historical (including rarity value) and aesthetic significance.

Why is it significant?

The dwelling at 25-27 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, is of historical significance (Criterion A). The 17 room brick house was constructed in 1903 for civil engineer John Booth, to a design by noted architect George de Lacy Evans. Although later than the (typically 1880s) grand residences constructed in Rathdowne Street, in this area of Carlton and in proximity to the prestigious Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, the large scale of the dwelling is nevertheless consistent with this localised pattern of development. Of note is Booth's history as the founder of the Esperanto Society in Melbourne, with his substantial residence in Rathdowne Street serving as the Melbourne Esperanta Klubo's first meeting place. The building was subsequently used as a nurses' home, and from approximately 1916 to 1949, as a boarding house. The conversion to boarding (or rooming) house, in turn, was a common fate for many large historic houses in inner Melbourne in the first half of the twentieth century.

The dwelling at 25-27 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, is also of aesthetic significance (Criterion E). The building is an early example of Art Nouveau, occurring just three year after the Paris Exposition brought the style to international attention. It is also highly externally intact, as it presents to Rathdowne Street, with a capably resolved arrangement of building elements. Of note is its asymmetrical three storey form with projecting bay to the street, the latter capped with a gable-end incorporating an arch headed window to attic level; red brick materiality with unusual rendered dressings and wrought iron detailing; and Art Nouveau-inspired railings to verandah balconies.

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The design by notable architect George de Lacey Evans also has rarity value, in its unusual incorporation of design elements not found in Evans' other works, in particular the Art Nouveau detailing (Criterion B). While Evans is remembered for his capacity to move freely and confidently between popular architectural styles, he is mainly remembered for Boom Style works, with the subject building one of a small number that illustrate his post-Boom output. Overall, the building presents as an imaginative reconsideration of the asymmetrical two storey villas constructed in Carlton during the late nineteenth century, with its height, Gothic proportions and Art Nouveau detailing distinguishing the design as an unconventional outcome of a kind rarely encountered locally.

Primary source

Carlton Heritage Review (Lovell Chen, 2021)