

# LABASSA



LABASSA SOHE 2008



1 labassa caulfield front elevation oct1999



labassa caufield detail column capital



labassa caufield front view



labassa manor grove north caulfield front view oct1999



labassa caufield external windows

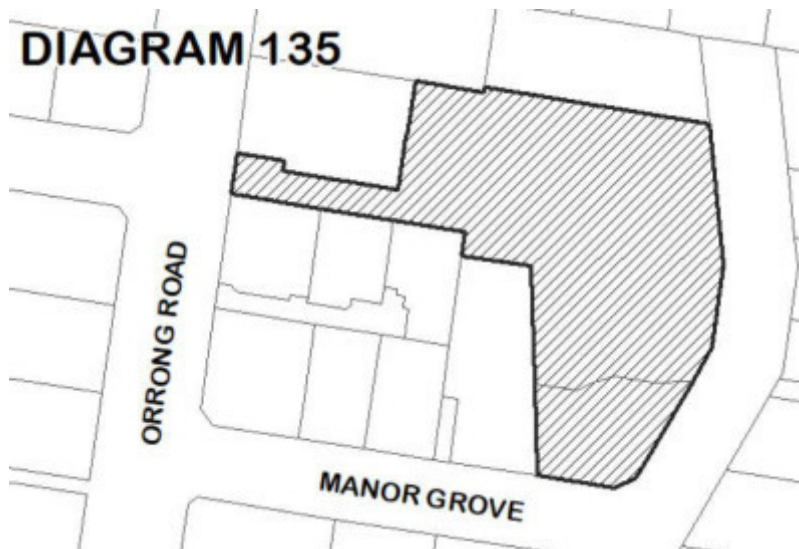


DIAGRAM 135

## Location

2 MANOR GROVE CAULFIELD NORTH, GLEN EIRA CITY

## Municipality

GLEN EIRA CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0135

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO42

## VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

## Amendment to Registration

October 8, 2020

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 8, 2020

What is significant?

Labassa, Caulfield is one of Melbourne's most lavishly decorated nineteenth century mansions. It resulted from the extensive remodelling in 1889-90, of an earlier house, known as Sylliott Hill, which was begun in 1862-3 for lawyer, Richard A. Billing. The land at the corner of Balaclava and Orrong Roads was first acquired in 1854 by William Lyall, transferred to his partner, John Mickle, in 1859, who also acquired the adjoining allotment in Balaclava Road, and the three allotments were conveyed to Billing. His first eight-roomed house was extended significantly in 1873 into a twenty-roomed house by architects Crouch and Wilson, who were possibly also responsible for the first house. This reflected Billing's success as a barrister, and he resided at this property until his death in 1882.

In 1883 prominent Melbourne businessman, Alexander William Robertson, leased the Sylliott Hill property from Billing's widow, and in 1885 he purchased the adjoining allotment in Balaclava Road. He purchased the Billing's property in 1887 and renamed the 6.31 hectare property, Ontario. In 1889-90, Robertson commissioned the German born architect, John A. B. Koch, to extensively remodel the house into a thirty-five roomed mansion. The existing house was extended and altered, largely resulting in the nineteenth century mansion as it now appears. After Robertson's death in 1896, the house was tenanted until it was eventually sold to John Boyd II Watson, son of a mining millionaire, in 1904. He renamed the property Labassa and carried out repair and re-decoration work to the house.

In the early twentieth century, many large estates were subdivided into smaller allotments as the demand for land grew and it became difficult to maintain such large estates. After Watson's death in 1911, portions of the Labassa estate were offered for sale, with Mrs Watson retaining a 1.73 hectare portion containing the house. In 1913 forty-six allotments were auctioned at Labassa Estate, with the formation of Labassa Grove and Ontario Street to the east of the property.

Labassa was first recorded as containing flats in 1920. In 1936, the owner, Robert Hannon, built a red brick block of flats adjacent to the house. Subdivision continued, until the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) purchased the house in 1980 and subsequently purchased adjoining sites, one to the south-east in 1984 (house demolished in 1988) and to the west in 1988.

Labassa as it now stands is substantially as it appeared when Koch completed the work in 1890. The original two storey house was transformed into a French Renaissance style mansion, with the addition of a two level L-shaped arcaded verandah and two prominent terminating bays to the south and the east. The building is of unpainted cement render with dressed bluestone plinths, balustraded parapet and steep, slate covered, flat topped mansard roofs behind. A truncated conical roof is a feature of the south bay and a helmeted head is incorporated in the parapet over the east bay. The main south and east facades incorporate many cast cement details, including sculptures, elaborate cornices, swagged Corinthian columns and caryatid consoles flanking the entrance porch, as well as pink marble panels and imitation marble, or scagliola, on curved surfaces.

At the rear of the building is a two storey wing (built 1873) and a single storey cottage (1860s), the former being connected to the main house by a tower. The estate at its peak included stables (1873), conservatory (probably 1890) and a tennis pavilion (probably 1890). All of these outbuildings survive, with the conservatory being converted for residential use, and the stables in 1926. The tennis pavilion remained in its initial location at 13 Manor Grove, until it was moved to the mansion gardens in 2014.

Internally a range of decorative treatments remain from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, both from the Robertson and Watson periods of occupancy. These include wallpapers, ceiling decoration, chimney pieces, mouldings, joinery and decorative glass.

How is it significant?

Labassa, Caulfield is of architectural, aesthetic and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Labassa, Caulfield is of architectural significance as the most prominent example of a small number of houses built in Australia in the French Renaissance style. It is of further note due to the German interpretation of the style and the use of Hellenistic sources, via Germany. It is exceptional for its lavish treatment externally, including marble, scagliola, caryatids, swagged columns, mansard roofs and ornamental cresting.

Labassa is of architectural significance as the most important surviving example of German-born architect, John Koch's domestic work. He undertook a large variety of work in Melbourne, including a number of houses, however Labassa is the most lavish example of his work.

Labassa is of aesthetic significance for its outstanding assemblage of late nineteenth and early twentieth century European style interior decoration, which remain remarkably intact. These include a trompe l'oeil ceiling, painted ceilings, embossed imitation leather and other papers, chimney pieces, ceramic tilework, oak parquetry and stained glass, including a tripartite window by Ferguson and Urie, probably dating from the 1873 period.

Labassa is of historical significance as an illustrative example of the wealth acquired by a number of prominent Victorian families in the second half of the 19th century. The early development of the property, Sylliot Hill, was due to the wealth acquired by Richard Billing, barrister and fifth Victorian to be appointed Queen's Counsel in 1878. The significant development in 1889-90 of Ontario is illustrative of the wealth of Alexander Robertson, a partner in Cobb and Co., a director of Goldsbrough Mort & Co., and a pastoral speculator. John B. Watson, whose father had acquired great wealth from the goldfields of Bendigo and subsequently invested in city and country properties, was the third resident to impact on the house, particularly the interiors.

The Labassa estate is of historical significance as an illustrative example of the development that occurred in such suburbs as Caulfield in the 1880s due to the land boom, its proximity to Melbourne and the establishment of the Melbourne to Gippsland railway in 1879. It is also illustrative of an estate which succumbed to the pressures of subdividing in the early twentieth century, as properties became difficult to maintain and demand for land close to the city grew. It was typically divided into flats in the 1920s and was used as such for about sixty years.

It is of historical significance for its associations with the remnants of the earlier estate which remain extant. These include the stables, conservatory (H2005) and tennis pavilion. Also significant are the remains of early electrical wiring and fittings. Labassa was one of the first houses in Caulfield to be electrified and some of the

original wires remain.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

**General Conditions:** 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. **General Conditions:** 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

**General Conditions:** 3. All works should ideally be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

**General Conditions:** 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. **General Conditions:** 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authorities, where applicable.

#### Specific Permit Exemptions

##### General - Labassa Mansion

Minor repairs and maintenance which replaces like with like. Repairs and maintenance must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements. Any repairs and maintenance must not exacerbate the decay of fabric due to chemical incompatibility of new materials, obscure fabric or limit access to such fabric for future maintenance.

Repair to or removal of items such as antennae, aerials, air conditioners and associated pipe work, ducting and wiring.

Works or activities, including emergency stabilisation, necessary to secure safety in an emergency where a structure or part of a structure has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and poses a safety risk to its users or the public. Note: The Executive Director, Heritage Victoria, must be notified within seven days of the commencement of these works or activities. External cleaning including the removal of surface deposits or graffiti by the use of low-pressure water (less than 300 psi at the surface being cleaned) and neutral detergents and mild brushing and scrubbing with plastic not wire brushes.

#### Events

The installation and/or erection of temporary elements associated with short term events provided they are not attached to buildings or other structures for a maximum period of five days after which time they must be removed. This includes temporary structures such as shelters, marquees and tents.

#### Landscape/ outdoor areas

The processes of gardening including mowing, pruning, mulching, bedding displays, removal of dead shrubs, planting and replanting of garden beds, disease and weed control and maintenance to care for existing plants.

Management and maintenance of trees including formative and remedial pruning, removal of deadwood and pest and disease control.

Removal of dead or dangerous trees to maintain safety.

Subsurface works involving the installation, removal or replacement of existing watering and drainage systems or other services provided there are no visible above ground elements. Existing lawns, gardens and hard landscaping, including paving, are to be returned to the original configuration on the completion of works.

Repair and maintenance of existing hard landscaping including paving, footpaths, driveways and the car park using like for like materials and where the scale and form is unchanged.

Maintenance, repair and replacement of existing gates and fences providing the scale, height, material and location remain the same.

Installation of physical barriers or traps to enable vegetation protection and management of possums and vermin.

Maintenance and repair of the brick wall to the east of the Labassa mansion and the flats at 2A Manor Grove, providing the scale, height and material remain the same. Removal or replacement of external information signage provided the size, location and material remains the same.

#### Flats at 2A Manor Grove

All works within the building envelope which do not alter the external appearance of the building.

Construction dates	1872, 1890, 1862,
Architect/Designer	Koch, JAB, Crouch & Wilson,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	Ontario, Sylliott Hill,
Hermes Number	278
Property Number	

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## History

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**The draft statement of significance and the above history were produced as part of an Online Data Upgrade Project 2004. Sources were as follows:**

Ian & Roslyn Coleman. *Labassa Conservation Analysis (revised)*. Melbourne 1998

## **Extent of Registration**

Heritage Act 2017 NOTICE OF REGISTRATION As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act 2017, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying a place in the Heritage Register: Number: H0135 Category: Registered Place Place: Labassa Location: 2 Manor Grove, Caulfield Municipality: Glen Eira City All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 135 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 335193 and lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision 603596. 8 OCTOBER 2020 STEVEN AVERY Executive Director

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*