

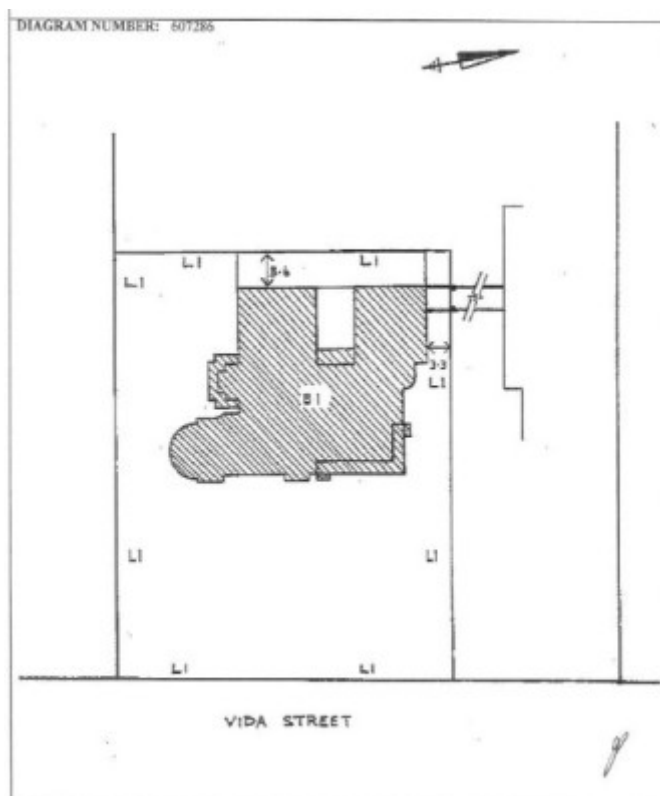
## FORMER CLYDEBANK



FORMER CLYDEBANK  
SOHE 2008



1 former clydebank vida  
street essendon front tower  
may1996



H1325 plan

### Location

16 VIDA STREET ABERFELDIE, MOONEE VALLEY CITY

### Municipality

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1325

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO120

## VHR Registration

June 19, 1997

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 1, 2023

### What is significant?

The former mansion Clydebank, now Ave Maria College, was built in 1888 for Congregational lay preacher and land agent, John Ramsay. The stuccoed Italianate residence of two storeys was designed with a slate, hipped-roof, and apart from the two-level return cast iron verandah and parapeted tower, the house displays little that would distinguish it from the many other large metropolitan houses built during Melbourne's boom years. John Ramsay prospered and his large family pursued successful careers in their chosen domains. Two sons, William and James founded the Kiwi Boot Polish firm, both predeceasing their father who then acted as chairman for the company. Another son, John Ramsay Jnr., became Surgeon Superintendent at Launceston General Hospital and was knighted in 1939. The most celebrated of the sons, Hugh (1877-1906) pursued a short but brilliant career as an artist, prior to his death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine. Many of Hugh Ramsay's now famous portraits were painted at Clydebank and several of his works continued to grace the building's walls until the Catholic Church purchased the property from the Ramsay family in 1943.

### How is it significant?

The former mansion Clydebank is of historical importance to the State of Victoria.

### Why is it significant?

The former mansion Clydebank is of historical importance for its association with the life and oeuvre of Hugh Ramsay, one of the nation's most gifted artists. Ramsay's response to character and environment and the tonal quality of his paintwork is quite distinct from all other painting of the Edwardian period in Australia. Clydebank is historically important as the backdrop to most of Hugh Ramsay's short life; it was here that he established his first studio and painted many of his finest works, and it was here that he died, his career scarcely spanning a decade. Ramsay's strong attachments to home and family are demonstrated by the many portraits painted at Clydebank of his sisters, with the house and its interior ever-present in the background. That some of these elements can still be identified within the rooms of the former mansion today adds further texture to the interpretation of the artist, the paintings, and the house Hugh Ramsay inhabited.

## 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:

**EXEMPTIONS FROM PERMITS:** (Classes of works or activities which may be undertaken without a permit under Part 4 of the Heritage Act 1995):

In the Diagrams Marked Permit Exemptions Drawings A & B, File 607286 held by the Executive Director, Heritage Council:

**Area Marked 0** including total building exterior and tower interior:

Nil permit exemptions apart from repairs where decaying material is replaced by new identical material of exact size shape and manufacture. (Any new slate must be Welsh)

**Area Marked 1**

New floor coverings and new finishing schemes which use heritage colours do not require a permit.

**Area Marked 2**

New finishing schemes, new floor coverings, renewal of services such as gas, water, electricity, renewal of plumbing fixtures and built in joinery do not require a permit. New temporary partitions which do not affect ceilings or windows are also permit exempt.

**Note:** Structural alterations and alterations to surface materials of walls ceilings and floors are not permit exempt (eg replacing a timber floor with concrete requires a permit)

Construction dates        1888,

Heritage Act Categories    Registered place,

Hermes Number 5170

Property Number

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## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

### The Ramsay Family

In March 1878, aged thirty-six, John Ramsay, a zealous Congregational lay preacher, cabinet maker, bookseller and land agent, left Glasgow with his wife, his unmarried sister-in-law and his four sons on the s.s. Loch Sunart for the Australian colony. Once in Melbourne John Ramsay 'prospered, increasing his family by five and enlarging his fortune'. As the agent for James Semple, the Glasgow publisher, he imported bibles to the colony, as well as other books, pianos, watches, jewellery, and paging machines. He also continued his real estate interests, establishing the lucrative estate agency, John Ramsay and Son which reaped the benefits of the 1880s Melbourne land boom. In 1888 he built a two-storey mansion on the Essendon Heights Estate, and although the house had to be mortgaged when the banking system totally collapsed in 1893, Clydebank remained in the family with the Ramsay children spending most of their formative years on the suburban estate.

John Ramsay's wife Margaret, died in 1896 and in the following year he married her sister Janet who for many years had helped to care for the family. Of his nine children, he was predeceased by five; Hugh died in 1906, Jessie died in 1910, William in 1914, and in 1919 within two years of each other Jim died in London and Tom died in Essendon.

### Ramsay Children

The eldest son, William was the founder of the Kiwi Polish Company in 1910. Kiwi began in two small rooms and a shed in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. The name was chosen because of family associations in New Zealand. Two years later his father established a factory in England. When William died shortly after his return John Ramsay became Chairman of Directors, a position he held until his death in 1924. The First World War increased demand for Kiwi polish; the Australian Light Horse used vast quantities, supplies were also sold to the British forces and later the American army. Another son, James was involved in the English factory. In 1981 Kiwi merged with Nicholas International, and since 1986 has been included in the Sara Lee Corporation. The business was still a family concern in the 1980s, with Sir Thomas Ramsay, grandson of James being chairman.

Another son, John Ramsay Jnr., graduated from Melbourne University in the mid-1890s and became Surgeon Superintendent at Launceston General Hospital and was knighted in 1939.

Ellen, known as Nell Ramsay, remained at Clydebank until her death in 1943. Another sister, Margaret was among the earliest women drivers in Australia.

### Hugh Ramsay

Perhaps the most celebrated of the Ramsay children is Hugh (b. Glasgow 1877), who pursued a short and brilliant career as an artist, prior to his death from tuberculosis in 1906, aged 29. The Ramsay family and their home, Clydebank became,

the backdrop to most of Hugh Ramsay's short life. He had strong attachments to his home and family and, except for eighteen months in Europe, he lived here from the age of ten. It was the one place for which he yearned while abroad and, eighteen years after Clydebank's completion, he was to die within its solid walls. It was here that he established his first studio and painted some of his finest works. On the door to this room he wrote the word STUDIO in elaborate letters of black and gold.

His family, the house and its surroundings are the subjects of many of his major canvases, and even the furniture and decorations designed by his father can be seen in the background to some of the domestic scenes. Ramsay's father, in turn, was involved in a framing business which made some of the chip-carved frames in

which his son's paintings were hung.

Hugh attended Essendon Grammar School, and at seventeen he became the organist and choirmaster at the local Congregational church in Ascot Vale. He had shown particular gifts for both music and painting, and could have chosen careers in either field with equal success. One of his earliest paintings was a mural of soldiers in action, completed at Clydebank when he was about twelve years old. John Ramsay objected to his son's choice of profession, and much against his wishes Hugh entered the National Gallery School in Swanston Street, Melbourne, in the first term of 1894. At sixteen he was one of the school's youngest students. He studied painting under English artist, Bernard Hall, and drawing under the supervision of Frederick McCubbin, founder member of the Heidelberg School. Ramsay faithfully became an adherent to Hall's principles of colour, restricting his range to subtle tones of soft browns, greys and greens, with an occasional touch of gold, violet, pink, Prussian blue or magenta, giving his works the desired subtlety of Whistler, Sargent or Velasquez. He also studied briefly under E. Phillips Fox and T. Tucker at their summer school at Charterisville in 1897, before visiting Europe in 1901 where he studied further at the Academie Colarossi, Paris at the same time as fellow Australian artist, George Lambert.

In 1902 four of the five paintings he submitted to the Paris New Salon were accepted for hanging, giving the twenty four year old Ramsay the greatest recognition of his career. (Lambert who had beaten Ramsay to the travelling scholarship, and Rupert Bunny, each had one out of four paintings accepted.) His work also appeared in the British Colonial Exhibition, and at the Royal Institute Galleries, London. Ramsay's success secured him the patronage of the expatriate singer Nellie Melba, who commissioned the artist to paint her portrait in London. However the painting was never finished; Ramsay became acutely ill with what was then termed 'pulmonary consumption', and in August 1902 he was forced to return to Australia an invalid, with Melba assisting him with his passage. Retreating to the family home Clydebank, Ramsay completed three portraits of his sisters Jessie and Madge, and his fiancée, Lischen in less than a month, and these were exhibited to a very curious public at Melba's home Myoora, Toorak, who were perhaps more interested in the diva's house than the artist's works. They had been painted at his Clydebank studio, with the life-size portrait of Madge faithfully recording 'the shabby blue, patterned linoleum on the floor and the stack of unframed canvases at the side'. Over the following three and a half years Ramsay painted a number of major works at Clydebank notably, *An Equestrian Portrait* (1903), *Lady with Fan* (1904), *Jessie with Collie* (1904), and *Two Girls in White* (1904).

Ramsay died on the morning of 5 March, 1906, in the Clydebank drawing room nursed by his sister, Jessie. Four years later Jessie died of the same illness, aged twenty two. She is buried alongside her brother at St Kilda Cemetery.

#### Subsequent Appraisal and Exhibitions

In 1906, on Bernard Hall's recommendations, the NGV, through the Felton Bequest purchased its first Ramsay painting, *Self-Portrait (Smoking in Front of the Piano)*, (painted in Paris, 1901/2). On 1 October 1918, a memorial exhibition of his works was organised by art dealer, William Gill at the Fine Art Society, Alfred Place, Melbourne, where it was pronounced by Sir Baldwin Spencer that Ramsay,

is undoubtedly one of the biggest artists in portraiture and figure painting that Australia has produced... Up to the present time he has been represented in our public galleries by one single work - a self -portrait - the selection of which we owe to his old master, Mr Bernard Hall. The exhibition of his paintings, which have been hitherto hidden away, unseen by, and almost unknown to art lovers, to whom the name is more or less a legend, will come as a revelation... His portraiture appeals to me as strongly as the landscape of Arthur Streeton.

A second exhibition of his works was held at the Latrobe Gallery at the NGV, in March 1943. Organised by Daryl Lindsay, it comprised largely of pictures collected by the Ramsay family over the thirty seven years since his death. Ramsay's sister had until that time been living with the majority of these works at Clydebank.

A large retrospective of Hugh Ramsay's works was held at the NGV in 1992. James Mollison, Director of the NGV, in his forward to the accompanying exhibition catalogue acclaimed Ramsay as

one of Australia's most gifted artists. His ability to paint, even as a student, ensures his place as one of our finest painters. Ramsay's career scanned scarcely a decade; he was however, prolific, accomplished and mature beyond his years. His paintings have been a major influence on artists...

Like other critics, he felt that Ramsay's finest works were painted during the last four years of his life at Clydebank.

In October 1996 the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, was bequeathed the portrait of Ramsay's sister, Madge (1902). The work is the first of a bequest of about twenty Ramsay paintings valued at \$2 million, that will be received by the gallery, and includes the artist's sketchbooks, childhood drawings, letters and memorabilia. According to Mary Eagle, the gallery's senior curator of Australian art, the paintings 'are so good they have the potential to become the new Ramsay favourites, the new icons of the future....I would say he was the best painter of his generation, the generation that came after the painters of the Heidelberg school'. It has also been said that 'had he lived...and matched quantity with his quality, he might have completely changed the course of Australian painting'.

The following works were painted at Clydebank:

Lamplight (1897), private collection (p.c.).

Anxiety (1899), owned by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). The subject is the artist's sister, Madge.

Madge (1896), (p.c). This was painted shortly after their mother's death in March 1896.

Jessie with Doll (1897), (p.c). The artist's sister aged eleven.

Clydebank from a paddock (n.d), (p.c).

Madge (1902), National Gallery of Australia. The artist's sister full length in front of screen.

The Mandolin (1902), Art Gallery of South Australia. Portrait of the artist's sister Jessie. aged fourteen.

Nell (1902/3), (p.c). Probably a sketch for a larger portrait of the artist's sister which was never completed.

An Equestrian Portrait (1903), NGV. A life size portrait of Betram Milne Sutherland, the son of Ramsay's doctor, standing with old Prince the Clydebank carriage horse saddled to appear as a hunter. The figure in the background is the artist's sister Madge, standing with the family hack, Pet. Sketches for the painting are held by the University of Melbourne.

Lady with Fan (1904), NGV. This portrait of the artist's fiancée Lischen, was painted in the dining room. The painting received unreserved praise by the Age:

The portraits of Mr Hugh Ramsay are remarkable, and give promise of still better achievement. His most sympathetic work is the portrait of a young lady, who stands holding a fan, a delicate muslin handkerchief veiling her bare neck and arms. He has combined the womanly grace of a model and the youthful lines of the slender figure.

Jessie with Collie (1904), Queensland Art Gallery. Portrait of the artist's sister, Jessie, painted on the door step of Clydebank, with her dog, Lassie.

Two Girls in White (The Sisters) (1904), Art Gallery of NSW. Portrait of the artist's sisters, Margaret and Nell, painted in the drawing room. In July, 1904, the Herald called this painting, 'his tour de force'.

Landscape with Gumtree (n.d) (p.c).

Self-portrait, (n.d), Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

Portrait sketch - woman in lilac dress (n.d.), (p.c)

### Clydebank

Clydebank, built in 1888, was initially surrounded by fifteen acres of land. The north and south fence lines were planted with trees, and at some distance from the house, a line of outbuildings separated the house and formal gardens from the cow and horse paddock. The stuccoed, Italianate mansion of two storeys had a slate, hipped-roof, and apart from the two-level return cast-iron verandah and parapeted tower, the house displayed little external ornamentation. In this respect it was not unlike many of the large metropolitan houses built during Melbourne's property boom.

The ground floor included many reception rooms, John Ramsay's study with built-in safe, and bedroom the family referred to as the 'low bedroom' or visitor's room. The drawing room, to the left of the front door, contained a marble fireplace that featured in the background to some of Hugh Ramsay's family portraits. Behind this room was the dining room containing the onyx mantel where for many years hung the portrait of Jessie Ramsay. Other rooms on this level included a parlour, breakfast room, kitchen, as well as a wash house, scullery and other service rooms. Upstairs there were six bedrooms and a billiard room where paintings by Hugh Ramsay hung until the 1940s. The family bedrooms had access to the very spacious verandah which wrapped around the north east corner of the house, and it is here that three of the Ramsay siblings spent time resting during the last years of their lives. The tower, reached by steep stairs, contained John Ramsay's telescope. From here could be seen the Macedon Ranges, the Dandenongs and Port Phillip Bay.

At the back of the south west (rear) wing of the house was a room which Hugh Ramsay used as a studio. Above the door was written 'studio' together with a painting applied directly onto the wall, entitled The Duellists. Both

existed until this section of the house was altered in 1946. After Hugh's death the studio reverted to its former use of staff bedroom. The north west, single storey wing containing the ironing room, a bootroom and generator room, was completely rebuilt in 1946.

Although considerable additions were made to the house after it was sold to the Roman Catholic Property Trust, many original features remain to help interpret the seemingly gracious late Victorian and Edwardian lifestyle of the Ramsay family, and the paintings of Hugh. The stained glass windows survive on the north and west walls, as does the glass on the front door minus the Ramsay coat of arms. Door handles and panels are still in use. Fireplaces in the bedrooms have been removed. With the exception of the drawing room fireplace, all those on the ground floor remain with their onyx or marble mantels. Many of these formed the backdrop to the famous family portraits painted in the last years of the artist's life. The hall and verandah tiles, the stairs and ornate newel post show little evidence of their use for over one hundred years. Very little remains of the original garden. The cypresses forming the backdrop to the painting, Jessie with Collie, were removed in the early 1980s because they were diseased. However Clydebank's rendered front door pillars have been retained, and one of these can be seen in this painting of Jessie.

#### Subsequent Occupation of Clydebank

Clydebank was sold to the Roman Catholic Trusts Corporation shortly after the death of Ellen Ramsay on 8 August 1943. Many of Hugh Ramsay's paintings had remained in the house until this date. The Ave Maria Retreat House (a place for religious contemplation) for women was officially opened in Clydebank on 19 December 1943, by Archbishop Mannix. The first retreat was held over the weekend of 22-24 January 1944 for a group of munition workers. It was run by the Legion of Mary until 1946 and thereafter by the American organisation, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, founded in India in 1877. Extensive additions were made to the house in keeping with the original style. On the south side the drawing room was lengthened for the chapel and the Ramsay breakfast room was extended to make a larger dining room. Upstairs the bedrooms were modified to dormitory accommodation. The north west wing became two storeys, and both it and the south west wing were almost doubled in width. Extra bathrooms were included on both levels. A further extension was made in 1958 to provide an enclosed verandah outside the Ramsay breakfast room.

In 1957 a kindergarten opened on the property and remained quite separate from the Retreat House. In 1961 planning began for the secondary school which had been first discussed in 1955. Ave Maria College opened in a separate building in 1963. By 1969 the retreat house was found to be too small, so the nuns decided to discontinue its operations and withdraw from the parish to a new Apostolate in West Sunshine. The property continues to operate in 1996 as Ave Maria College for girls.

## Extent of Registration

Heritage Act 1995  
NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under Section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the Heritage Register Number 1325 in the category described as a Heritage Place:

Former Clydebank, 22 Vida Street, Essendon, Moonee Valley City Council.

#### EXTENT

1. All the building marked B1 on Diagram 607286 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 607286 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described in Certificate of Title Vol. 10038 Folio 714.

Dated 5 June 1997  
RAY TONKIN  
Executive Director

[G24 19 June 1997 1406]

*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/>*