

Building Name: Stokesay
Address: 288-289 Nepean Highway

Historic Buildings Register: Registered
National Trust Of Australia (Class/Rec.): Classified
NTA File Number: 6015
Study Grading: A
Type: House
Construction Date: 1921
First Owner: Onians, Arthur & Amy
Architect: Ballantyne, Frederick
FCC Property Number: 21/0010/44304



CITY OF FRANKSTON HERITAGE STUDY
1991

Graeme Butler & Associates Dr Chris McConville Francine Gilfedder

Stokesay, 288-289 Nepean Highway, Seaford.

History

Built: 1922

Architect, J.F.W. (Frederick) Ballantyne designed Stokesay in March, 1922, for Arthur & Amy Onians.¹ Originally designed as the Onians' seaside home, Stokesay soon became their permanent residence. It is probably that the house was built by Ballantyne as the general contractor.²

The property overlooks the bay and backs onto Kananook Creek. Stokesay once had a private jetty which jutted out into Kananook Creek.³ A garage and laundry are situated adjacent to the house and a large fowl house occupies part of the property.⁴ In 1925 Stokesay was awarded First Prize in the *Australian Home Beautiful* competition for 'Australia's prettiest home.' Stokesay has remained unaltered and in the Onians family since its construction.⁵

Frederick Ballantyne entered the University of Melbourne in 1918. It was still necessary at that time to be articled to a practising architect.⁶ Ballantyne, on the advice of Edward Billson who worked in Griffin's office, became a pupil of Walter Burley Griffin. Ballantyne, at the age of 21 years, received his diploma and completed his articles in 1921.⁷ In 1922, when he designed Stokesay, Ballantyne set up in private practice with an office at 313 Glenferrie Road, Malvern. In 1923 he traveled to the United States, where he met Louis Sullivan and Dwight Perkins and visited many buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.⁸ Returning in 1924 he set up office in Haverbrack Avenue, Malvern. He and his brother, Keith, who had worked for a short time with Griffin, carried on the family contracting business and many of the houses designed by Ballantyne at this time were also built by him.⁹ In 1934 Ballantyne went into partnership with one of his senior employees and cousin, Roy Wilson, a partnership which became known as Ballantyne and Wilson.¹⁰

Description

This complex is thought to be one of the best and most complete examples of Walter Burley Griffin's Knitlock Wall construction system. Possessing the distinctive pyramid-shaped roof of Griffin's Knitlock prototype Pholiota, the house modules are roofed with the Marseilles pattern cement tile, rather than Griffin's Knitlock cement tile, seen on the Jefferies Surrey Hills house. Inside the pyramid form is reflected in the (large) living room ceiling profile, like Chancellor & Patrick's pitched ceilings of the 1950s. As with the smaller Knitlock prototypes, such as the 1922 Gumnuts (q.v.), this living area, with its large fireplace, was used as the circulation space to perimeter rooms, some with double (glazed) doors (sleepouts), and the dining room with none. Dressing rooms were provided to the two sleepouts and a 'workroom' to the main bedroom. Typical of the era, there was plenty of built-in storage and, *less* typical, a maid's room.¹¹ The garage and laundry were housed in another pyramid- roof building on the site, north of the house, while the perimeter hedges, garden pathways and fencing provide a notable setting for the two buildings.

The house had a jetty on to the Kananook Creek and a croquet lawn.

¹ NTA FN6015

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ see P. Goad, P. Navaretti, NTA classification (1988) report

External Integrity

Generally original, except for only slight possibility that the roof tiles were once knitlock.

Context

The landscape (hedges) provides a buffer for this complex from the highway. It is identifiable as one of a diminishing number of between-the-wars houses established in this part of the Point Nepean Road prior to the onset of higher density development via flats and units, post-War.

Landscape

The layout is intact, together with structures such as the entrance gates, timber garage, gravel paths, a series of tall clipped cypress arches (*Cupressus sempervirens?*), orchard and rear sheds.

Significance - Study Grading A

Architecturally, this house complex perhaps the best preserved Knitlock example in Australia and one of the few to incorporate suburban elements such as garages into the system; also designed by one of Griffin's first articulated pupils, Frederick Ballantyne, in a form which was faithful to the internationally known architect, Walter Burley Griffin's original Pholiota concept, by providing one central space as the focus for ancillary rooms/alcoves around the perimeter: of national importance.

Historically, acknowledged by a national periodical as 'Australia's Prettiest Home,' it represents a nationally publicized ideal in a time of housing shortages and many attempts to develop cheap construction systems. Historically, it is of added significance in that it has been lived in by the one family since its construction also as still the home of Mrs. Gladys Hartley Watson, well-known in the Girl Guide and charity movements: of National interest and State importance.

The landscape is of regional importance.