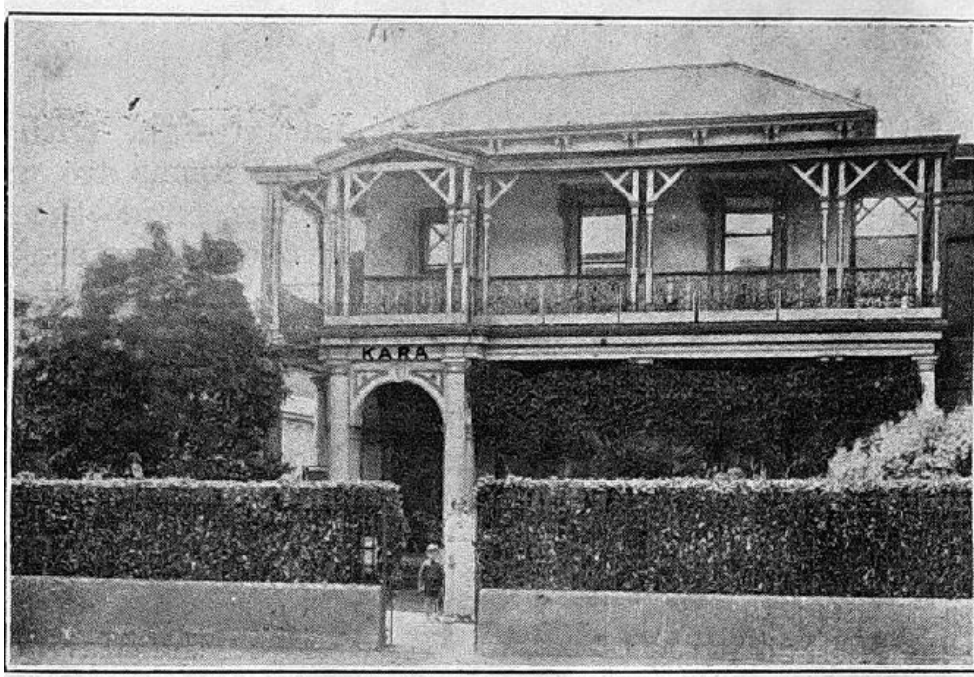


Kara / Kara Mansions

26-28 Dalgety Street, St Kilda



As it was in 1914 and in 2020



Researched and written and by Rohan Storey, Flat 3

2026

Summary

The flats at 26-28 Dalgety Street, St Kilda have a history going back nearly 160 years, so there's been an awful lot of owners, occupants and changes in that time.

1855

Dalgety Street created and building lots subdivided and sold.

1868 or 1869

A house was built on our lot, which probably looked much like the photo on the cover. It was probably built for Emmanuel Davis, who is listed as the first occupant. He was a financier, probably Jewish, with a least five children.

1875 (probably)

A twenty-five foot width of the block was subdivided from the property to the south, and added to our lot, creating a side garden.

1889

The house was sold, described in the auction notice as a 'Really Desirable Dwelling', with '11 rooms, kitchen etc'. By now it is called KARA, a name it may have been from the beginning.

1890

The house was bought by German-born solicitor Joseph Sabelberg. He commissioned a grand new Jacobean style mansion, which was not built. He may have added the upper level of the verandah seen in the photo.

1914 -1917

The Misses Pitman advertised that they 'received paying guests' in ads complete with a photo, and that's when the photo on the cover was taken.

1925-26

The house was sold and completely transformed into a block of thirteen flats called Kara Mansions. This involved additions to the original house to the front, the side, and the back, in an eclectic design drawn from the Mediterranean, Old English and Arts & Crafts styles.

1991

The apartments were sold individually on company share titles, and it was probably in preparation for this that the kitchens and bathrooms were renovated, the whole building painted beige, and the tall front fence added.

2000s

The block was converted to strata title in about 2001. In 2014 the exterior was repainted in heritage colours, and in 2016 the front garden was repaved and replanted.

Sources

Research by the St Kilda Historical Society, including old maps; Sands & McDougall historical street directories, which list the main occupant; the National Library of Australia 'Trove' service of scanned historical newspapers (up to 1957); photos I've taken over the years since I bought my flat in 1999.

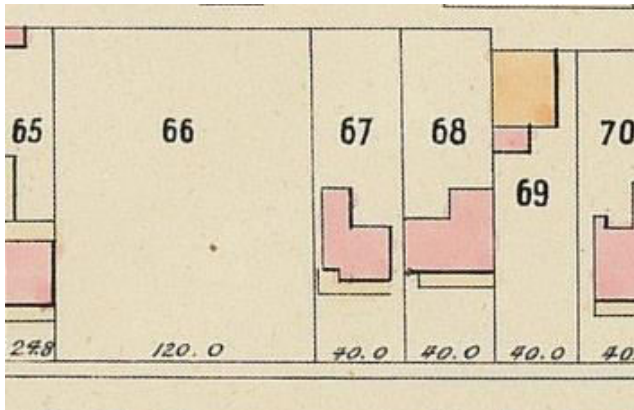
History

Subdivision

The first St Kilda land sales were in 1845, and two big lots running between Grey Street and Princes Streets were bought by H F Gurner. By 1855 he subdivided them, creating Dalgety Street lined with 40ft wide lots each side. The first houses in the street, Eden Terrace at nos. 4-18, were built in 1857. A map of 1864 shows the three or four lots north of them as all vacant, including our block.

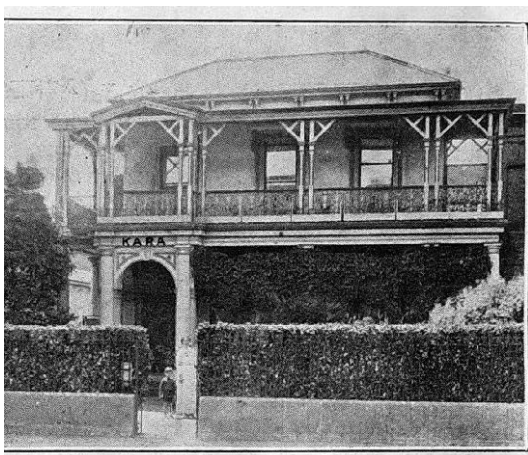
Construction

A house was built on our lot in 1868 or 1869. I've worked this out by first using the 1873 'Vardy' maps held by the St Kilda Historical Society (see below), which shows the outline of a house about where our building is now, on lot 67 (this wasn't a street number). It also lists the names of occupiers of the six houses shown north of Eden Terrace. I then worked backwards, comparing those names with those listed in the street directories for each year, which don't have street numbers either, but it was clear that both our place and the pink house next door at no. 30-32 (lot 68) were built between the listings of 1868 and 1869.



1873 Vardy map. The house is shown on lot 67.

The Vardy map implies the house was probably built like a large two storey terrace house, going almost to each side boundary, with a verandah across the front. The indent to the left side was likely the entrance, which matches the arch in the 1914 photo. This also matches where the stair hall inside is now. The narrower rear wing behind was probably three levels due to the slope of the land.



The 1914 photo shows what it looked like (though the upper part of the verandah may be later). The upper wall behind the verandah survives inside the attic of flat 8.

He may have commissioned the house, but if so he did not stay long, since the 1875 directory lists the occupant as FP Hines (so Mr E Davis did indeed go overseas). In 1880, the occupant was John Barker, who was still there in 1885. These men may have been the owners as well, but it was very common back then to rent houses rather than own them.

The mansion next door to us with the palm trees in front was built in c1875, and called Asgard. It did not occupy all of lot 66, stopping short of the north boundary. The remaining 25 feet or so was sold to the owners of our lot, probably at the same time. This area became a side garden. (The larger and smaller blocks now comprising no. 26-28 are clearly shown in the title boundary drawing of 1970, and have since been amalgamated into one lot).

[illegible]

1889 sale

The directory for 1890 lists Arthur Graham as the occupant, but he must have been a renter because in November 1889, the house, now called KARA, was advertised for auction 'by the trustees of the late George Russell'. It was described as a 'Really Desirable Dwelling' in the 'Favourite Suburb'.

It is possible that the house was named Kara from the beginning by Emmanuel Davis. In that case it may be a version of the Hebrew word Qara, 'to read', or possibly refers to the Jewish sect the Karaites, founded in the 9th century (or something else altogether).

Joseph Sabelberg

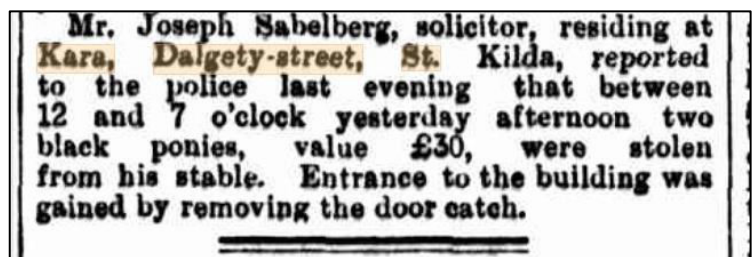
The successful bidder was Mr Joseph Sabelberg. This comes from an entry in the Miles Lewis Melbourne Mansions Database for a tender for a new two-storey residence for Mr Sabelberg, 'two doors from Eden Terrace' (i.e. our address). This was advertised in May 1890, so he probably planned to replace the house when he bought it. He also appears in a newspaper report from 4 October 1890 about a robbery of two black ponies from 'Kara, Dalgety-street'.

Joseph Sabelberg was then about 48, with a wife and perhaps 7 children, and newspaper mentions show they had lived around St Kilda since at least the mid 1870s. He was born in Koblenz, Germany c1842, arriving in Melbourne aged 12 with his family around 1854. He later became a solicitor and barrister, and in 1867 he married Marianne Brentani.

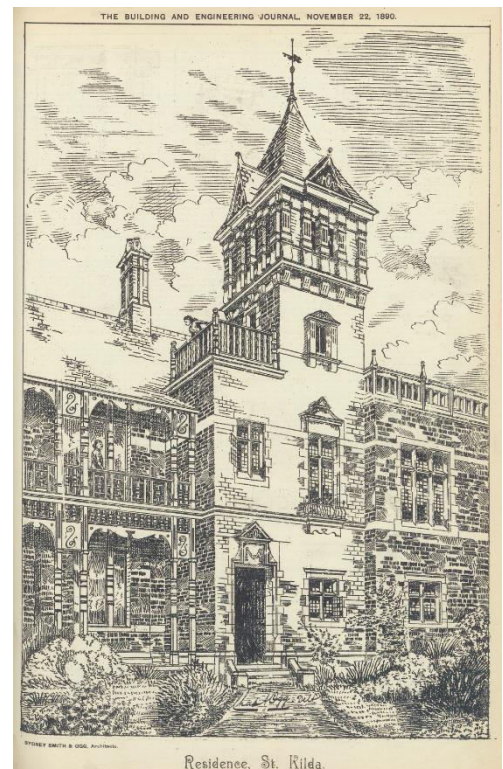
The *Building and Engineering Journal* of 21 Nov 1890 happens to include a report on the house he was intending to build, and an illustration, which is very rare to find.

It shows an extravagant Jacobean style mansion with walls in 'picked Northcote bricks' with stone dressings, a pointed tower, and a Queen Anne style timber verandah. It was by architects Sydney Smith & Ogg, illustrated 'from the pen of Mr Chas Ogg'. Smith's father, also Sydney Smith, had been Surveyor for the City of St Kilda, and Sydney Jnr grew up at their house at 2 Princes Street just round the corner in the 1870s.

Joseph Sabelberg was probably caught up in the land and construction boom which reached its height in 1890, before prices plummeted sending Victoria into deep depression. He may have had investments in mining or real estate that made him believe he could afford a grand mansion, so perhaps he was lucky he didn't proceed, or he may in fact have suffered from the crash. In any event by 1895 he is no longer at this address.



Robberies in the Suburbs, The Argus, 4 October 1890



The Jacobean mansion planned for this site in 1890

However, he may have made some changes - in my opinion the rustic timber style of the upper level of the verandah is much more 1890s than 1860s, and since some early St Kilda houses had single level verandahs with a porch above, this upper level could have been added in c1890, and perhaps from the pen of Mr Ogg.

Clearly a hard worker, Joseph made the news on his death in 1933, because he was still a practising solicitor at the age of 91.

Anne Brentani, the gold rush, and St Kilda

Joseph's wife Marianne Brentani had a colourful family background.

The St Kilda Historical Society newsletter of April 2020 has an article about Marianne's parents. Her father, Carlo Brentani, was Italian, born in 1817 in his parent's inn on Lake Como. Sent to London to learn silversmithing, he was caught stealing, and transported to Tasmania in 1835.

Meanwhile back at the family hotel on Lake Como, Mary Shelley, the famous author of *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, stayed for a couple of months in 1840, and wrote appreciatively about her stay there.

Carlo was released in 1844, married Anne Campbell, moved to Melbourne, and established a jewellery business in Collins Street in the fledgling town. He died young in 1853, and thirty years later his widow Anne reminisced that the first gold nugget to be found in Victoria was brought to her husband's shop in 1849 - but its source was uncertain, and no further gold was found until 1851, sparking the Victorian gold rush.

Anne Brentani had settled in St Kilda in the 1860s, where perhaps Marianne met Joseph Sabelberg.

1890s

The directories list the occupant in 1895 as Edward Fitzgerald, and then in 1897 it was put up for auction again. The notice describes the house in detail, with drawing, dining, and breakfast rooms, a library, seven bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom 'with hot and cold water and marble bath' - this last convenience

Victoria's Oldest Lawyer Dies

MR. JOSEPH SABELBERG. Melbourne's oldest practising barrister and solicitor, died on Tuesday night at High Street, Prahran, in his 91st year. Until last week he had been attending his office daily.



He was admitted to the bar in 1868, and for 56 years was legal adviser to Whittlesea Shire.

Mr. Sabelberg was born at Coblenz, Germany, and came to Melbourne with his parents when he was 12. His wife died a few years ago. He left six sons.

The Sun, 3 August 1933

Terms at Sale.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27.
On the Premises. At Three p.m.

KARA,
DALGETY-STREET, ST. KILDA.
Splendidly-built Commodious Family RESIDENCE.

Containing Very Large Drawing, Dining, Breakfast Rooms, and Library, Seven Spacious Bedrooms, Large Bathroom, with Hot and Cold Water, and Marble Bath; Large Kitchen, with Range; Washhouse, Laundry, Stables, Buggy-house.

The Land has a Frontage of 66ft. 9in. to Dalgety-street by 151ft. Deep, and is Laid Out as Lawn, Shrubbery, and Flower Garden.

The House has Just been Put in a Thorough State of Repair, Both Inside and Out. The Whole of the Outside has been Painted, and the Rooms Decorated. The Drawing and Dining Rooms and Hall are Decorated in the Most Recherche and Artistic Style.

The Position of the House is Second to None in St. Kilda, within a Stone's-throw of the St. Kilda Station and Tram Line, and a Few Minutes' Walk from the Esplanade and Baths.

The Auctioneers can with Confidence Recommend this Property to Any Gentleman Seeking Either a Residence or an Investment.

The Terms will be Liberal.

W. J. BUTCHER and Co. (Wm. J. Butcher, auctioneer) and G. B. APPLETON (in conjunction) have been instructed to SELL at AUCTION, as above.

Auction notice, Australasian, 9 October 1897

was probably later than the c1869 house. The drawing and dining rooms had been redecorated in 'the most artistic and recherche style'.

The auctioneer was William J Butcher, and in 1900 the occupant was also William Butcher, so ... he must have bought it.

The Butcher family was still there in 1906 when a marriage took place in the front parlour between daughter Hilda Louise Butcher and Mr George Rudd. The ceremony and the dress were described in great detail in an article in a society newspaper.

In 1910, the house was occupied by Mr & Mrs Charles Field, who hosted the reception for their daughter Ella's wedding in the parlour in 1911.

By 1914 the occupants were the 'Misses Pitman', presumably sisters, who advertised in the short-lived *St Kilda by the Sea Annual* that they would 'receive paying guests'. The ad includes the one photo of the original house.

I was much impressed by the simplicity and solemnity of the Presbyterian marriage ceremony, which took place in the drawing-room at "Kara," Dalgety-street, St. Kilda, on March 14, when Mr. George W. Rudd, son of the late Mr. W. Rudd, and Mrs. Rudd, of St. Kilda, and Miss Hilda Louisa Butcher, second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Butcher, of "Kara," Dalgety-street, St. Kilda, were united in holy matrimony. The guests were confined to relations and intimate friends, who were received at the entrance to the hall by Mr. and Mrs. Butcher, the ladies then going upstairs to see the bride, who stood in the centre of her large, bright bedroom, dressed in her bridal robes, waiting there quietly till her father should come to lead her down—very fair, sweet, and happy she looked, and told us with such girlish, pardonable pride that she had made her own wedding veil of Limerick lace; also the lace that draped the bodice of her ivory duchesse satin gown, the front of the skirt being quite covered with very valuable Limerick lace, that her mother had worn on her wedding-day. Soon a message came that the clergyman had arrived, and the guests moved to the drawing-room, there forming lines four or five deep down each side of the room.

A wedding in the parlour, Australian Town and Country Journal, 21 March 1906.

"Kara," 28 Dalgety Street, St. Kilda.

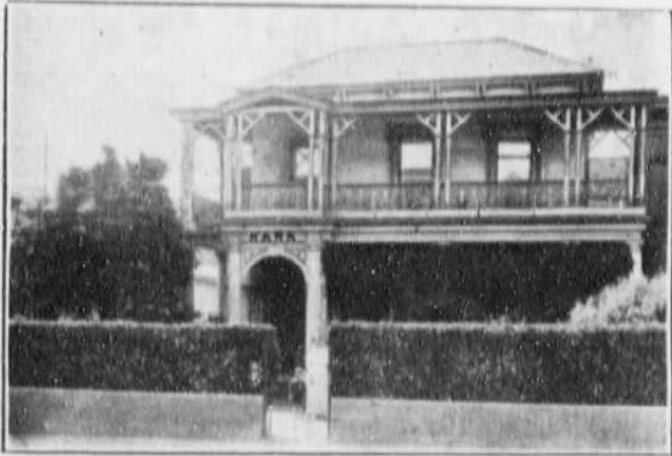
Highly Recommended. Phone 3382 Windsor.

Balconies

Gardens

Lawns

Etc.



Three Minutes from Train, Tram and Beach.

— The MISSES PITMAN Receive Paying Guests. —

A GOOD TABLE AND EVERY HOME COMFORT.

In 1920 the occupant was Mrs Edith Metcalf, and at least one room was still advertised to let.

The 1925 directory lists the occupant as Mrs Hannah McLaughlin. Our address also appeared in a death notice in 1923 for her husband Andrew Thomas McLaughlin, aged only 59.

By Oct 1925 she had decided to sell up, or she was renting and the owner decided to sell, when a newspaper ad lists an auction of the entire contents, down the linen and crockery.

Conjointly with
FRANK BERRY, 339 Collins Street.

MONDAY NEXT, OCTOBER 19.
At Eleven O'Clock. On the Premises,
Kara, Dalgety Street, ST. KILDA.
MODERN HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS,

Including Axminster and Brussels Carpets, Blackwood Dining-room Suite, Oak and Kauri Bedroom Suites, Upright Grand Piano (Cable), Several Shadow Tissue Suites, Oval Cedar Table, Oak Hallstand, Blackwood Sideboard, Duchesse Chests, Single and Double Bedsteads, Bronze Coal Scuttle, Pedestals, Pictures, Electric Iron, Lounge Chairs, 4 Main Gas-stoves, Oval Table, Wicker Chairs, Linos., Blankets, Linen, Ornaments, Crockery, Cutlery, Kitchen, Utensils, Garden Tools, Sundries, &c., &c.

WITHOUT RESERVE.

DON, BAILEY, and Co., 225 Collins street, will
SELL, in conjunction with BAYLEE and Co.
(R. C. Murphy), auctioneers, 325 Collins street.
Tel. Cent. 1159.

Auction of contents, The Argus, 14 October 1925

Kara Mansions

An ad in July 1926 notes 'Kara Mansions' is nearing completion, and available to rent 'at popular rentals to approved tenants'.

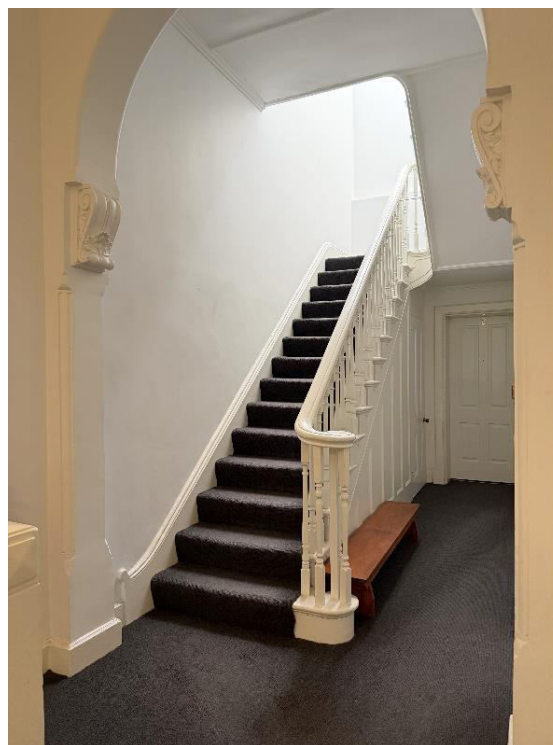
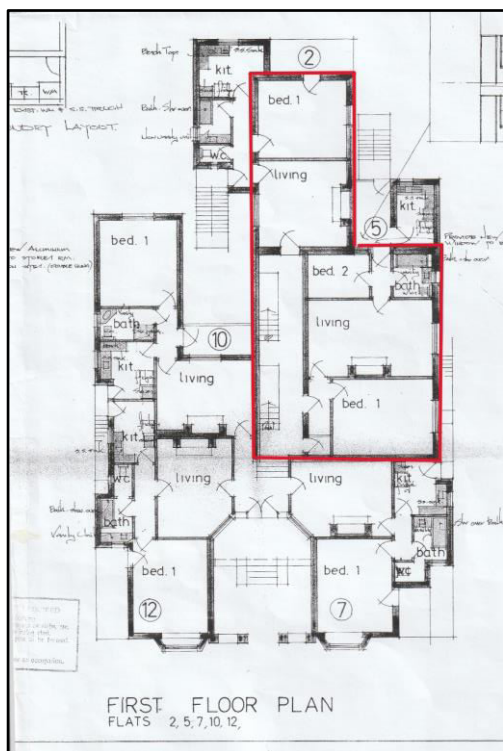
So in the previous eight months or so, the house had been completely transformed into the flats as they are today (though it notes '12 exclusive flats' when in fact there are 13).

The 1926 alterations were very extensive, and involved replacement of the front verandah with large additions, which then ran back along the south side where the garden was, internal walls rearranged, and doors and windows relocated, leaving very little intact from before. Five garages were also built across the rear as well.

The main stair, with its Victorian turned timber balustrade is however clearly original, and so is probably the shape of the hall. Some of the walls out back have faint lines outlining blocks, which were a typically Victorian feature in imitation of stone. Another remnant is the extraordinary survival of the upper facade in the attic of flat 8.

Clayton station. H. Pullyn & Co., Clayton.
ST. KILDA, Dalgety-st, Kara Mansions.—New and modern building, nearing completion, completion, comprising 12 exclusive Flats, at popular rentals, to APPROVED TENANTS, 8 only are available. Early to RATTEN & Co., Temple-court, U. 2842 and U4097.
ST. KILDA, — No. 2 Charnwood-crescent.

Kara Mansions, The Age, 31 July 1926



Red lines indicate the outline of the original house; the archway and stairs are also original.

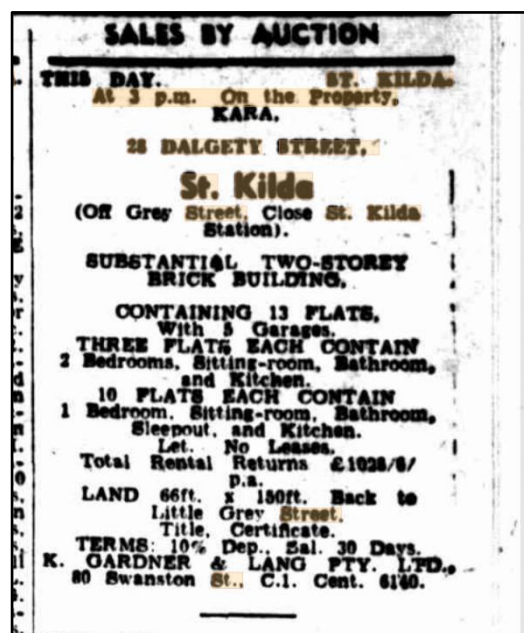
The additions were done in a way to maximise the number of flats, at the least expense. For instance, the added sections have lower ceiling heights than the original house, with two levels at the front, and three levels on the south west corner, resulting in many different floor levels. This is why there are steps everywhere, and to get to flat 12 you go upstairs, then down at the front, then up again.

1920s- 1940s

In the next few decades many people must have lived here. Directories only list Kara Flats at this address, rather than all the occupants, so the only hints of their lives are a few newspaper references. These include: a birth notice for Mr & Mrs Larkins in 1929; that when Denise Strong got married in 1931 her parents were living here; and that so were the parents of John Bonwick when he got married in 1940. 28 Dalgety Street is also given as the address of three people who died, all their 70s, though they actually died elsewhere.

1950s

In 1950 the entire block was sold, noting that all flats had a 'sleepout', which was an open balcony that could be slept in on hot nights. These are now sunrooms.



Sale notice, The Argus, 12 December 1950

Naturalisation lists from the 1950s show that Polish born Mordka Richter lived here in 1954, as did Eta and Judel Berg in 1956 - they were likely post-war Jewish refugees/migrants, since St Kilda and Elwood, with an existing Jewish community and plenty of flats, were the most popular destination for this group in Melbourne. Lists of bankruptcies show that Moische Fichtenbaum, who was probably also a Jewish postwar refugee/migrant, was living here in 1967 (in flat 10), and he was still here in 1971 when it was discharged, the notice stating he was a 'taxi school instructor'. By then the name Kara Mansions seems to have fallen out of use.

The only change up until the 1970s was turning at least some of the open sleepouts into sunrooms, as seen in a photo (below) of the house next door dated 1978 that shows the side of our building. By then the side verandahs of flats 12 and 13 had simple square windows with flat sheet wall cladding between (and these particular windows were changed again later). That flat cladding was probably also used above and below other sunroom windows around the building. This photo also shows that the high gable was weatherboards, and the bricks still unpainted. The sunroom windows to flats 1, 2, 3 at the rear look like 1950s windows, but could be later.

Company Share 1990

Title documents indicate that in 1990 the block was registered as a company share, and the flats sold individually in 1991. Various alterations around the building are rather 1980s style, and may have occurred as part of this process.

Some sunroom windows were changed to aluminium windows and doors, other were timber framed. The flat panels between the sunrooms all around the building were replaced by fibre cement 'weatherboards', and the gable weatherboards were replaced with flat sheets. The whole building, including the brickwork, was painted two shades of beige/ pink.

The front garden was paved in bricks with a fountain in the centre, birch trees planted along the front, and the tall brick fence with cast-iron fence on top and a gate was added. The roof tiles were changed from red/brown terra-cotta to glazed black.

The bathrooms and kitchens were also probably renovated at this time - there is a plan on the Port Phillip Council file dated 1982 for internal renovation (used on p8), but the layouts as built are a bit different in some cases, so it's possible they weren't done until later.



1978 view showing the side. St Kilda Historical Society.



In 2008, with birch trees, fence and beige paint.

Recent history

The flats were converted to strata title in c2001.

Various improvements have occurred since 2009, starting with removal of the birch trees. About the same time, the fountain was turned off due to water restrictions, and planted with flowers.

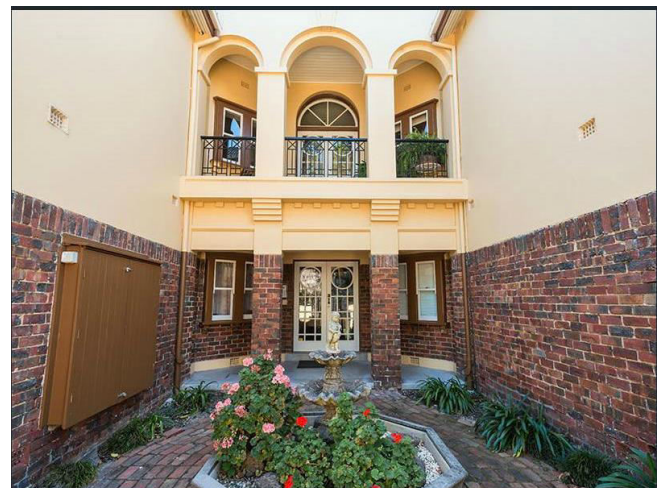
In 2014 the exterior was repainted in heritage colours of yellow ochre and mid brown, and the paint removed from the clinker bricks. The front fence was rendered and painted to match. In 2016 the front path was repaved in bluestone, the fountain removed and the garden replanted.



In 2009-10, after the birch trees were removed.



In 2014, after repainting and brickwork cleaning, before the garden was done.



Architectural Style

The style of the 1926 work is quite eclectic, combining features from various 1920s popular styles together. For instance, the X pattern 'half-timbering' between the sunroom windows at the front is from the Old English or Tudor Revival, while the arches of the first floor verandah are Spanish or Mediterranean. Other features are more typical of 1920s Arts & Crafts or Californian Bungalows, such as the clinker bricks, the brick arches, the boxed-out windows, and the gables. Internally, the timber panelling in the hall is typically 1920s, and would have been dark varnished originally, as would the skirtings and door surrounds. Inside the flats the fireplaces have typically 1920s simple timber mantlepieces, and these and the skirtings, doors and window sills would have been dark stained timber.

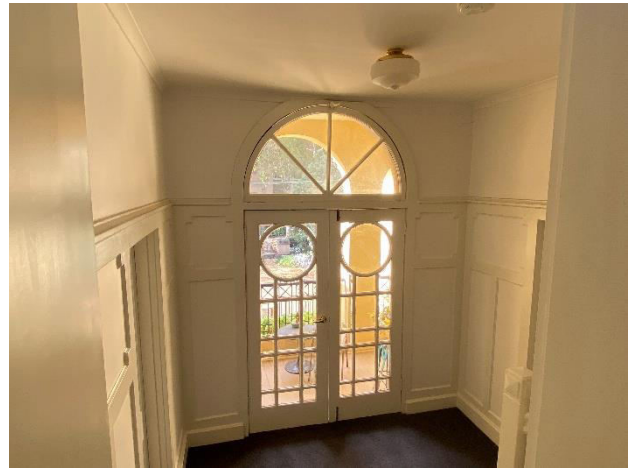
These photos illustrating the various features were taken in February 2026.



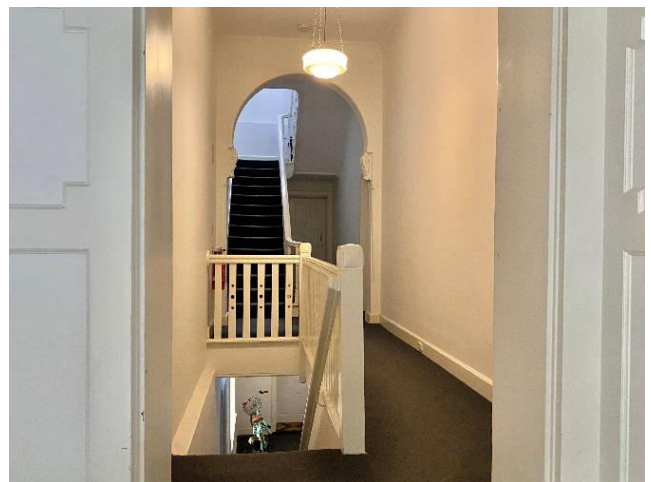
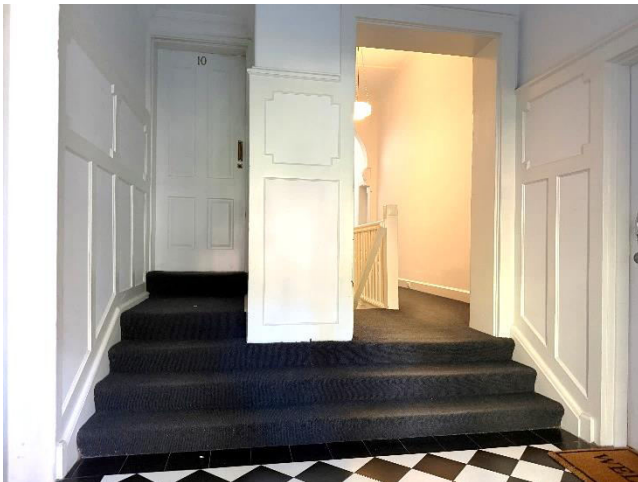
X-pattern Tudor Revival half-timbering, with Arts & Crafts brick arches and clinker bricks.



Mediterranean arched porch, Arts & Crafts boxed-out windows and clinker bricks.



Multi-paned double front entry doors, and matching doors to the first floor porch. The arched fanlight above is typical of the Georgian Revival style.



Ground floor entry showing differing floor levels. The original Victorian hall beyond has 1926 stairs going down and the Victorian stairs going up. While the archway is also Victorian, the skirtings and cornices are 1920s. (The Victorian style brackets on the arch look like a recent addition to me).



The spiral handrail end and the turned timber balusters are typical of Victorian era stairs.