

Newburn flats

Address 30 Queens Road, Melbourne 3004

Practice Romberg & Shaw

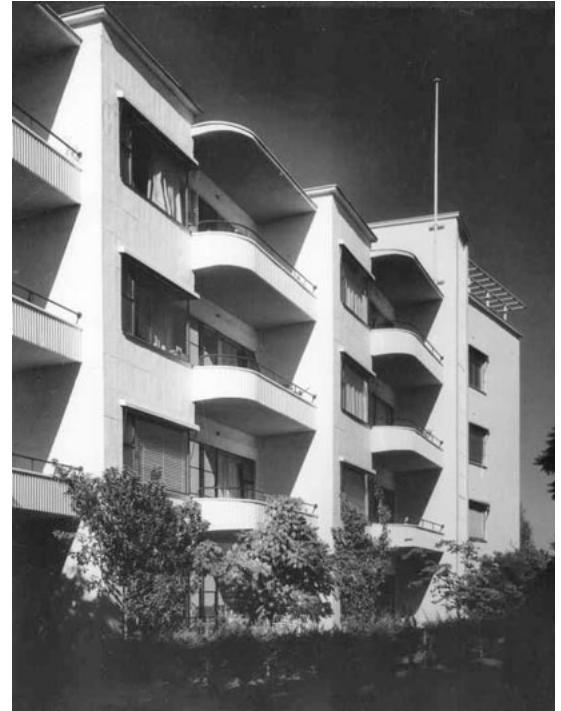
Designed 1939

Completed 1939

History & Description Newburn was designed in 1939 as a four storey investment block of bachelor flats. The design was Frederick Romberg's first independent commission, carried out in partnership with former Stephenson & Turner employees Richard Hocking and Mary Turner Shaw. Romberg had studied architecture in Germany before moving to Zurich to continue his studies under Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn and Otto Salvisberg. In 1939 he arrived in Australia on a scholarship. The original design was amended to reduce costs and meet the client's new requirements. The building was innovative stylistically. As in Gropius's Berlin housing estate (1930), Romberg offset each flat unit in plan to give privacy to the balconies, views, and a north orientation, whilst adopting the Expressionist formal repeating curved elements and bold horizontals of Erich Mendelsohn to give a sculptured exterior to the Functionalist plan. Structurally, concrete walls and slabs were created by utilising 600 by 600 modular steel forms, whilst bent corrugated steel was used to form the balconies. Influenced by the Swiss practice of incorporating art with the building, Romberg commissioned artist Gert Sellheim to provide a large colourful sundial on the main front wall and smaller murals based on an Aboriginal motif in each entrance porch. The use of bold colours on major building elements, contrasting against the creamy white walls, was another feature of this design. Subsequent alterations have been carried, including replacement of the front rooftop pergola with a penthouse in the 1950's, the painting over of Gert Sellheim's graphic elements, and changes to the internal finishes and fittings of most flats.

Statement of Significance Newburn was one of the first block of flats to adopt thoroughly the characteristics of advanced European architecture of the time, with an offset plan reminiscent of Gropius's Berlin housing estate, design elements related to the Expressionism of Erich Mendelsohn, and interior detailing of consistent character. This block is believed to be the first residential building to use off-form concrete as a final finish for its complete exterior. In that respect it was unlike other buildings of the period, which employed the vogueish curved elements, traditional hipped roof forms and stuccoed brickwork to provide the streamlined exterior. Newburn is the earliest and ground breaking example by the renowned émigré architect Frederick Romberg (1913-1992) in his first practice who later went on to form the innovative firm of Grounds Romberg and Boyd in 1953 with Roy Burman Grounds (1905-1981) and Robin Boyd (1919-1971).

Criteria Applicable N2 - Significant heritage value in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
N3 - Significant heritage value in establishing a high degree of creative achievement.
N5 - Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history



North elevation in c.1951, by Wolfgang Sievers



Detail of balconies in 2008, real estate web site



Rear view from Queens Lane in c.1951, photo by Wolfgang Sievers, SLV



View from Queens Rd in 1939, photo by Wolfgang Sievers, SLV