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Jackson's Manor Backpackers (formerly Wattle House) 53 Jackson Street, St Kilda

St Kilda has buildings by Melbourne's three earliest architects: Robert Russell (1808-1900) who probably designed the earliest section of the Elsternwick Hotel (39) and his firm Russell, Watts & Pritchard who designed Elwood House (40), John Gill (c1797-1866) whose Barham House is concealed within Eildon (24) and Samuel Jackson's (1807-76) own house survives here in Jackson Street.



Australian School (circa 1860): The architect Samuel Jackson and his wife on the verandah of the Wattle House, St Kilda (By permission from John Playfoot Fine Art Pty Ltd)

Russell's earliest surviving building in Melbourne is St James' Anglican Old Cathedral, 419-435 King Street, Melbourne (1839-51), which was relocated stone by stone from its

original site in King Street. Jackson's (and indeed Melbourne's) earliest surviving building on its original site, St Francis' Roman Catholic Church (1841-45 & 1849) has been in heavy continuous use since the day it opened on 22 May 1842.

Jackson was born in England, the eldest of three brothers who in 1829 when he was 21, all emigrated to Hobart in Van Diemen's Land. In England, Jackson had operated as a builder. In Tasmania he turned his hand to design as well, employing his brothers as carpenters. Three of his buildings survive in Hobart. In 1835 he joined the John Pascoe Fawkner syndicate. Crossing to Melbourne from Launceston in 1835, soon after Fawkner, he arrived within weeks of Russell. He first established a pastoral property near Sunbury. He then returned to the practice of architecture.

In 1840, he opened a part-time office in Little Collins Street, developing a practice responsible for more significant buildings than any other architect prior to the Gold Rush, although many no longer survive. He was designer of Scots' Church, Collins Street (corner of Russell Street, 1841-42, demolished for the construction of the present Scots' in 1873); St Patrick's Church (1850, predecessor of the present Cathedral); St Mary's, Geelong (1846); St Patrick's Hall (Victoria's first Legislative Assembly); the first Melbourne Hospital (1848); Charnwood, St Kilda the house for Octavius Browne (1855); Fairlie, Col. Anderson's house, South Yarra (1846); 'Tower House'; St Paul's Church, Pentridge (1851-53) and Toorak House (1848-50).

With Russell, he entered the 1844 competition for the first Princes' Bridge. They received second prize, despite the winner, Charles Laing not fulfilling the competition conditions, not the last time for such a dubious occurrence in Melbourne.

As a designer without architectural training, Russell's designs are provincial, unaffected, and even naive. His details are very difficult to source, generally Gothic and Picturesque. The ornament of St Francis recalls the decorated halls of the Commissioners' Gothic, which Jackson may well have experienced as a builder in London. He also painted one of the most important relics of early Melbourne - a panorama of the town on 30 July 1841, which is now in the La Trobe Collection of the State Library of Victoria.

Jackson had moved to Acland Street, St Kilda in 1845. He is listed in the 1847 *Port Phillip Directory* as 'Samuel Jackson Architect, St Kilda'. For Prof. Miles Lewis, this is sufficient to date Wattle House as 'c1847'. With F.G. Dalgety and H.F. Gurner (26), Jackson had purchased land at the second Crown Land sale in St Kilda in 1846. Eventually, he owned several hectares between Fitzroy, Acland and Grey Streets.

Jackson's design for Wattle House is particularly Romantic, in a Picturesque Gothic or Cottage Orneé manner. But Lewis, Australia's principal expert on prefabrication has confirmed that Wattle House is not, as is often claimed, prefabricated. Its design was probably derived by Russell, from architectural Pattern Books. Further research is needed to determine which.

It is two-storied with steeply pitched gabled roofs, with Tudor details and most decorative fretwork barges and finials, timbering and small-paned casement windows. It is the oldest surviving house in St Kilda.

A fascinating technical detail is that the roof of Wattle House is partially clad with Morewood & Rogers iron roof tiles. Today, these are very rare in Victoria, but Berkley Hall's stables (26) have them and formerly, so did the stables of Fenagh Cottage (25). Galvanised iron tiles reached Victoria as a patent method of roofing from 1850 and were used for about twenty years. They are about 900 x 575 mm and screw-fixed over half-round timber rolls, as an overlocking seal between tiles. Morewood and Rogers tiles were the earliest and most common, after those of their predecessors, Morewood & Co. The tiles were imported from a factory in leafy Gospel Oak, North London.

Jackson was a foundation member of the Victorian Architects' Association in May 1851, predecessor of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects (now the Victorian Chapter of the RAlA), but after the Gold Rush, Jackson retired from architecture to his 81 hectare property at St Kilda.

By 1851, St Kilda consisted of a loose group of 20 substantial houses. Of these, two: Eildon (then known as Barham House, 1850 (24) and Wattle House, survive. There is a row of rough stone cottages at 16-22 Acland Street (cnr St Leonards Avenue (11)) which may have been built in the 1840s. They certainly appear on Kearny's 1855 map. Their present appearance is concealed beneath the accretion of subsequent renovations.

In 1853 Dalgety, Gurner and Jackson took advantage of the new golden wealth and the desirability of St Kilda, to subdivide their properties on the St Kilda Hill at profits almost 40 times their initial purchase prices. By 1863, there were already 6,363 residents in St Kilda.

So early in 1863, Jackson returned to England a wealthy man, where he married a widow and fathered a daughter, Mary Anne. On 7 May 1876 he died at Enfield, Middlesex, north of London, leaving a large estate. He is buried in Highgate Cemetery, North London. His fine Georgian mansion, that he touchingly named Yarra House, probably no longer survives in Baker Street, Enfield. Today, Baker Street is best known for its splendid sequence of Edwardian pubs.



Wattle House, St Kilda, c.1865 (Eugene von Guerard, water colour). Moir Collection, State Library of Victoria

Later, in 1863 (one source gives 1858, others 1867); Sophia Matilda Murphy leased Wattle House from Jackson and relocated her flourishing girls' school there. It is unclear where it was previously. She was the sister of Frances Kerr, wife of J.H. Kerr, the author of *Glimpses of Life in Victoria*. Her girls' school is said to be one of the earliest in Australia. Oberwyl (27), became a girls' school also, in 1867 and The Priory (28), in the 1880s.



Former Wattle House, 2004

A letter survives in the Clyde Company Papers: Miss S. Matilda Murphy of Wattle House wrote to a George Russell on 11 October 1870, regarding (his daughter?) Christina, returning to classes in drawing and Italian.

In June 1874, J.H. Kerr died, and his widow, Frances went to live with her family at Wattle House, the school that her Sophia had opened. It appears that eventually, four Murphy sisters conducted the school. They had all emigrated to Australia from England, with their mother. When the Murphy sisters eventually returned to England, a memorial window was installed at Christ Church, St Kilda in 1880, in their honour.

In June 1878, Wattle House was auctioned by Samuel Jackson's daughter, Mary Ann Lawson. The auction notice describes the house, as it then was. It was mostly brick, '...being equal to new, the outside wooden portion, would only have to be taken down, and the whole building, at moderate cost could be restored in brick to it's original, much-loved design.

It was auctioned again in 1884: 'nine rooms in the main building, three-roomed wooden annexe (that was still there)...' It was bought then by Alfred Felton (14), who sold it on

only four years later (four years again before he moved into the Esplanade Hotel). Then it was surrounded by a 'large, beautiful fernery, large greenhouse, forcing houses, lawn tennis (court), with kiosk'. By the late nineteenth century it was also known (on the MMBW Plan) as 'The Wattles'.

Later Wattle House became a boarding house and then a special accommodation house. A large addition was built at the rear. It is now relegated to a busy (if not onerous) life as a 'backpackers' hostel', offering, it's advertisement insists, 'quality accommodation.'

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