

## Elmore Homes.

One of the most influential designer/builders in Blackburn was Algernon J. Elmore who by 1916 had established his home and workshop in Blackburn. He was a proponent of the 'Arts and Crafts' and 'Fresh Air' movements of early twentieth century. He was one of the pioneers of Victorian Hardwood construction, including weatherboards, flooring and interior joinery in his Blackburn bungalows.

Angela Taylor (BVRG founding committee) wrote a journal article for *Historic Environment* in 1986 - 'Craftsman Bungalows in Blackburn'<sup>1</sup> and features an article: The Hardwood King - from the *Whitehorse Gazette* 3rd July 1997.

# Hardwood King

In this week's *About Whitehorse*, reporter ALISON McCLELLAND uncovers a little known piece of Whitehorse's history.

**W**ITHIN the peaceful, leafy streets of Blackburn lies a secret. So secret in fact, many Blackburn residents don't even realise they share a common bond — living in an A.J. Elmore house.

Algernon John Elmore (1882-1961) or 'The Hardwood King' as he came to be known, had a significant impact on the development of the Blackburn area, designing and building more than 50 craftsman bungalows in the early 1900s, about 30 of which are still standing today. He also built some houses in Camberwell, Mont Albert, Wheelers Hill, and country Victoria.

Most of the houses he built in Blackburn were in an area referred to as 'The Paddock', which was bounded by the railway line to the north, Blackburn Rd to the east, Middleborough Rd to the west, and Blackburn Creek to the south. The area was thick with eucalypts, and surrounded by apple orchards, dairies and poultry farms.

Mr Elmore bought several lots in the area in 1910, designing and building his own home in 1912, in what is now Laburnum Rd.

He set up a joinery nearby and began building houses for people moving out to the fringes of the city.

Blackburn resident and Elmore enthusiast, Angela Taylor, said the builder's houses reflected the mood of the time, but also revealed his forward thinking.

"The remnant of the bush in Blackburn drew him here," Mrs Taylor said. "The ethos of the time

was a desire for fresh air and a simple life lived in open air on the fringe of the city."

"A lot of people came out here to have a house built by Elmore ... different clients wanted different things so each one is not an exact replica. He didn't build any on spec."

A keen conservationist, Elmore fitted each house around the existing bushland, and even advised some of his clients which native plants would be suitable for their garden.

Although each house differed according to need, most of them shared distinctive characteristics, including simple, spacious rooms, board-and-batten walls and ceilings, solid fireplace mantel shelves, and a special joint he devised to minimise the effects of shrinkage.

The timber used to build the houses was always hardwood. Houses built before World War I were made mainly from jarrah. But when transporting jarrah from Western Australia became too expensive after the war, Elmore turned his attention to Victorian hardwoods, particularly Mountain Ash from Launching Place and Powellite.

Ms Taylor said these materials would probably never be used again in the same way since the forests in these areas were destroyed in the Black Friday bushfires of 1939.

**S**HE said Elmore only used hand tools, and preferred a rough, natural finish to the timber, rarely using pigmented stains for the interior, and favoring a natural stain for the exterior.

Another distinctive characteristic the houses shared was a wide verandah, complete with floor to ceiling flyscreening. Bedrooms opened directly on to the verandahs, which were commonly used for sleeping on hot evenings, and as an isolation room for family members with then

common infectious diseases such as diphtheria, typhoid, and scarlet fever. Fresh air was also thought to benefit tuberculosis sufferers.

"Elmore was a fresh air fanatic and was probably influenced by the emphasis on health and hygiene at the time," Ms Taylor said.

"If you wanted fresh air and sun you could go out in the verandah which could be up to 10 feet wide."

**M**S TAYLOR, who lives in an Elmore house, began researching the history of A.J. Elmore houses in the early 1980s, and hopes to write a book on her findings.

"When we moved into this house in the late 1970s, I was struck by the craftsmanship in the timber," she said. "But I didn't think a lot about it until I got to know my neighbors and realised their houses were similar and had been built by the same person."

"I would like to think I can educate people about the value of these houses. Most of the owners I talk to do want to find out about their history."

She said although many of the houses had been renovated, they still had many of the unique Elmore features, a point being increasing highlighted by real estate agents at auctions.

"The people who buy his houses usually intend to live there for a long time. They like the ambience and value its qualities and craftsmanship. They tend to be well-loved houses," she said.

"Some owners have lived in the house for 30 or 40 years and have maintained them. But not many have been left in a pristine state."

Noel Allen First National Real Estate consultant Joan Foyle said Elmore houses "always fetched a premium" due to their location in the Bellbird area.

<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Angela. Craftsman bungalows in Blackburn [online]. *Historic Environment*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1986: 4-18. Availability: <<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=866088953192598;res=IELHSS>> ISSN: 0726-6715. [cited 05 Oct 17].

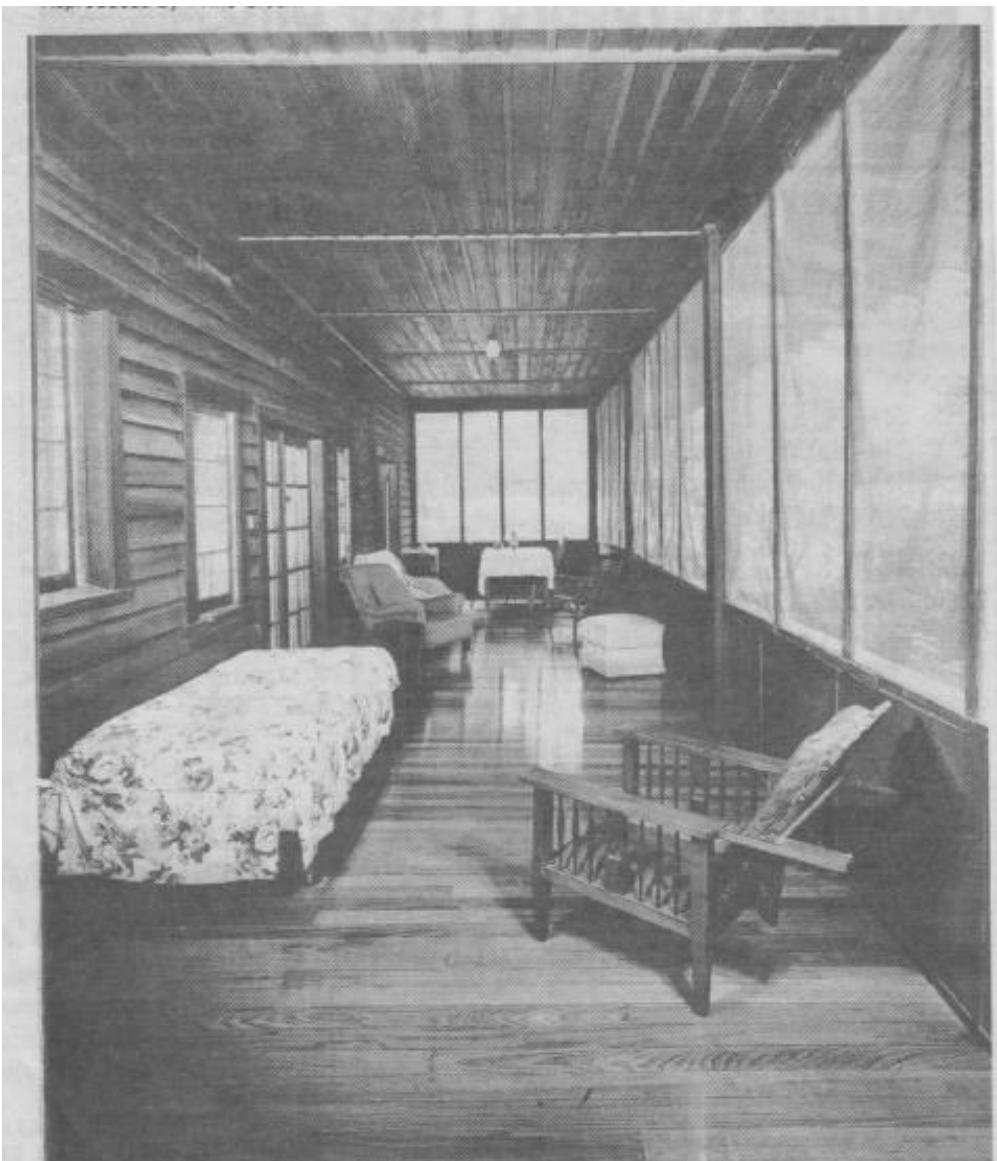


*Comfort: Angela Taylor in the living room of her Elmore house.* Picture: JO PATTERSON.

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*'Kyalite': A. J. Elmore's first jarrah bungalow in Blackburn, built in 1912.*  
Reproduced by Irvine Green.



**A typical Elmore fly-wired verandah: it has access to bedrooms, and board-and-batten ceiling panels.** Picture: IRVINE GREEN.

In 1996 the last home built by Algernon Elmore for his family at 30 South Parade Blackburn was sold, ending almost a century of connection with Blackburn. The house has since been replaced with a contemporary structure. The nearby laneway is named Elmore walk in recognition to his contribution to Blackburn. The distinctive character of Elmore houses however will remain, some protected by heritage overlays. Examples of some Elmore houses around Blackburn from real estate promotional material have been inserted below.

## History on sale

A LOCAL tradition came to an end when, in 1949, A.J. Elmore Esq of Blackburn built his last house. During the early 1900s, Jack Elmore started his building career and many of the houses he built still stand today. Most of the Elmore houses were built for others but the last home was constructed for the Elmore family and has remained in the family until now. Dating back to 1914, his family home was featured on the cover of *Home and Garden Beautiful*. As one tradition comes to an end, another begins and, for the first time, 28 and 30 South Pde, Blackburn, are available to purchase. The house at 28 South Pde along with the adjacent allotment will be auctioned on Saturday July 6 at 11am. There are four small bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom and lounge with open fire. The home is ideally suited to refurbishment. The land size is 15.24 x 52.07 metres or 793 sq metres. The adjacent allotment, 30 South Pde is slightly smaller, 15.24 by 46.85 metres or 714 sq metres.



Figure 1. Algernon Elmore's last house built for his family in 1949 at 28-30 South Parade Blackburn.



Figure 2. Elmore House, 16 Main Street Blackburn



Figure 3. Elmore House, 22 Laurel Grove Blackburn



Figure 4. Elmore House, 26 Fuchsia Street Blackburn.



Figure 5. Elmore Home, 28 Glen Ebor Avenue Blackburn.

## Further References.

Trove - <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/38631443?q&versionId=51247959>

City of Whitehorse Heritage assessments -

<http://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/IgnitionSuite/uploads/docs/Part%203%20Places%20in%20Suburbs%20Other%20than%20Box%20Hill%20LCD%20Pty%20Ltd.pdf>

City of Whitehorse Heritage Review -

<http://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/IgnitionSuite/uploads/docs/Amendment%20C157%20City%20of%20Whitehorse%20Heritage%20Review%20Thematic%20History%20Vol%201%20Part%20A.pdf>

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