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An Elegant Queenslander in Auchenflower



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Images:

Cover: Aerial shot of Auchenflower and Toowong, Brisbane, c1916 to 1922 (University of Queensland Library; Henry William Mobsby Collection, UQFL181; Copyright expired). The elegant Queenslander is third from the right-hand margin on Ridley Street, which runs along to Auchenflower Station.

- Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Department District No. 3 Detail Plan No. 826

An elegant Queenslander in Auchenflower

The house remained an object of fascination long after a family of four relocated to Townsville.

Given an appropriate budget and a suitable hillside location with a view of something, there's no doubt I would have sought to replicate the building (perhaps with an additional verandah on the right-hand side) because the structure possessed a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

For a start, it was built by someone with money. Until I started looking at the contrast between what we left behind and what we found when we moved North, I wasn't sure who that was.

It might have been someone of considerable influence, possibly a Premier, cabinet minister or some other significant figure.

It turns out that I was wrong, but not very far (distance-wise). While I was wrong, a combination of basic research, some reasonably straightforward assumptions and a degree of hypothetical guesswork may have landed reasonably close to the mark. ¹

Mrs Blakey's house seems to have been built by Norman Meredith Davis before 1910. ² Davis owned a colliery. Since he called his new residence *Tyneside*, one assumes he was a Yorkshireman from around Newcastle-on-Tyne. And he seems to have been out to impress: most [Queenslander](#)-style houses have the steps at the front, often in the middle, leading straight up to the verandah.

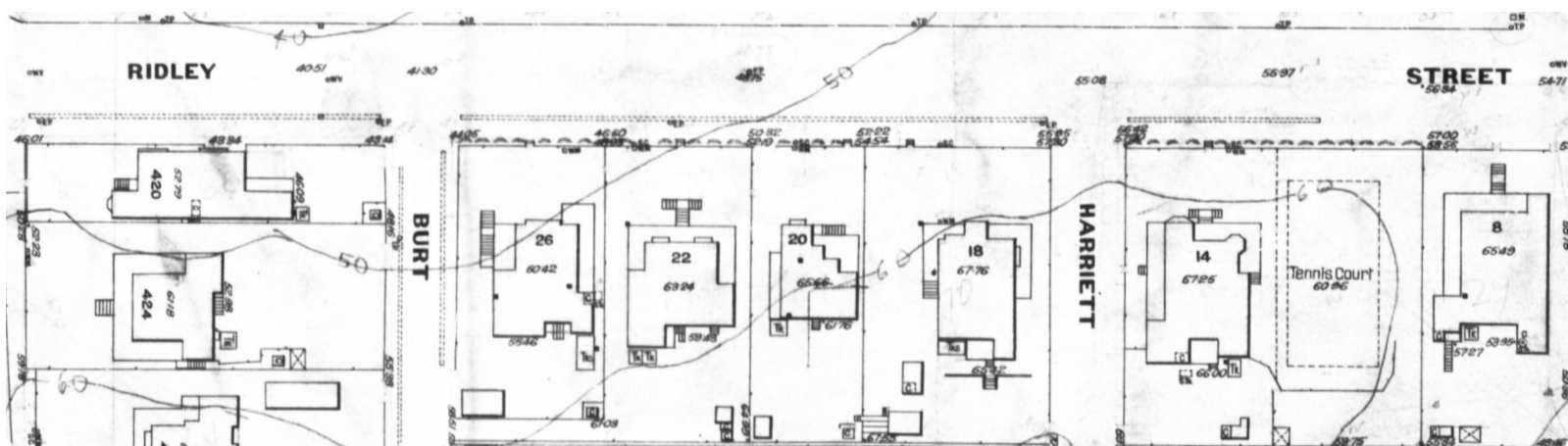
Visitors arriving at Tyneside made their way onto the property through a slightly off-centre gateway on Mrs Blakey's property. From there, the pathway headed uphill beside the house before a U-turn onto the stairs and the verandah that looped back to the front door.

A 1932 City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Department map ³ reveals more clues.

¹ Further research in the appropriate locations may deliver more precise detail, but that will have to wait until I can investigate the ownership records for residences in Aitkenvale, Currajong, various other parts of Townsville, and, finally, Bowen.

² Based on the biannual **Post Office Directories**, Ridley Street did not exist in 1902, although it appears on this [1899 Dunmore Estate auction flier](#). The other side of Ridley Street (the former Auchenflower Estate) had not been subdivided at that point. Without further detail, the 1904 Directory lists Mrs M. A. Hargrove, William C. Stone, and Miss Elizabeth Harling as mail recipients in Ridley Street. The 1910-11 edition has Davis on the appropriate side of the street, with no one between him and Milton Road. The 1911-12 edition inserts a Hartley into that space. During my time in the house, an elderly spinster named Miss Hartley lived two doors down from us.

³ Brisbane City Council Water Supply and Sewerage Department District No. 3 Detail Plan No. 826.



The house under discussion is Number 18; Miss Hartley's is Number 22. Between them, we knew Number 20 as the Forno residence.

I think its alignment, right up against the boundary between the two allotments, suggests Davis wanted to maximise his allotment when he subdivided his original block sometime in the 1920s.⁴

Until the subdivision occurred, Norman M.'s visitors enjoyed a vista across an open hillside space towards Milton Road, with views toward the Brisbane CBD from the front verandah.

Visitors who failed to make the U-turn onto the verandah would have reached the shed that contained *Tyneside's* outside toilet.

The building behind the outhouse was a garage.

While the sewerage map does not show Number 18's internal structure, the initial configuration is easy to describe.

Once through the front door, a hallway led to the living and dining room.

The main bedroom was on your right-hand side as you proceeded with a string of bedrooms on your left.

A dividing wall on the verandah side had a snug fireplace on one side and the kitchen on the other. An extension of that wall split the house in two and allowed Mrs Blakey to rent out the rear portion. 'our' side of the partition was probably the original dining room, with two bedrooms opening off it.⁵

The rear of the house had a bathroom behind the kitchen, an enclosed back verandah as the continuation of the living/dining room and another bedroom opening off it.⁶

⁴ Without getting too far ahead of the narrative, I would suggest late 1926 or early 1927 as likely time frames. See below: *A Catholic nunnery in a thoroughly Protestant neighbourhood*.

⁵ If so, the dividing wall between the two rooms was removed to make a larger space. My parents' bedroom had two doors.

⁶ I suspect this space, where my brother and I slept, may have been the maid's quarters.

Colonel Oswald S. Hoad, who lived there in 1939,⁷ may have owned a car.

The Blakeys certainly did, but that takes us beyond the emerging narrative, which moves on to the building that lurked behind a three- or four-metre galvanised iron fence that enclosed the rest of the block bounded by Ridley, Burt, Maude and Harriet Streets.

And that's where the story becomes intriguing.

That sewerage map shows a building labelled *Carmelite Monastery* that would appear to be roughly the size of the Davis/Hoad/Blakey, Forno and Hartley residences combined!

The *Carmelite Monastery* was the former *Auchenflower House*, home to Queensland Premier Sir Thomas McIlwraith and two of his successors.

⁷ Mr Davis died on 23 March 1935. On 31 May 1935, the ***Brisbane Telegraph*** and ***Courier Mail*** reported that probate had been granted on the estate of Norman Meredith Davis, late of Ridley Street, Auchenflower, Brisbane, gentleman, deceased, realty £901, personalty £11,144. The ***Courier Mail*** reports the date of death.