

WILLIS HOUSE

Address	10 Gruyere Crescent, Ivanhoe East
Significance	Local
Construction Date	1950
Period	Postwar
Date Inspected	January 2021



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

Willis House at 10 Gruyere Crescent, Ivanhoe East is significant. The area remained essentially rural well into the 20th century and the site derives from the Charteris Estate subdivision of 1939, which was mostly developed after WWII. The extant house was constructed in 1950 as a family home for and likely by Albert Alexander Willis, to a design by the architect Robin Boyd, then in solo practice as well as directing the Small Homes Service. Albert and his wife, Rosalind, a singer, remained in residence into at least the late 20th century.

The significant elements are its cuboid form, including painted brick walls with extensive section of grille ('hit and miss') brickwork to the lower level of the façade, screened entry, stained timber boards to the entry canopy, large timber-framed windows, and timber front door. The small laundry block to the rear is also original and significant.

The cream-brick garage with concrete lintel, associated wall and timber pedestrian entry to the rear boundary along Gruyere Lane and cypress trees to the front west boundary both likely date to the late 1950s. These elements contribute to the significance of *Willis House*, as do key landscaping elements in the front gardens, such as the lava rocks – to both low retaining walls and garden bed edging – and random stone paving.

How is it Significant?

Willis House is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Banyule.

Why is it Significant?

Willis House is of historical significance as an early postwar design by Robin Boyd, one of postwar Australia's foremost architect and designs commentators. Its 1950 construction in the southern reaches of Ivanhoe East foreshadowed the emergence of this locale – which had remained sparsely developed farmland into the postwar period – as a notable concentration of architect-designed modernist residences over the mid-to-late part of the 20th century. The circumstances of *Willis House*'s construction demonstrate the high cost and/or difficulty to procure labour in the years immediately following the Second World War as it was likely constructed by its owner Albert Alexander Willis, a (former) Master Builder who at the time of purchase of the land in 1948 was employed as a leather merchant. (Criterion A)

Willis House is of aesthetic significance as a fine, earliest modernist house in the municipality. An array of its elements, such as its cuboid form, near-flat roof, partly screened entry, unusually extensive areas of glazing (near fully glazed band to the main level), restrained articulation and lack of decoration, represent a dramatic break with the mass of pre-war suburban housing characterised by pitched roof forms and elaborately detailed exteriors. The design also takes considered advantage of its site and location – a prerequisite of good modernist design – in that, while south-facing, there are large windows with minimal framing divisions to the front living areas that capture fine views of the river valley opposite. (Criterion E)

Description

The *Willis House* is located in the central part of Gruyere Crescent, a gravel road that defines the southern edge of the residential part of Ivanhoe East. The house is located at the southern end of an elongated block, which overlooks the *Birrung/Yarra* River near Burke Road. The parcel of land has an area of about 808m² but is narrower at the north end, where it backs onto Gruyere Lane (about 13 metres as compared to about 19 metres at the southern end). The land also slopes about 5 metres across the length of the site (about 51 metres).

Willis House is widely visible and is set back about 10 metres from the front boundary, which is defined by a low, loosely configured wall of lava rocks. Much of the front yard is a lawn with a eucalypt to the east end within a garden bed primarily consisting of agapanthus, similarly edged with lava rocks. There is a part concrete driveway with a central section of crazy paving to the west end (likely Castlemaine slate or the like, lain in an irregular formation) adjacent to a row of five established cypresses. A similar stone has been employed to the garden bed in front of the house and the adjacent stairs and edge of the lawn area.



The house's overall footprint (including the front porch and rear patio) is rectangular, but the internal plan is T-shaped.¹ Due to the slope, there is a partial basement/lower level with a garage (roller door), workshop, and storerooms that has an extensive grille ('hit and miss' brickwork). The latter is a common feature of Robin Boyd's work, and other architects during the postwar period, though rarely utilised in such an extensive and prominent manner as in this instance. Three piers are visible behind the screen.

The form of the house is essentially cuboid with a near flat or low skillion roof. The roof is clad in metal sheeting behind a wide timber fascia with a squat chimney at the east end. It projects over the entrance to form a tapered canopy, with a soffit lined in stained timber boards. The walls are brick and painted white, as are the timber-framed openings, though the original wall finish not known. The brickwork was possibly bagged, a finish which Boyd commonly employed during the early 1950s (for instance, at the nearby *Stone House*, HO110). The entry stairs are concealed behind a wall that extends out from the grilled section.

The main upper-level front wall of *Willis House* is almost entirely glazed. The extent to which would have been noteworthy at the time of construction. Under the influence of postwar modernism, there was a general preference with contemporary planning to have a relatively blank façade, primarily as a means of creating privacy. The employment, at this stage, of such large panes of glass (that is, comprising few glazing bars) was less typical for a private residence. In this case, Boyd combined these elements to provide unimpeded views of the Yarra corridor, creating a picture window of the landscape while achieving some privacy with the screened entry wall for the stair. The fact that Gruyere Crescent is (now at least) a no-through road also likely factored into his decision-making. The visible part of the entry above the screen wall consists of a painted timber board door with sidelights.

While not evident from the public domain, there are four small square windows along the west elevation and a door to the east side. The rear/north wall is mostly glazed in a similar manner to the façade.



Front, showing extent of concrete paving, and areas of random stone/crazy paving

The floor plan has bedrooms along the western side with living areas to the east end, opening onto a rear patio. The central fireplace, with cut corner, has a curved rear wall and hearth clad in bricks. Walls and ceilings are lined with plaster sheeting,

¹ '10 Gruyere Crescent, Ivanhoe East', realestate.com.au, August 2015, www.realestate.com.au/sold/property-house-vic-ivanhoe+east-120309157

though there are likely original stained timber elements, including partition walls and cabinetry and/or joinery in some areas. The kitchen cabinetry likely dates to the later part of the 20th century.

A separate laundry block is located in the rear yard near the eastern boundary. It is designed in a similar mode to the house and to the south side features a large, fixed window with a band of louvres.

Extending most of the rear boundary (Gruyere Lane) length is an original cream brick wall, which has a concrete lintel over the double-width garage door and a timber board pedestrian door. To the east is a section of metal sheeting, set back from another skillion roof structure.



Gruyere Lane
(Source: Google Street View)



Willis House is an early example of a modernist house defined by its flat/low pitched roof form, which represented a distinct break with the typical suburban norm of a gabled and or hipped roof. Other key aspects of the postwar modern movement illustrated by the house is its conscious response to the site conditions, such as solar access, privacy and views.

Around 1950, Boyd employed some varied or compartmentalised footprints before exploring a more regimented and modular approach to planning under the sway of the prevalent International Style. The inclusion of an unusually large window without/minimal divisions is reminiscent of the Wood House at 12-14 Tannock Street, North Balwyn (1949-50), which was extended twice by Boyd in 1959 and 1971.

History

Context

The City of Banyule covers the unceded Country of the Wurundjeri-willam people, who have inhabited and managed its landscape for thousands of generations and maintain an ongoing cultural connection.² The lightly wooded grasslands of what became known as 'Ivanhoe' were quickly targeted for sheep runs and by timber-cutters from the 'illegal squatter camp (est. 1835) downstream of the *Birrarung/Yarra* at Melbourne.³ However, as part of the 'Heidelberg' district in the Parish of Keelbundora, this area passed rapidly into private hands via an auction in Sydney Town in 1838.⁴

Over the following decade, a patchwork of 'prestige' estates emerged, along with a surveyed township – *Warringal* (possibly 'eagle's nest'), later 'Heidelberg' – on the river's west bank.⁵ Productive river flats, and the demands of the gold diggings further afield, encouraged market gardening, orchards and (gradually, due to soil exhaustion and flooding) dairying; activities mostly undertaken by tenant farmers.⁶ This perceived rural idyll enticed *plein air* artists to the district during the 1880s, fixing the 'Heidelberg School' within Australia's artistic consciousness.⁷

Ivanhoe – its name stemming from Archibald Thom's 'Ivanhoe Estate' – remained a sparsely populated agricultural area until Melbourne's 'Land Boom' in the late 1880s.⁸ 'Picturesque' terrain, varied outlooks and the high repute of the broader district drew often well-off newcomers. By the turn of the century, 'Beautiful Ivanhoe' was routinely portrayed as a 'fashionable', 'exclusive locality' of 'model homes'.⁹ An improved railway connection to Melbourne in 1901 supported further middle-class growth, instigating 'four decades of slow and relatively affluent suburban sprawl' in the vicinity of Ivanhoe, Eaglemont, and Heidelberg train stations.¹⁰

During the interwar years, suburban Ivanhoe solidified, although its southern and eastern reaches remained primarily locked up by the expansive 'Hartlands', 'Charterisville', and 'Chelsworth' estates.¹¹ To navigate the complexities that accompanied the subdivision of these areas (sloping land, curving streets, views) in the postwar period and galvanised by the swelling influence of modernism, many of the new and generally moneyed proprietors sought the services of an architect.¹² By the early 1960s, distinct enclaves of upmarket, modernist design culture were apparent in the southern reaches of Ivanhoe and Ivanhoe East, with the aesthetic and lifestyle reverberations of the modern movement also shaping infill development in the more established environs of the locale.



View near Heidelberg in Victoria, pen and ink drawing, circa 1858
(Source: Eugene von Guérard, National Gallery of Victoria)

² Context, *Banyule Thematic Environmental History*, October 2018, pp15-20, available online

³ James Boyce, 1835: *The Founding of Melbourne & The Conquest of Australia*, Black Inc., 2011, pxi

⁴ Keelbundora stems from a European rendering of Kulbundora – the name of the eldest son of the important Wurundjeri *ngurungaeta* (essentially 'head man') Billibellary. ('Suburban Native Names', *Argus* 28 April 1906, p5). One of the earliest manifestations of local governance in the Port Phillip District (1840), the fluctuating borders of municipal Heidelberg mirrored its growth, as it was reformatted into a Road District (1860), Shire (1871) and then City (1934). It was amalgamated as the City of Banyule in 1994.

⁵ Donald S Garden, *Heidelberg: The Land and Its People 1838-1900*, Melbourne University Press, 1972, p13

⁶ Robert P Whitworth, *Bailliere's Victorian Gazetteer*, F F Bailliere, 1879, pp237

⁷ Context, *Banyule Thematic Environmental History*, sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.5, and 2.3.10; and Janine Rizzetti, 'Heidelberg', in Richard Broome et al, eds., *Remembering Melbourne 1850-1960*, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 2016, p282

⁸ Thom's estate designation was inspired by a novel of the same name by Sir Walter Scott (1819).

⁹ Ivanhoe & Alphington Progress Society, *Beautiful Ivanhoe: the suburb of model homes and scenic charm*, Model Studio, 1900, SLV

¹⁰ Ivanhoe Station opened in 1888; however, inefficiencies in the Heidelberg-Melbourne railway line initially bedevilled growth.

¹¹ Ivanhoe grew from roughly 2,000 residents in 1913 to nearly 8,000 by 1933 (*Victorian Year Books*, Australian Bureau of Statistics).

¹² Don Garden, 'Ivanhoe', *eMelbourne*, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, July 2008

Site-specific

The subject allotment derives from Portion 2 of the Parish of Keelbundora, a roughly 420-hectare holding purchased (along with portions 1 and 3) by Thomas Walker in 1838. A Sydney-based Scottish banker and philanthrope with an eye for marketable land across the colony, Walker's intention in the Port Philip District was speculative from the start. He commenced subdividing his acquisitions as early as mid-1839 to enormous profit.¹³

In the resulting sales, Portion 2 was carved up into multiple large estates. The subject land formed part of a roughly 33-hectare farm purchased by one of the first surveyors of the district, William Wedge Darke, and known as 'Waverly'. Darke appears to have developed this property rapidly, for at its sale in December 1839, it was noted as cleared, fenced, and under cultivation with a weatherboard residence.¹⁴ Ultimately, Waverly was incorporated into Captain Sylvester John Brown's (the original spelling was 'Brown', the 'e' was added later by his son) considerable 'Hartlands' estate. Brown was a onetime shipmaster in the East India Company who had made a small fortune in Sydney through whaling and trade.¹⁵ (He was also the father of multifarious Thomas Alexander Browne, celebrated during the late 19th century as the novelist 'Rolfe Boldrewood'.) He made Hartlands his familial seat in 1840, cultivating the flats and socialising with the area's gentry.¹⁶

However, within a few years, the colonial economy's worsening conditions forced the foreclosure of Hartlands – the stress of which shattered Brown Snr. A fortunate marriage between his daughter and a relative of Walker (the mortgage holder) enabled the debt to be cleared through the partial sale of the estate in 1853 (namely, the western portion, establishing Maltravers Road) and the 'Brownes of Hartlands' were able to reoccupy the remainder of the traduced estate.¹⁷ They remained there until the mid-1860s, departing in the wake of their residence's destruction by arson, after which the holding was leased agriculturally.¹⁸

The infamous 'Land Boom' syndicate, the Trustees, Executors & Agency Company, acquired most of the southeast segment of Portion 2 in 1889, including a large section of the former Hartlands estate, instigating intensive subdivision but sluggish development.¹⁹

By June 1928, a holding consisting of about 6 hectares had been acquired by the Trustees Executors & Agency Company and the viticulturist, François Robert de Castella, then an occupant of *Chartersville*.²⁰ This property included all the land between Burke Road North (west), Gruyere Crescent (south), The Boulevard (east), and McArthur Road (north). It was advertised as the 'Charteris Estate' and split into two subdivisions. A few lots gradually sold from September. The subject property formed part of the larger section.²¹ At this time, according to a contemporary aerial photograph, much of Burke Road North had yet to be laid out and the area between Lower Heidelberg Road and the Yarra presented as cleared farmland.²²

The subject allotment (no 10) was one of 40 home sites offered for sale in March 1939. The location was noted as the 'finest hill on the river boulevard'.²³ A description of the sale follows:

Good prices were obtained at the auction sale of 40 allotments in the Charteris Estate, East Ivanhoe ... About 600 persons attended The estate is bounded by the Boulevard, on the north side of the Yarra River, opposite Burke road bridge, and has an extensive outlook over Camberwell and North Balwyn.²⁴

All 40 lots were sold at auction.²⁵ In May 1939, the subject land was transferred to Ernest William Capuano, an engineer and (company) director of Elizabeth Street.²⁶ Around this time, the City of Heidelberg had issued a by-law allowing for the construction of brick veneer houses (previously frowned upon) in the area provided the floor area exceeded the prescribed

¹³ W Joy, 'Walker, Thomas (1804-1886)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1967, available online

¹⁴ Garden, *Heidelberg: The Land and its People*, p34

¹⁵ He was also the father of multifarious Thomas Alexander Browne, celebrated during the late 19th century as the novelist 'Rolfe Boldrewood'.

¹⁶ Garden, *Heidelberg: The Land and its People*, pp31-2

¹⁷ Garden, *Heidelberg: The Land and its People*, pp41-2

¹⁸ 'Incendiarism', *Australasian*, 15 April 1865, p6

¹⁹ Certificate of Title, vol 2142, folio 233

²⁰ Certificate of Title, vol 5435, folio 947

²¹ LP12704. The SLV has several holdings relating to the Charteris Estate, most of which are not available on-line. The name of the estate was being used by 1916 for sales of land west of Burke Road North.

²² Landata, Project no 131, Run 17, Frame 3328, December 1931

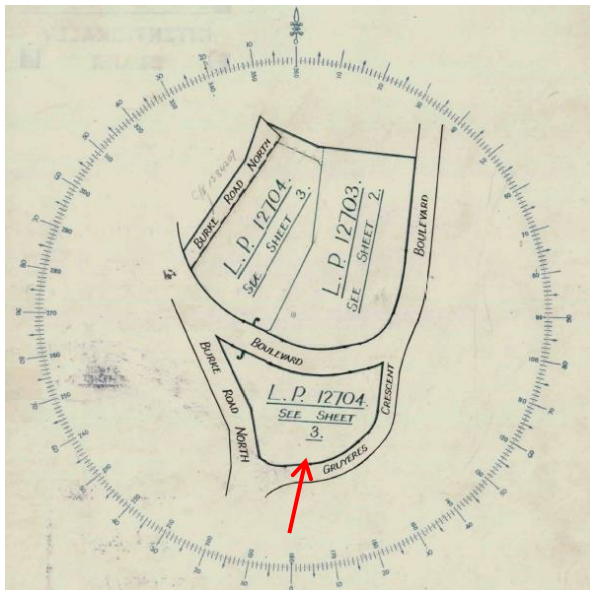
²³ Age, 11 March 1939, p3

²⁴ 'East Ivanhoe Sale', *Argus*, 27 March 1939, p2

²⁵ 'The Week in Real Estate', *Herald*, 29 March 1939, p22

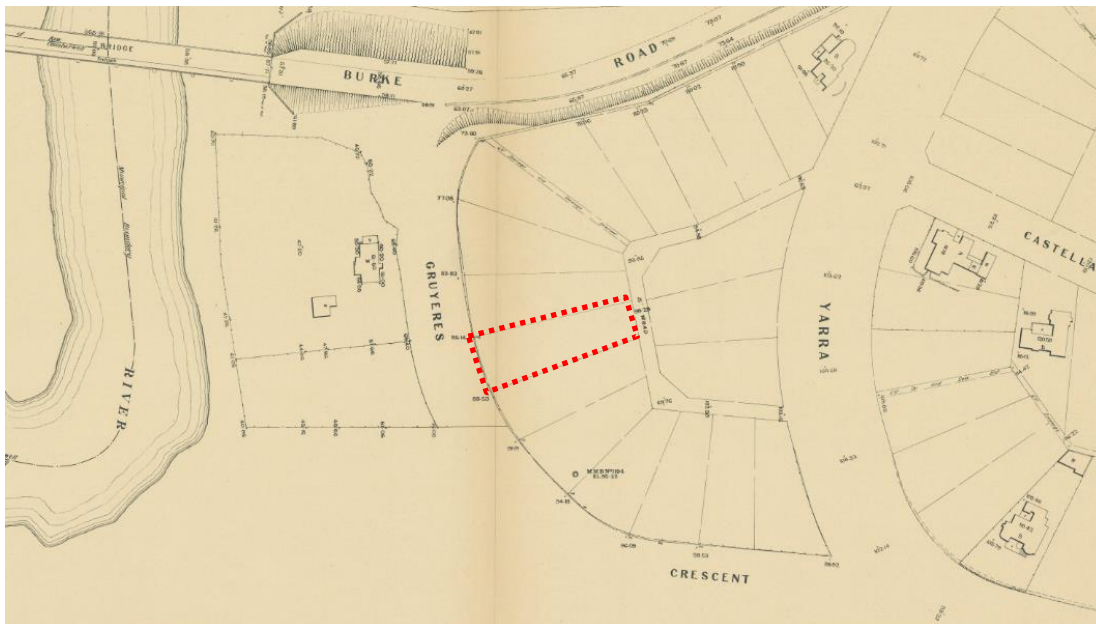
²⁶ Certificate of Title, vol 6302, folio 247

minimum by 15 per cent.²⁷ However, the official declaration of war in September and the virtual cessation of private building from December 1940, together with postwar restrictions and rationing, appear to have delayed development at the property.



Charteris Estate subdivision, 1928, showing the two distinct parts
Approximate location of Willis House is indicated by the red arrow
(Source: Certificate of Title, vol 5435, folio 947)

A 1941 MMBW plan shows that no construction had occurred along Gruyere Crescent, which in reality had not even been established (see 1945 aerial photograph below), although a few lots to the north had been developed. Construction in Gruyere Crescent only started in earnest during the late 1940s, possibly buoyed by the provision of sewerage in Ivanhoe East in mid-1949.²⁸



MMBW detail plan 4825, dated 1941
Subject allotment outlined in dashed red – north is to right of frame
(Source: SLV)

²⁷ 'Brick Veneer Houses', *Recorder* (Port Pirie, SA), 6 June 1940, p4

²⁸ *Argus*, 13 July 1949, p20



1945 aerial photograph, showing approximate location of subject site
(Source: Ringwood AIC, Zone 7, Photo-map 849-a1, The University of Melbourne)

In November 1948, the title was transferred to Albert Alexander Willis of Dickens Street, Elwood, then a married leather merchant.²⁹ Willis had been born in 1909 in Clifton Hill. He had served in the Militia Forces from 1926 to 1934, enlisting in the Citizen Air Force of the RAAF in October 1942. At that time, he described himself as a 'Master Builder':

with six years practical experience in the construction of all types of domestic structures from timber framed dwellings to three storey brick residences including the preparation of plans and specifications.³⁰

Willis was awarded the Pacific Star for his service in 1945. His wife, Rosalind, was a singer who had studied at the Sydney Conservatorium. References to her activities were frequently noted in the 'Society' sections of the daily newspapers.

The *Willis House* was constructed in 1950.³¹ The residence was an early commission for the eminent architect Robin Boyd,³² then in his early thirties and in solo practice while also running the RVIA Small Homes Service which provided a wide range of inexpensive architect-designed plans. It seems likely that *Willis House* was designed during 1949 as Boyd spent much of 1950 travelling in Europe with his wife.³³

No drawings or other documentation relating to this project has been unearthed.³⁴ This lack makes it probable that *Willis House* was neither documented to working drawings nor supervised by Boyd. This circumstance may have arisen as Willis – a former/current (unclear) contractor – likely undertook the build himself. Owner-builders were widespread in the postwar years, as professional builders were expensive and difficult to procure.

²⁹ Certificate of Title, vol 6302, folio 247. Willis had married Rosalind Mary Spriggs in Balmain (Sydney) in 1932 in what appears to have been a military ceremony. One contemporary description ran: 'an arch of swords was formed by fellow-officers as the bride and groom left the church'. ('Arch of Steel', *Sun* (Sydney), 24 December 1932, p7)

³⁰ NAA, series A9300 (RAAF Officers Personnel Files, 1921-1948), barcode 5241738, Service Number – 119623

³¹ Valuation record provided by the City of Banyule.

³² This claim was made in the 2015 sale notice. Correspondence with the Robin Boyd Foundation, 10 March 2021. An inspection by noted authorities on Boyd – Tony Lee and Phillip Goad – at the time of the sale confirmed it was likely.

³³ Geoffrey Serle, *Robin Boyd: A Life*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1995, pp108-111

³⁴ Banyule Council have no drawings, etc. No record of this house is evident in the *Grounds, Romberg and Boyd collection*, MS 133363, [SLV] or is held by the Robin Boyd Foundation (Correspondence with RBF, 10 March 2021)



Albert Alexander Willis
(Source: NAA, series A9300)



Miss Rosalind Spriggs
(Source: *Sydney Mail*, 18 January 1933, p20)

Neither Alexander or Rosalind Willis was listed at the subject address in the Victorian electoral rolls until 1955 or in the *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria* until at least 1960.³⁵ However, the extant footprint of *Willis House* is evident in a 1954 aerial photograph, along with the laundry block, although the garage to the rear lane appears absent. The residence's primary roof shows a dark colouring, suggesting it was surfaced with 'Malthoid' (bituminous felt), a material Boyd utilised extensively in the absence of steel sheeting that could clad flat/low-pitched roofs. Malthoid became notorious for its failure under Melbourne's intense UV radiation. This aerial photograph also depicts several other completed houses in Gruyere Crescent. Most of these remain but are of a markedly different ilk to the Willis House, illustrating more conventional and common cream-brick veneer designs with pitched roofs.



1954 aerial photograph
Willis House is indicated by the red arrow
Note the unformed nature of Gruyere Crescent
(Source: Landata, Project no 174, Run 15, Frame 75)

³⁵ Victorian electoral roll, Division of Batman, Subdivision of Ivanhoe. Neither Albert or Mary Willis were listed along Gruyere Crescent in 1952 or 1953. The 1954 edition was not available at the SLV. *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria*, various editions.

The garage to Gruyere Lane was likely built during the latter part of the 1950s as suggest by the cream brick palette. Similarly, the cypress trees to the front west boundary are also not evident on the 1954 aerial but as well-established specimens, were likely planted soon after. No other major changes are known to have been undertaken at the *Willis House*.

The residence appears to have been envisioned as the permanent postwar family home for Albert and Rosalind, after raising their two children at the site, remained in occupation until at least 1990.³⁶

Robin Boyd (1919-71)

Robin Gerard Penleigh Boyd was one of Australia's pre-eminent architects, cultural critics and public educators. His prominence and influence were such that he was one of the few architects to have become a household during and after the postwar period, attaining a broad reputation – rare for his profession – as a public intellectual. His life and work have been subject to comprehensive academic review.³⁷

Born into the famous Melbourne artistic family, Boyd's father Penleigh was a highly regarded landscape painter who designed and built the family home, *The Robins*, in North Warrandyte in 1913. His mother Edith Susan (*née* Anderson) was also an accomplished artist, especially at drawing.³⁸

After Boyd's father's death in 1923, the family moved to a flat in Toorak then a brick bungalow in East Malvern from where he undertook his secondary school education. He studied architecture at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT) and the University of Melbourne before being articled to the leading practice of A & K Henderson. Boyd's burgeoning interest in modernism often put him at loggerheads with the conservative forces in the profession, especially through his nascent critiquing activities in *Smudges*. Boyd worked as an assistant for (Sir) Roy Grounds during the late 1930s.

In 1941, Boyd married Patricia (*née* Madder) and served in Queensland and Papua New Guinea during the Second World War. Subsequently, he began solo practice and entered into a short-lived, unofficial partnership with Kevin Petherbridge and Francis Bell as Associated Architects. Between 1947 and 1953, he became the founding director of the pioneering and inventive RVIA Small Homes Service, which provided contemporary architectural outcomes to the public at an affordable price. The services support by the *Age* newspaper provided Boyd with a popular weekly column and, over hundreds of pithy but pointed articles, he projected his vision of urban design, taste and 'modern' living into the public discourse.³⁹ At this time, Boyd designed his first house in Camberwell in 1947 and published the first of several provocative books, *Victorian Modern*. Other publications now regarded as classics include *Australia's Home* (1952) and *The Australian Ugliness* (1960).

In 1953, Boyd formed the partnership of a generation – Grounds, Romberg & Boyd – with Roy Burman Grounds and Swiss-trained émigré architect Frederick Romberg, though they tended to work separately. This resolutely modernist practice dissolved in 1962 with the bitter wrangle over the National Gallery of Victoria and Cultural Centre commission, which was taken by Grounds. Romberg & Boyd continued until Boyd's sudden death.⁴⁰ His awards and honours were numerous.

Boyd's celebrated architectural output was prodigious and was almost exclusively residential. Several of his houses are seminal modernist works and he explored a range of ideas about enclosure with them. He is famed for the singularity of many of his designs, including his second home in Toorak of 1957, which has been purchased as museum/design foundation.

Thematic Context

Context, *Banyule Thematic Environmental History*, October 2018:

- Theme 5: Suburban development

See also Allom Lovell & Associates, *Banyule Heritage Place Study: An Urban History*, vol. 1, July 1999:

- 6.4 Post-War Residential Development

³⁶ Albert and Rosalind became joint proprietors in 1963 (Certificate of Title, vol 6302, folio 247). After Rosalind's death in 1989, Albert appears to have remained at the site (Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, Registration no. 17003/1989, ancestry.com.au).

³⁷ The literature on Boyd is extensive – Serle, *Robin Boyd: A Life* is the definitive biography; see also 'Robin Boyd: Special Issue', *Transition*, no 38, 1992; and Goad, 'Boyd, Robin', in Goad and Julie Willis, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp100-2

³⁸ Marjorie J Tipping, 'Boyd, Theodore Penleigh (1890–1923)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1979, available online

³⁹ Neil Clerehan, 'Boyd, Robin Gerard (1919–1971)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1993, available online

⁴⁰ Philip Goad, 'Grounds, Romberg & Boyd', *Melbourne Architecture*, 1999, pp250-1

Comparative Analysis

Four houses designed by Boyd are currently included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay in Banyule. Three of these heritage places date to the mid-1950s when he was part of the practice of Grounds, Romberg and Boyd (HO110, HO148, HO160). The other, *Featherston House* (HO65), was constructed in 1968 and represented a different phase of his output.

Willis House pre-dates the mid-1950s group by about four years and is representative of Boyd's postwar work as a solo practitioner. Boyd's other known projects in the municipality are shop/supermarket at 73 Haig Street, West Heidelberg (1954, since demolished) and *Burgess House*, Ivanhoe (1965), which alterations have severely compromised.

The following HOs are broadly comparable to *Willis House*:

- *Victor & Peggy Stone House*, 22 Mount Eagle Road, Ivanhoe, 1954 (HO110) – obscured from the street with a garden designed by Ellis Stones, this two-storey house is also located on a sloping site. Much of the façade is blank with a combined entry canopy and carport. The brickwork was bagged and there were brise-soleil (sunscreens) to the large rear window wall, which took in the views to the east.
- *Holford House*, 14 Hardy Terrace, Ivanhoe, 1955 (HO148) – also located on a steep slope, *Holford House* explored a combination of key ideas or formats he explored at this time, encompassing a parasol roof with a U-shaped pod beneath about a central courtyard. This house similarly has a carport to the front and incorporates breeze block grille/screens into the bagged brick walls.
- *Joseph Simpson House*, 35 Douglas Street, Rosanna 1958 (HO160) – located on a tapering corner site and partly obscured, it similarly has an elongated form with salmon brick walls to the most visible parts of the site and is largely glazed otherwise. The beams of the roof framing are less prominent, with a fascia across their ends and a panel to the upper part of the wall so while the walls are tall, they are not full height and have a different unit configuration.
- *Featherston House*, 22 The Boulevard, Ivanhoe (HO65) – designed by Robin Boyd in 1968 for Grant and Mary Featherstone, notable industrial and furniture designers, it received a posthumous citation in the RAIA (Victoria) awards of 1972. This iconic house of tan brick with reinforced concrete floors is defined by a series of elevated platforms to a large 'garden room' featuring a full, double-height window wall to the rear. From the street, it has an unassuming presence, with a garage effectively screening it.

An array of architect-designed modernist houses are included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay for Banyule. Most originate in the 1950s and reflect the multiplying version of mid-century modernism. The dominant influence of the International Style is prevalent, particularly its preference for rectangular footprints, cuboid forms and stripped-down aesthetic; for instance, 10 Alexandra Street, Greensborough (HO136) by Moore and Hammond, 1957. Others reveal the period's growing interest in the modular derivation of the plan, with steel or timber framing and lightweight panelling and bands of glazing. A key example of specific geometry is the 1954 *Snelleman House* (HO36 + VHR H2282) in Ivanhoe East by architects Peter and Dione McIntyre, often referred to as the 'Coil House'.

Only one example – *Woodburn House*, 1/11 Hughes Street, Montmorency (HO159) – predates the *Willis House*. It designed in 1948 by architecture student William Woodburn in mudbrick on a concrete raft slab (an early example thereof) and was praised for its approach to the materials shortages by Boyd. It has a flat roof with large banks of windows.

Collectively, these varied examples of modernism provide insight into the forces of modernity that shaped the district following the Second World War, particularly shifting sociocultural and economic factors and the willingness of some residents to interact with then unconventional design culture and novel lifestyle patterns.

Intactness

Highly Intact

Previous Assessment

- RBA Architects + Conservation Consultants, *Banyule Heritage Study 2020: Stage 1 report*, Banyule City Council, August 2020 – High priority, recommended for Stage 2

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	Yes (bagged brickwork)
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and/or fences	No

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent of the heritage overlay is outlined approximately below.



Recommended extent of heritage overlay
(Source: Nearmap, March 2021)