
WILLAROO

Location

Nareen-Coleraine Road NAREEN, Southern Grampians Shire

Municipality

SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

Level of significance

Stage 2 study complete

Heritage Listing

Southern Grampians Shire

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 8, 2003

What is significant?

Willaroo is a large single storey rendered brick house situated in an extensive landscaped garden. The house is approached by a long winding drive, which crosses Corea Creek, and rises gently to a white painted gateway, which marks the start of the formal garden. The house is effectively screened from the surrounding farmland by perimeter plantings, including *Populus nigra* 'Italica'. The house is approached by a circular driveway, which curves through a formal landscape of lawns, border plantings, and mature specimen trees.

Designed in 1936 by the prestigious Melbourne architectural firm Yuncken Freeman, the house is positioned so that the main rooms take advantage of the views over the garden. To the left of the entrance hall, the sitting room has been designed on a grand scale, with large windows and a door providing access to the garden. The dining room also provides a vista to another aspect of the garden via a covered porch. The main bedrooms are located to the right of the entrance hall, and all have an outlook to the front garden. Additional bedrooms, bathrooms and storage spaces look to a rear courtyard, which has been landscaped in the 1980s with a formal rose garden. The large service wing at the rear, including the kitchen and laundry, have been remodelled in the 1990s. The rear garden is screened from a series of sheds beyond by a tall hedge.

Claude and Shirley Austin originally established the extensive formal garden at Willaroo in the late 1930s. In 1937 Edna Walling was commissioned to design the garden, but the extent to which her plans were implemented is limited. The garden composition is distinctive for its use of sweeping curved driveways, which intersect with broad lawns, formal and informal bed, and clusters of trees to create a series of appealing vistas.

A tennis court is located to the north west of the homestead. It is believed that the tennis court may be one of the only features of Edna Walling's 1937 plan to be implemented.

The collection of ornamental and native botanical specimens at Willaroo is extensive, with fine examples of ornamental tree plantings including: Iowa crab (*Malus ionesis*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Heterophylla') and Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea'), all located around the central lawn. More unusual plantings include Snow berry (*Amelanchier Canadensis*), a small tree highly favoured by Edna Walling in her 1930s designs, Washington Thorn (*Crataegus phanenopyrum*), Darwin Barbery (*Berberis darwinii*) and *Berberis x stenopylla*.

Two substantial specimens of Spotted Gum (*Eucalyptus maculata*) stand on either side of the entrance gates to the garden, and a substantial Giant Redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) defines the point of the teardrop shaped lawn.

A substantial and diverse rose garden is located in to the south of the house, which has long been admired for its variety of different types of *Rosa* species.

The garden retains a fair degree of integrity to the 1930s period, although some substantial changes have been made in the past ten years, particularly to the areas adjacent to the house. The garden is in very good condition, although some of the earlier specimen trees are diseased.

How is it significant?

Willaroo is of architectural, historical and aesthetic significance to the Shire of Southern Grampians.

Why is it significant?

It is of architectural and landscape significance as a fine early example of architectural firm Yuncken Freeman, and for the possible Edna Walling garden design which has been incorporated into an earlier garden. It is of historical significance for its association with Claude and Shirley Austin, who as well as being highly influential members of the local community, were also passionate naturalists, as well as amateur horticulturalists. Of further historical importance is the properties early links to the great pastoral properties of nearby Satimer and Wando Dale, of which the original two roomed cottage was potentially an outstation. The garden is one of the finest inter-war gardens in the whole of the Shire, including fine plantings of native and exotic trees, shrubs, grasses and bulbs. The whole of the complex is situated on a rise above Corea creek and has an important aesthetic impact on the otherwise relatively de-vegetated landscape.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Southern Grampians - Southern Grampians Shire Heritage Study, Timothy Hubbard P/L, Annabel Neylon, 2002;
Construction dates	1936,
Architect/Designer	Yuncken Freeman,
Hermes Number	23120
Property Number	

Physical Conditions

The house is in excellent condition, while the garden is in good condition.

Physical Description 1

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Historical Australian Themes

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

Theme 5: Working

5.8 Working on the land

Usage/Former Usage

Residential

Integrity

High degree of integrity to the house. The garden has undergone many changes, and its integrity is reasonable.

Physical Description 2

Alexander Cameron, pioneer pastoralist

Edna Walling, landscape designer and gardener

Claude Austin, naturalist and conservationist

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>