

# SOUTHERNWOOD



Southernwood\_Eltham\_entrance view\_KJ\_Dec 09



Southernwood\_Eltham\_rear view\_KJ\_Dec 09



Southernwood\_Eltham\_south of house with studio windows\_KJ\_Dec 09



Southernwood\_Eltham\_house from north-west\_KJ\_Dec 09



Southernwood\_Eltham\_return verandah\_KJ\_Dec 09



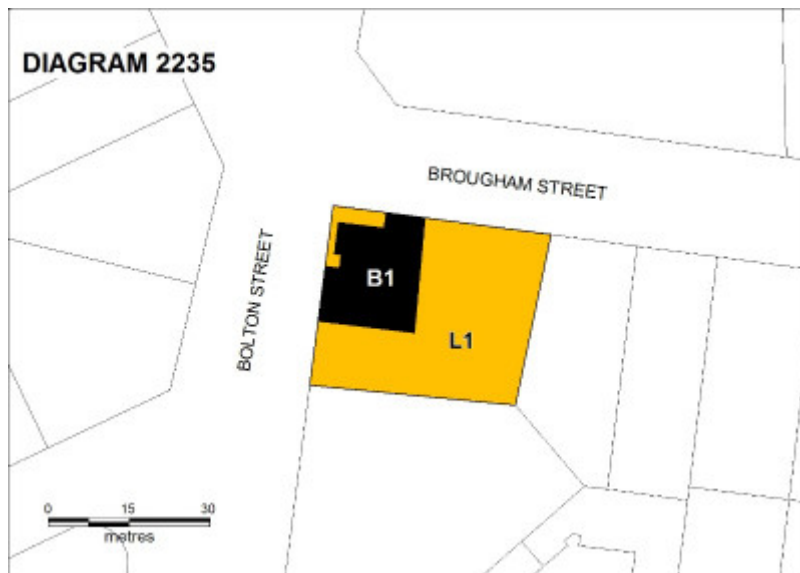
Southernwood



Southernwood rear view



2016\_View.jpg



southernwood.jpg

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### Location

250 BOLTON STREET ELTHAM, NILLUMBIK SHIRE

### Municipality

NILLUMBIK SHIRE

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2235

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO13

### VHR Registration

April 8, 2010

### Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 17, 2017

What is significant?

Southernwood was first built as a four room cottage in 1891, and in 1903 it was purchased by the artist Walter Withers (1854-1914), an Englishman who migrated to Victoria in 1883. Withers was a painter, illustrator and teacher, and one of the founders of the Heidelberg School of Australian art, the first to realistically and sensitively depict the Australian landscape. He lived and painted extensively in the Heidelberg area in the 1890s, and also established a city studio in Collins Street. He won the first Wynne Prize for landscape painting in 1897 for 'The Storm', and won again in 1900 for 'Still Autumn'. Payment for the Art Nouveau style murals painted in 1902 for the entrance hall at William Manifold's house Purrumbete allowed Withers to buy Southernwood as a home for his family. He made substantial additions to the house including a large studio which is the earliest known purpose built artist studio in Victoria. An entrance hall linking the studio to the house was also constructed, as well as a kitchen, a bedroom wing and a new bay window in the room adjacent to the entrance hall. The design of the interiors was possibly influenced by the architect Guyon Purchas's work at Purrumbete. Withers lived during the week in the city and on weekends and holidays travelled to semi-rural Eltham, which provided him with a wealth of subject matter. He died at Southernwood in 1914.

Southernwood is a single story weatherboard house with a corrugated iron roof, and with a return verandah on the west and north. At the core of the house is the original four-roomed cottage with a hipped roof, and to the south and east are gable-roofed additions. To the south, down a few steps from the entrance hall, is Withers' studio, a large timber-lined room with a plate rail around the wall, with an inglenook with a bench seat on each side at one end, and well lit by a large high rectangular window above a double hung sash window in the south wall. The house retains many original and early twentieth century features, such as timber and canvas lined walls, Art Nouveau inspired timber fireplace surrounds and leadlight windows, and a large timber cupboard in the rear hallway. The original kitchen has been demolished, and a new kitchen, bathroom and living room added at the rear.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people.

How is it significant?

Southernwood is of historical and architectural significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Southernwood is of historical significance as the home and studio of the artist Walter Withers from 1903 until his death in 1914. Withers was one of the most important Australian painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was a leader of the Heidelberg School, the first major local artistic movement in Australia, which had a great influence on the history of Australian art, particularly landscape painting. Walter Withers was considered to be the most versatile and educated member of the Heidelberg School, and his presence and the artists he attracted to Eltham initiated a strong artistic tradition in the area during the twentieth century. [Criterion A]

Southernwood is of architectural significance for its fine and intact early twentieth century artist's studio with an Arts and Crafts influenced interior. [Criterion A]

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Construction dates	1891, 1904, 1948,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	WALTER WITHERS HOUSE,
Hermes Number	120079
Property Number	

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## History

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The Heidelberg School was an Australian art movement of the late 19th century. It originated in July 1891, when the art critic Sidney Dickinson wrote a review of the exhibitions of works by Walter Withers and Arthur Streeton. Dickinson noted that these artists, whose works were mostly painted in the Heidelberg area, could be considered as 'The Heidelberg School'. Since that time, The Heidelberg School has taken on a wider meaning and covers Australian artists of the late nineteenth century who painted *plein-air* in the impressionist tradition. These artists were inspired by the beautiful landscapes of the Yarra River and the unique light that typifies the Australian bush.

The most famous of the Heidelberg artists were Louis Buvelot, Charles Conder, Emanuel Phillips Fox, Eugene Von Guerard, Frederick McCubbin, Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Walter Withers. The works of these artists are notable, not only for their merits as compositions, but as part of Australia's historical record. The period immediately before Federation is the setting for many classic Australian historical stories of the "bush", both fact and fiction. The School's work provides a visual complement to these tales and their images have embedded themselves into Australia's historical subconscious.

#### WALTER HERBERT WITHERS (1854-1914)

[Andrew Mackenzie, 'Withers, Walter Herbert (1854 - 1914)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 12, Melbourne University Press, 1990, pp 551-553.]

Walter Withers, artist and teacher, was born in Warwickshire, England, one of fourteen children. He trained at the Royal Academy of Arts, before embarking for Australia, arriving in Melbourne in 1883.

After working on several country properties as a jackaroo for eighteen months, he moved to Melbourne where he enrolled in evening art classes at the Melbourne National Gallery school of painting under G. F. Folingsby. Employed as a draughtsman for lithographic printers, he produced portraits in black and white for several periodicals. His work was accepted for exhibition in the Old Academy, Melbourne. At this time he met Frederick McCubbin, Tom Roberts and Louis Abrahams who became lifelong friends.

Encouraged by Roberts to travel overseas, Withers left Melbourne for London in May 1887, having journeyed overland from Naples, via Paris. On 11 October 1887 he married Fanny Flinn, and soon after, they departed for Paris, where they lived for six months, while he studied with Australian artists E. Phillips Fox, Tudor St George Tucker and John Longstaff at the Academie Julian. On the weekends he toured Paris, visiting major galleries where he was impressed and influenced by the works of Bastien LePage, Monet, Manet and Anton Mauve.

Commissioned to illustrate *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne* by Edmund Finn, Withers and his wife returned to Melbourne in June 1888. They rented a cottage at Kew where Withers established a studio and met the artists Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder, Arthur Loureiro and George Rossi Ashton. While his wife revisited England in 1889, Withers shared with Roberts and Streeton the old farmhouse on the Mount Eagle Estate at Eaglemont. His attempts to organize his fellow artists earned him the nickname 'Colonel'. In 1890 the Withers family moved into the mansion, Charterisville, at Heidelberg, where Withers established a studio and sub-let cottages to other artists. In April 1891 he also established a city studio in Collins Street, took private pupils and in May held a successful major exhibition there. With the onset of the 1890s depression, black-and-white work became scarce and Withers contemplated returning to England, but decided to stay when McCubbin found him teaching positions at three schools.

In 1893 Withers taught at Creswick, where Percy and Norman Lindsay were among his pupils. Next year he rented a house in Heidelberg, and produced some of his finest work: 'A Bright Winter's Morning' (1894), 'Tranquil Winter' (1895) and 'The Storm' (1896) which won the first Wynne prize for landscape painting in 1897. He again won the prize in 1900 with 'Still Autumn'. 'Tranquil Winter' was exhibited in the colonial art exhibition held in London in 1898.

After rekindling friendships with pastoralists Edmund Smith and W. T. Manifold, Smith invited Withers to paint at his properties at Point Henry and Cowes, while Manifold commissioned him to produce six large, historic, Art Nouveau panels as a mural for Purrumbete, then being extensively altered to designs by the architect Guyon Purchas.

In 1904-05 Withers was president of the Victorian Artists' Society, later joining a group of fellow professional artists who formed the Australian Art Association in 1912. He was one of the judges of the work of the National Gallery students for fourteen years and in 1912-14 was a trustee of the Public Library, museums and National Gallery of Victoria.

Withers died of cerebral thrombosis on 13 October 1914 at Eltham and was buried nearby in the Anglican churchyard at St Helena. His wife, four daughters and a son survived him.

In his art Withers developed his own distinctive, poetic style, capturing nature in all her moods, and reflecting his early interest in the works of the English water-colour artists Peter De Wint and David Cox. Critics have discerned the influence of Constable in Withers' sombre, low-toned, lyrical landscapes, and of the Impressionists in his use of broken colour, his preoccupation with light and his interest in the momentary and the commonplace. He is

represented in national, State and regional galleries, and in many private collections in Australia and abroad. An exhibition of his paintings was held in Collins House, Melbourne, in 1915, an Art Union of his paintings and those of his son Charles Meynell was held in May 1926, and a major retrospective exhibition of Withers' works was held in 1975 at the Geelong Art Gallery.

#### Select Bibliography

A. McCubbin, *The Life and Art of Walter Withers* (Melb, nd, c1920); C. B. Christesen (ed), *The Gallery on Eastern Hill* (Melb, 1970); M. Rich, *Walter Withers: A Survey*, exhibition catalogue (Geelong, 1975); J. Clark and B. Whitelaw, *Golden Summers* (Syd, 1985); A. Mackenzie, *Walter Withers: The Forgotten Manuscripts* (Melb, 1987); A. Mackenzie, *Walter Withers, 1854-1914: A Biographical Sketch* (manuscript, 1989, privately held); National Trust of Australia, *Trust News*, Sept 1987; *Age* (Melbourne), 26 July 1958, 21 July 1987; Withers papers (State Library of Victoria); R. McCann papers (State Library of Victoria); private information. More on the resources

#### HISTORY OF PLACE

Southernwood was built in 1891 for Julia Harby, the owner from 1891 until 1901, and it was occupied by John Harby, a labourer. The house then was probably a four-roomed cottage.

Payment for the commission for the murals at Purrumbete for William Manifold, completed in 1902, provided Withers with the means to buy Southernwood, then on 2½ acres (1 ha), to which he added a studio. He taught art on week days in Melbourne, and was reliant on the railways for transport. Because of ill health, he lived during the week at his studio in Oxford Chambers, Melbourne, and on weekends and holidays with his family at Eltham, then in a semi-rural situation. The completion of the railway to Eltham, in 1903, allowed him to travel there easily.

Several additions were made to the house during Withers' occupation. He first added the large studio on the southern side of the house, and probably a kitchen east of the studio and the entrance hall linking the studio to the rest of the house. A photo of his daughter Nan in the studio is thought to have been taken in c1904. An addition with two bedrooms and a bathroom was also made (possibly later) to the east of the house. The design of the interiors of the additions was possibly influenced by Guyon Purchas's work at Purrumbete, and there are similarities for example in the design of the fireplace surrounds and in the Art Nouveau-inspired hinges used for the large cupboard in the bedroom corridor.

Further extensions were made at the rear in 1948, probably the living area joining the kitchen, since rebuilt, to the rear bedroom section. Alterations have also been made at the front, with the addition of a bay window to the lounge room and a new entrance porch.

#### Assessment Against Criteria

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

Southernwood was the home from 1903 until his death in 1914 of Walter Withers, one

of Australia's most important artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He played an influential role in the development of Australian art, and his move to Eltham attracted many artists to an area which was to become a focus of artistic activity in Victoria in the twentieth century.

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

Southernwood is important for the retention of the studio built for Walter Withers, which is an outstanding example of an early twentieth century artist's studio.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Southernwood was the home and studio of the artist Walter Withers from 1903 until his death in 1914. Withers was a leader of the Heidelberg School, the first major local artistic movement in Australia, which had a great influence on the history of Australian art, particularly landscape painting. Walter Withers was considered to be the most versatile and educated member of the Heidelberg School.

## **Plaque Citation**

This was the home from 1903 until his death in 1914 of the artist Walter Withers, one of the founders of the Heidelberg School of art, who extended the 1891 house and added the large artist's studio in c1904.

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All of the building marked B1 on Diagram 2235 Held by the Executive Director.
2. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2235 Held by the Executive Director being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 9271 Folio 855.

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*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/>*