
The Bend Precinct

Location

1607 Burwood Highway and 1609 Burwood Highway and 1611 Burwood Highwa and 1613 Burwood Highway and 1615 Burwood Highway BELGRAVE, YARRA RANGES SHIRE

Municipality

YARRA RANGES SHIRE

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO408

Heritage Listing

Yarra Ranges Shire

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is Significant?

The Bend precinct is located on the northern side of Burwood Highway, Belgrave, set around a picturesque bend or turn in the road known locally as 'The Bend'. The precinct is on the high side of the Highway, and elevated above the main road. It comprises five properties in total, being a group of five consecutive residences. The properties all largely date from the early 1920s; share a range of valued built form and architectural characteristics including those derived from the 'bungalow' and 'hills bungalow' types; and have been a prominent and highly visible collection of buildings sited at the entrance to Belgrave for over 80 years.

How is it Significant?

The Bend precinct is of historical and aesthetic/architectural significance to the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

Why is it Significant?

The Bend precinct is of local historical significance. Buildings in the precinct generally date from the early 1920s, when Belgrave was undergoing a change from a modest timber township into a tourist destination, aided significantly by the extension of the railway from Upper Fern Tree Gully in 1900. Guest houses and often

substantial holiday homes, as per the subject houses, were established in this period, together with shops, coffee palaces, cinemas and cafes, which all serviced the burgeoning tourist trade. The Bend houses were also prominently located and highly visible on approach to the township, emphasised by their featuring in historic images and postcards. Their location in the evocatively named 'The Bend' additionally reinforces the value attributed to this picturesque bend in the road on the way into Belgrave.

The Bend precinct is also of local aesthetic/architectural significance. Important built form characteristics shared by the dwellings include their adaptation to the hilly topography and irregularly shaped allotments; their elevated siting to maximise views; and in some cases angled orientation to the street. The houses can also incorporate several internal levels; have side entries; and are enlivened by projecting bays and faceted bay windows, dormers and decorated gables, and verandahs. Roofscapes include prominent gables and pitches, with some complex forms, and bracketed eaves.

Other important precinct characteristics include heavily vegetated blocks on steep allotments to the curved alignment of Burwood Highway, often with mature trees to the rears and sides of properties, providing a backdrop to the houses. These attributes enhance the experience of the precinct on the approach to Belgrave, and combined with the orientation of the properties and the spaces between buildings, afford views of the houses 'in the round'. The precinct also has elevated walkways and embankments reflecting the change in levels, built up or contained behind retaining walls clad in local field stone, and at different grade to Burwood Highway.

Architecturally, The Bend houses are all linked to what was often known in early twentieth century Australia as the 'bungalow'. This building form was increasingly characterised as 'Californian', although Australian bungalows of the period mixed a range of contemporary approaches, including the Greenes' Pasadena bungalow, the 'Craftsman' or East Coast America bungalow, British Arts and Crafts influences, as well as elements of earlier Australian Federation architecture. More specifically, The Bend houses can also be regarded as a 'hills bungalow' type, with many similar dwellings built locally in the early 1920s which often served as mountain holiday houses. Moreover, the hills bungalow as a type can be traced back even further to the single-storied house with prominent verandah commonly found in India, which was a form popularised throughout the then British Empire and southern United States by visiting troops and government officials.

Heritage Act Categories Registered place,

Hermes Number 165945

Property Number

Physical Conditions

The precinct is located on the northern side of Burwood Highway, set around a bend in the road near the entrance to the Belgrave township from Melbourne. The precinct is on the high side of the Highway, and elevated above the main road. It comprises five properties in total, being a group of five consecutive residences.

The important characteristics of the precinct are also evident in other residential areas of Belgrave and the Dandenong Ranges generally, but are given focus here due to the prominence of these buildings and their highly exposed location at the 'gateway' to the township. The characteristics include the hilly topography, and the historical adaptation of the built form to the topography; mostly heavily vegetated blocks, with mature trees including on the rears and sides of properties, providing a backdrop to views of the houses; a winding street/road alignment; irregularly shaped allotments with in some cases an angled orientation of buildings on the allotments; and the elevated siting of buildings (including to maximise views). The precinct also has elevated walkways and embankments reflecting the change in levels, built up or contained behind retaining walls clad in local field stone, and at different grade to the road (Burwood Highway). The walkways also provide for views into the properties and the surrounding area.

This locally characteristic form of embanking pedestrian paths, and indeed property boundaries, appears to have originated during the post-WWII period and is also apparent throughout the main Belgrave shopping precinct and more broadly in the Dandenong Ranges, wherever there is hilly topography. The 1930s photograph of Main Street at Figure 6 shows a grassed embankment in front of 1615 Burwood Highway, with a timber-balustraded stair linking the footpath to the kerb. Today this has been replaced by a built-up stone-clad retaining wall with the footpath set above. A further embankment or retaining wall has been constructed at the 'bend' itself, from a point just below 1607 Burwood Highway, and rising towards the neighbouring properties to the west.

The subject properties are generally substantial in size and setback to a greater or lesser degree from the property boundary. The irregular shape and topography of some of the allotments has also had an influence on the siting and presentation of the houses, which are elevated and oriented to take advantage of views to the west and south; they can also incorporate several internal levels from enclosed underfloor spaces through to rooms placed in pitched roofs and gables. The houses can have side entries, and are enlivened by projecting bays and faceted bay windows, dormers and decorated gables, and verandahs. Roofscapes include prominent gables and pitches, with some complex forms, and bracketed eaves; chimneys are not prominent elements. The underfloor areas of the houses have also variously been enclosed with horizontal timber slats or infilled and incorporated into the floor plan.

The scale of the properties would indicate that the original or early owners were relatively affluent, and indeed, the largest house of the group, 1615 Burwood Highway, was a doctor's residence. Rate books research also indicates that generally the early owners/occupants had a Melbourne address indicating that the dwellings were most likely constructed as holiday homes. The subject properties also establish a strong contrast with nearby buildings outside the precinct boundary, including the more modestly scaled dwellings on the 'low' side of Burwood Highway, and more contemporary development to the west on the Highway. Many of the former properties (on the 'low' side of the Highway) are broadly contemporary with the subject houses but tend not to be as substantial, are below road level and/or behind thick vegetation, and accordingly are not as prominent and have restricted visibility.

Abutting the east end of the precinct on Burwood Highway is the site of the former Austral Hall, which was located in a larger property associated with the St Thomas More Catholic primary school.

Materials

Originally, all of the buildings were constructed of weatherboard, fibro cement sheet, or roughcast render above a timber plinth; shingled and half-timbered gables are also evident; roofs are clad in corrugated galvanised steel. Of these, 1609 Burwood Highway has been clad with a form of cement planking, emulating wide weatherboards. The front portion of 1613 Burwood Highway has also been clad in cream brick with manganese brick trims, and a similarly treated garage constructed within the underfloor area. The rear portion of the residence, partly visible from the footpath, is of weatherboard.

Fences

The precinct is characterised by a variety of open or permeable fence treatments, ranging from the paddock fencing and cyclone wire fencing to 1607 and 1619 Burwood Highway, to the timber picket fencing to 1613 and part of 1615 Burwood Highway. No. 1609 Burwood Highway has no formal fencing treatment and that to 1615 is part picket, framing a pergola entry and garden bed embanking behind rockwork. This last is not the original or early treatment which appears to have been a hedge possibly set behind an openwork twisted wire fence form. The rendered masonry fence to 1611 Burwood Highway is original or early, and is clearly visible in a number of early photographs of the property. It has a solid plinth (retaining wall) with a steel balustrade above linking rendered piers topped by cement globes. Previously the fence adjoined a garage at street level, also visible in early photographs, and since demolished. It is considered to be an important element, contributing to the significance of the property.

Alterations

The properties variously exhibit evidence of some change and modification, including the application of non-original cladding material to exteriors, or parts of exteriors, as noted above; and the addition of a prominent bay to the front of 1611 Burwood Highway, replacing a former enclosed verandah area and lower ground floor bay, visible in the photograph at Figure 6. However, these alterations have not impacted to an unacceptable degree on the original interwar bungalow character of the buildings, and have generally been undertaken in a reasonably

sympathetic manner, including repeating or maintaining the original detailing or style. While the cladding in cream brick of 1613 Burwood Highway has had more impact, in introducing a building material not seen elsewhere in the precinct, the original form of the visible front portion of the house is still discernible.

Picturesque qualities

The characteristics outlined above combine to give the subject buildings a visual prominence, apparent from both the roadway and the adjoining pedestrian pathway. The siting and orientation of the properties, the spaces between buildings, and the curve in the road, also results in some instances in the side elevations coming into view first on approach. As such the buildings are generally perceived more 'in the round' than buildings set within a typical level and linear streetscape. Historic images at Figures 4-6 also emphasise this, with the houses shown in their picturesque treed and garden settings, and providing a pleasing aspect to passers by including visitors approaching Belgrave. The very fact that the subject houses are located in an area known as 'The Bend', and were captured in these early images, including postcards, further reinforces their visual interest and an appreciation of their picturesque qualities.

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.

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