

# GUMNUTS COTTAGE



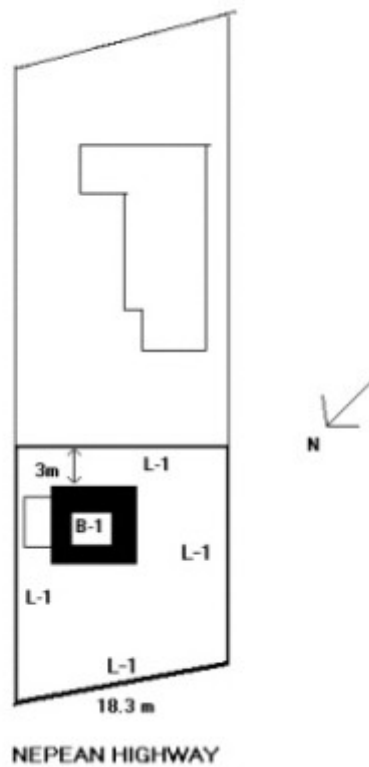
GUMNUTS SOHE 2008



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1 gumnuts frankston entrance



gumnuts frankston plan

## Location

619 NEPEAN HIGHWAY FRANKSTON SOUTH, FRANKSTON CITY

## Municipality

FRANKSTON CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1328

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO24

## VHR Registration

August 14, 1997

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 13, 1999

What is significant?

Gumnuts Cottage is a one-roomed cottage designed by Walter Burley Griffin 1919. The small pyramidal structure was built as the prototype example of Griffin's patented Knitlock system, comprising concrete wall segments and cement single roofing tiles. It conforms to Griffin's principles regarding his segmental architecture, being built to a modular ribbed design, with the Knitlock wall segments interlocked vertically and horizontally with staggered internal and external joints. The 3.5 foot (1.1 m) modular design gave standardised window and door openings of 2.5 feet (0.8 m). The internal wall surfaces required no veneer of tiles, plaster, textile, paper, enamel or paint (except for decorative purposes). Gumnuts was built as one of a pair of cottages, however the other, known as Marnham Cottage, was demolished in 1983.

How is it significant?

Gumnuts is of architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Gumnuts is architecturally important as a substantially intact and rare surviving example of Walter Burley Griffin's segmental architecture. The small house is an excellent example of both Griffin's Knitlock system and his domestic oeuvre and it is the best surviving example of the one-roomed houses designed by Griffin. The building exists as both the simplest example of Griffin's domestic designs of the 1920s and also as an intact example. It was designed as a seaside retreat for his wife Marion and himself, and was later replicated at Pholiota, their home in Heidelberg. Gumnuts is significant as a rationalised and resolved example of the work of Walter Burley Griffin and documents some of the devices employed by Griffin to minimise expenditure. Griffin was resolute in his intention to build a quality house for the 'average man' and his practice of hinging windows and doors on coach screws, as evidenced by Gumnuts, was one way in which he achieved this. The Knitlock blocks themselves were inexpensive to manufacture, requiring no additional materials such as paint or plaster, and allowed flexibility in design, form and plan. Gumnuts is thought to be the earliest surviving example of the combined Knitlock roof and wall system.

## 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:

Nil

Construction dates	1919,
Architect/Designer	Griffin, Walter Burley,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	2493
Property Number	

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## History

Architect - Walter Burley Griffin

In the late nineteenth century, Chicago became the epicentre for a new school of architectural thought and practice. Emerging from under the mentorship of architect Louis Sullivan, a group of young architects, many practicing within the confines of Steinway Hall in central Chicago, exchanged and developed ideas through a network which would later become known as the 'Chicago Group'.

Walter Burley Griffin was born in 1876 in Maywood, Illinois and graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1899. After graduation, the young Griffin commenced practice with Dwight H. Perkins and Robert C. Spencer at Steinway Hall and began to develop ideas and concepts linking structures to their environment. Griffin had studied both town-planning and landscape design at university and these teachings became an integral part of his growth as an architect. In 1900, Griffin joined the office of Frank Lloyd-Wright and worked alongside Wright on both joint and individual projects. Marion Mahony, a skilled draughtswoman, also worked in Wright's office on drafting projects and interior and furnishing designs for Wright. In 1905, Griffin left Wright's practice, apparently disillusioned with Wright's employment conditions and methods of payment, and again practiced at Steinway Hall, however this time in an independent office. The first product of his new practice was Griffin's 'Peters' house in Chicago (1906) which, whilst utilising some of the Wright-inspired concepts of the

Prairie School, began to investigate the particular idiom of Griffin's own concepts. Expressions of central bold massing, later to become peculiar to Griffin's designs, cantilevered eaves and hipped roofs were characteristic of Griffin's work at this time.

Griffin and Mahony married in June 1911 and their union was a combining of "life and art". The two had worked on collaborative projects whilst together in Wright's office and this coalition continued throughout their married life. In 1911, Walter and Marion Griffin entered the international competition for Australia's Federal Capital and when the announcement was made that the Griffin's entry had won, world attention was focused on the Griffins and the Chicago Group. In 1912, William Greg Purcell wrote in the *Western Architect*, "...Mr Griffin is one of the two or three younger men who have been thoroughly trained for the new movement in architecture ... He has worked hard and stuck uncompromisingly to his ideals in the face of repeated discouragements". Griffin arrived in Canberra in 1913 and while his first visit lasted no more than three months, he was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction.

In May 1914, Walter and Marion Griffin arrived in Australia, accompanied by Walter's sister Genevieve and her husband Roy Lippincott, also an architect of the Chicago Group. The Griffins set up offices in both Melbourne and Sydney, although Walter was still intensely involved in the Canberra project. The year following the Griffins' arrival in Australia, G. Taylor, editor of *Building* ran a series of articles on contemporary architectural principles and theories and Marion contributed with a piece entitled "Democratic Architecture, Its Developments, Its Principles and Its Ideals".

In 1920, Griffin terminated his involvement with the Canberra project, having experienced on-going problems with Federal bureaucrats who wanted to seize control of the scheme, and began to focus more on domestic work programs. Griffin had laid out a small estate at Eaglemont in Victoria in 1915 which he had anticipated would provide him with a suitable landscape to plan his own home environment, this later became the site of 'Pholiota'. The Eaglemont project aimed to prove that "architecture and landscape should be designed together and inhabitants grouped by common interests".

In 1917, Griffin patented a new concrete block known as 'knitlock'. The knitlock blocks provided an inexpensive construction system which provided unlimited exploration of design, plan and form. In America, Frank Lloyd Wright was also exploring a concrete block system and whilst both architects argued originality, it would appear that an exchange of ideas occurred during the period of invention. Whilst both systems fundamentally explored the same concepts, Griffin's blocks used a panel and pier system and were lighter-weight than Wright's. Griffin declared that the concrete block construction method was cheaper than any other type of construction and believed it to provide a solution to the housing shortage after World War One. He did not believe it be a substitute for timber, brick or stone house, however it provided a viable alternative. The knitlock system also allowed an exploration of organic architectural forms and further applications of the Prairie style first as first developed by Wright.

Griffin's segmental system used two types of blocks, one known as the 'vertebral' and the other the 'tesseral'. The vertebral locked together to form the frame of the structure and the tesseral created the walls. The vertical sections locked together to form pillars, columns, chimneys, ducts, walls, corners, crossings and buttresses. The wall blocks interlocked to form a cellular wall with staggered internal and external joints. The size of the blocks and the lightness of construction allowed span without lintels. Griffin himself wrote: "Such freedom to deal with the general proportion, making an articulate pile out of the smallest type of building, is the great characteristic of Segmental Architecture". Griffin's aim with knitlock was to bring quality housing within the reach of the average man and whilst he was the main proponent, other architects also employed the knitlock system; DC Jenkins was responsible for 139 Manning Road in Malvern (1919) and JFW Ballantyne designed 'Stokesay' for Arthur P Onions in Frankston.

The Griffins' own knitlock home, 'Pholiota' was constructed c.1919 and became the prototype for knitlock housing. The floor plan was based on a 3'6" module and the bungalow-style house had a shallow hipped roof. Other knitlock houses by Griffin included the S.R. Salter house in Toorak which was designed 1922-23 and completed in 1924 and the Julian S Jefferies House in Surrey Hills Victoria, (1924). The "Home of Five Rooms" was developed by Griffin in Melbourne in 1920 and its plan form further articulated some of Griffin's concerns with space and form. Set on a small square plan, the house aimed to maximise internal space while interacting harmoniously with its external surrounds.

The Griffins' time in Melbourne also culminated in other significant architectural achievements, including Newman College - Parkville, Capitol House - Melbourne and the Essendon Incinerator complex. In 1921, the Griffins left

Melbourne and moved to Castlecrag on Sydney's north shore. Castlecrag was to become one of Griffin's most ambitious projects and was perhaps his definitive statement on architecture inspired by the Australian landscape.

By 1930, Griffin's practice had deteriorated and Griffin himself was suffering depression as a result of his work having been the subject of negative criticism. In 1935, the Griffins designed a scheme for Lucknow University in India and this was accepted soon after. In October 1935 Walter journeyed there to supervise the construction of the university and was later joined by Marion in February 1936. The Griffins enjoyed a re-birth in India as their arrival was heralded by the press and their ideas more favourably received. Unfortunately this was short-lived as Walter contracted peritonitis and died on 11 February 1937. Marion returned to Australia in 1937, however she departed for America's mid-west in 1938. Marion Griffin (nee Mahony) died in 1962.

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All the building known as Gumnuts marked B1 on Diagram 602348 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 602348 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described in Certificate of Title Vol. 5509 Folio 746.

*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/>*