

## 7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn

Prepared by: GML Heritage

**Address:** 7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn

<b>Name:</b> House	<b>Survey Date:</b> December 2021
<b>Place Type:</b> Residential	<b>Architect:</b> Graeme Gunn
<b>Grading:</b> Not Significant	<b>Builder:</b> Merchant Builders
<b>Extent of Overlay:</b> To title boundaries	<b>Construction Date:</b> 1974



Figure 1 7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn. (Source: Realestate.com.au)

### Historical Context

After pastoralists moved into the Boroondara district in the 1830s, the first sales of Hawthorn land occurred in the 1840s. By 1853 most of the land within the then City of Hawthorn boundaries had been sold (Gould 1993:31,35 and *Victorian Places* 2015). Hawthorn is strongly characterised by its middle-class Victorian-era residential development, but this is overlaid with pocket redevelopment in established areas and the completion of development to the south. Improvements in transport systems between 1913 and 1918, including the provision of electric tramway services along Burke,



Camberwell and Riversdale roads, bus services along major roads, and improvements at Hawthorn, Glenferrie and Auburn railway stations, made Hawthorn and its shopping centres more accessible and attractive, and also attracted denser residential development.

During the interwar years the former City of Hawthorn's population grew from 24,450 people in 1911 to 33,758 by 1933. Any remaining vacant land in Hawthorn was taken up during an intensive boom of residential subdivision between 1910 and 1940, particularly in the area south of Riversdale Road. Pockets of late Edwardian or Californian Bungalow style houses were built in Hawthorn's streets, replacing earlier buildings or co-existing beside them. Re-subdivision in the 1930s and 1940s, often of Victorian-era mansion estates, led to a mixture of styles with cul-de-sacs and small pockets of mid-twentieth century housing surrounded largely by pre-1930s residential development. Aerial photographs of 1945 show that the then City of Hawthorn had become more or less fully developed by that time, with housing extending as far as Gardiner's Creek (*Victorian Places* 2015, Gould 1993:62, Built Heritage 2012:128,130,132).

In spite of the interwar population increase and intensive residential subdivision boom very few residential flat buildings were built in the 1910s and 1920s in Boroondara, with almost all that were built situated in the City of Hawthorn (Built Heritage 2015: 145). By the 1930s, apartment construction boomed in the City of Hawthorn. Major thoroughfares with tramlines, notably Glenferrie Road and Riversdale Road, continued to attract blocks of flats during the 1930s. At this time, in particular in the City of Camberwell where local by-laws were developed to restrict multi-unit construction, multi-unit dwellings tended to be designed to appear as over-scaled single dwellings (Built Heritage 2015:146).

During this era, changes also occurred in Hawthorn's shopping centres, particularly down Burke Road to Camberwell Junction, revitalised by the establishment in the 1920s of the electric tramway system along Camberwell, Riversdale and Burke roads. During the 1930s, specialist shops developed in Burke Road, especially clothing stores, reflecting the affluence of the middle-class suburb. By this time, a range of professional, financial and retail services had been established at the Junction. With the increasing use of the motorcar, the dominance of the Junction was reinforced, leading to the demolition of a number of Victorian and Edwardian houses on corner sites to allow for the erection of petrol stations (Gould 1993:64).

By the 1940s, the housing stock in Hawthorn west and central was old and contained many cottages in poor condition. From the 1930s, a new trend emerged – the subdivision of large Victorian houses into flats and offices, and the building of new blocks of two and three-storey flats.

By the 1970s, the demolition of old residences for the construction of new flats and office blocks was a local issue. By 1981 over 45 percent of Hawthorn's housing stock were flats, compared with 26 percent in Kew. During these years, Hawthorn's commercial shopping centres were also affected by demolition to make way for new buildings and car parking. In 1988, the local newspaper, the *Progress Press*, claimed that office development was 'the greatest threat to Hawthorn's retail and residential identity since the flat development drive of the 1970s' (Gould 1993:69–70 and *Victorian Places* 2015).

The Hawthorn entry in *Victorian Places* (2015) states that, despite the rapid growth of flats in Hawthorn:

*... there was a contrary trend toward the preservation of many of the surviving larger homes. Internal subdividing walls were removed and flats were converted back into homes. Other large buildings were converted into more sensitively designed apartments. The boom in period real estate peaked in the*

late 1980s. An active preservation area was around St James Park, adjoining Hawthorn's original town site. Preservation extended to a quite costly refurbishment of the Hawthorn railway station buildings, some of which had been transferred many years before from the first Flinders Street station in central Melbourne.

In 1994, the Cities of Hawthorn, Kew and Camberwell were amalgamated to create the new City of Boroondara. In 2011, the population of the suburb of Hawthorn was 21,177, with 53 per cent of people living in flats or apartments (*Victorian Places* 2015).

## History

The property at 7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn is situated on the east side of Burton Avenue, between Wattle Road and Lisson Grove.

The land occupied by Wattle Road and adjacent streets was surveyed as Crown Allotments (CA) 45 and 46 in the Parish of Boroondara which were first offered for sale in 1843. In 1851, allotments 45 and 46 were sold to Edward Kobelke, who then sold one-third to Christian Finger and one-third to Johann Fankhauser (McWilliam 1997:30). In 1910 Hawthorn Council resolved to provide through streets between Burwood Road and Riversdale Road subsequently creating Drill Street, New Street, Burton Avenue and Through Street by 1919. (*The Reporter* 16 September 1919:2) Burton Avenue is located on Christian Finger's fifth parcel of the original subdivision.

Burton Avenue was formed by the demolition of 62 Wattle Road and 45 Lisson Grove and incorporated the western garden of 66 Wattle Road and vacant land on Lisson Grove (MMBW 1902). Builder Aaron Wyatt purchased land on the east side of Burton Avenue subdividing the land in 1912 into fourteen allotments. (McWilliam 1999:9) Burton Avenue first appears in Sands and McDougall Directories in 1913 when 12 vacant homes were listed on its east side. George William Farrar became the proprietor of 7 Burton Avenue in January 1913. (CT V3666 F3065). Over the following decade the property changed ownership several times until Florence Barker, married woman purchased the property in 1923. Florence Barker owned the property until her death in 1970, at which time joint proprietorship transferred to Pater and Margaret Riach in 1973.

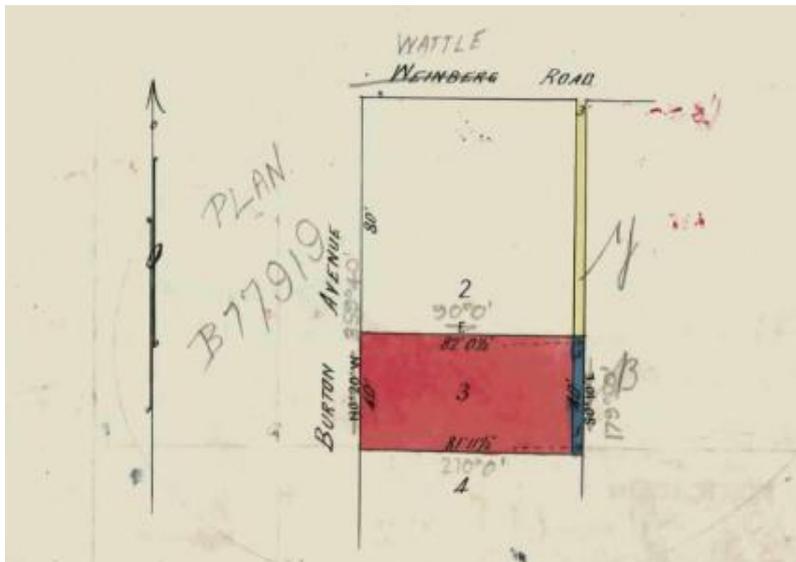


Figure 2 Detail of title deed showing (Source: CT V3697 F739325).

The Riachs demolished the existing dwelling on the site and commissioned Merchant Builders to build a two-storey dwelling and carport for a cost of \$28,000 in 1974. The front fence to the property was added in 1975 (BP1146,11498,12432).

7 Burton Avenue adopts a design of one of the houses advertised as part of Merchant Builder's Winter Park Project in Doncaster, the design for which was prepared by architect Graeme Gunn for Merchant Builders Pty Ltd.

In 1970 Merchant Builders designed an experimental alternative to the existing subdivision patterns by constructing 20 grouped or 'clustered' houses on a 2.43 hectare (6 acre) site fronting High Street and Timber Ridge in the Melbourne suburb of Doncaster. Cluster subdivision was defined as the free siting of individual houses, private gardens, public and communal open space, and public and private roads to make possible the most efficient use of land and to achieve the best possible relationships between buildings and open space. Winter Park was subdivided under the *Strata Title Act 1967* and was the first cluster type housing development in Victoria. In 1972 Merchant Builders received the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) Robin Boyd Environmental Award bronze medal for their contributions to housing development in Melbourne, and in 1975 the Winter Park project received a citation in the RAIA Housing Awards. (VHD Winter Park Cluster Housing H1345)

7 Burton Avenue is an adaptation of Gunn's 'Two Storey House design' which featured at Winter Park. Comprising an inverted floor plan three bedrooms are located on the ground floor with kitchen and living spaces on the first level opening out onto a north facing deck. When sold in 2006 the house was advertised as featuring 'garden surrounds by renowned landscape designer Ellis Stones.' (realestateview.com.au). The integration of architecture and landscape was at the core of Merchant Builders' ethos and underpinned the provision of well-designed houses which could be built on the owners' land without the normal expense associated with one-off, architect-designed houses and included landscaping designed by Ellis Stones (Saniga 2012). The garden has been re-landscaped since that time.

The Riachs remained at the property until 1988. The property changed hands several times over the next two decades. In 2012 its then owners' commissioned Gunn to update the interior to their needs. The property last changed hands in 2020.



Figure 3 Original brochure showing houses available at Winter Park. Extract shown shows the Two-Storey House which was the design used at 7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn. (Source: State Library Victoria)



## **Dr Graeme Gunn**

Graeme Gunn is an award-winning architect who is known as a leading architect in contemporary, Australian design. He studied architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology from 1956 to 1960 and he commenced work at Grounds, Romberg and Boyd in 1960, before starting his own practice in 1962 (GJM 2: 14). Gunn became the Dean of Architecture at RMIT between 1972 and 1982 (Goad and Willis (2012)). Gunn was/is influential both individually and in cooperation with Merchant Builders who had a relationship with each other for over 20 years. Graeme Gunn was known for his exploration with 'cluster' housing, as shown by his and Merchant Builder's *Winter Park*. In responding to post-war boom and need for high density housing, he was instrumental to the introduction of the Cluster Titles Act (1974) and Model Cluster Code (1975) which enabled a greater variety of subdivision to take place in Victoria (aka cluster housing)" (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 47). He has won several awards individually including the 2001 President's Award for Lifetime Contributions to Victorian Architecture from the Australian Institute of Architects Victorian Chapter and 2011 Gold Medal at the Australian Achievement in Architecture Awards (AAAA) by The Australian Institute of Architects (AIA).

## **Merchant Builders**

The 1960s marked a drastic boom in project homes, offering for the first time, affordable architect designed homes that were financially accessible to the every-day Australian. Merchant Builders, led by prominent architects David Yencken and John Ridge, were at the forefront of this shift, setting the "benchmark' for project homes in Victoria (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 6). Robin Boyd commented that 'for the first time a genuine architectural circumspection was brought within the financial reach of the average owner' (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 6).

Yencken and Ridge founded Merchant Builders with the intention to provide people with an alternative option to the speculative buildings that were available. In doing so, they re-imagined Australian, residential architecture. They adopted a holistic approach to architectural design, accounting for landscape, native planting, site planning and interior fittings. A Merchant Builder advertisement they claimed, 'we are concerned with the total environment, a functional and satisfying house, a harden which is an extension of the living areas of the house and a pleasing setting, internal furniture fittings which are clean, practical and in general harmony with the design' (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 55). Open floor plan, smooth transition between indoor and outdoor to embrace the surrounding Australian environment, minimality and vernacular building materials all became Merchant Builder's hallmark design features.

This careful consideration of both interior and exterior also extended to local climate and environment. In an advertisement, Merchant Builders advertised that their houses had have "been designed specifically for Melbourne sites and Melbourne's climate" even using local building materials (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 47). This was significant in Merchant Builder's reimagining of the Australian residential lifestyle as they worked towards an Australian vernacular architecture. As such, they helped set out a new, unique Australian typology.

Merchant Builders also thought critically about suburban development and density, re-imagining the typical quarter acre block after the rise of the housing boom post-war. They had the vision to improve the "quality" and "diversity" of volume housing, experimenting with townhouses, units, flats and cluster housing (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 47). In responding to post-war boom and need for high density housing,

Merchant Builders were arguably the most prominent company in developing display villages where prospective customers would choose a house design to be built on their property. Winter Park in Doncaster is the most well-known of these. Winter Park was the first housing development of its kind, designed by Graeme Gunn in partnership with Merchant Builders. Built from 1970 to 1974, the development had 20 detached houses built upon a large park with communal car and pedestrian space. This development led to the introduction of the Cluster Titles Act (1974) and Model Cluster Code (1975) (led by Graeme Gunn and Merchant Builders) which enabled a greater variety of subdivision to take place in Victoria (Melbourne School of Design 2015: 47). "It became a new cultural phenomenon through the link between affordable construction and architectural ideas representing aspirations about living in suburbia" (O'Callaghan & Pickett 2012: 7).

## **Description**

7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn, is a double-storey, brick veneer house built in 1974 by Merchant Builders to a design by architect Graeme Gunn. Located on the eastern side of Burton Avenue, Hawthorn, the house is set back from the street allowing for a large west facing courtyard garden. Constructed of pale brown bricks, the house has a simple rectangular footprint and sits below a tiled transverse gable roof.

The plan of the house is inversed with living spaces upstairs and bedrooms below. This affords the upstairs living rooms with cathedral ceilings that follow the pitch of the gable roof. Symmetrically arranged, the street facing principal elevation has four large openings (two above and two below) each fitted with a large plate glass window adjacent to an equally sized glazed sliding door. This allows for access to a full length cantilevered balcony at first floor level, and access to the garden from bedrooms below. A spiral staircase is located at the southern end of the balcony providing access to the garden below.

While the opening sizes are original, the door and window frames are not, having replaced the original frames which consisted of casement windows. At first floor level the deck features regularly spaced square timber posts that support a timber slated pergola above that follows the pitch of the roof line, a signature design element of Merchant Builders' houses. Other alterations and additions to the property include; the construction of a brick front fence in 1975, construction of a garden shed in 1979, and a small addition (9 square metres) along the east elevation of the house in 1982 which includes an ensuite and walk-in-robe to the main bedroom (BP 12432, 14854, 17789). Recent real estate advertisements note that Graeme Gunn was commissioned in 2012 to upgrade the interior of the house although this cannot be confirmed as Council holds no records of the works. It is probable that the windows were replaced at this time. A large freestanding canvas sail has been erected in the front courtyard largely obscuring the house from the public domain. The tall pale brown brick fence appears original.

Key features of the original building and landscape that remain include:

- pale brown brick veneer walls
- transverse gable roof with glazed terracotta tiles
- large window/door openings to the western elevation
- cantilevered first floor balcony with raked pergola roof clad with timber battens
- external spiral staircase



- inversed floorplan with living above
- large set back off the street
- early matching face brick front fence.

### **Integrity**

7 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn retains many original features but with some changes to original and early fabric. The building retains its original built form, roof form and pattern of fenestration and door openings and other key features. The integrity of the place is somewhat diminished by the replacing of the original casement window joinery with larger, mullion free panes of glass.

Overall, the place has moderate integrity.

### **Comparative Analysis**

7 Burton Avenue represents an example of a postwar modernist 'project home' designed by architect Graeme Gunn for Merchant Builders who were one of the leading project home builders at the time.

Modernist architecture offered an alternative to post-war styles of the time, many of which were simply scaled-down versions of the 1940s prototypes. The informality of open floor plans, and the relationship between interior spaces and the landscape setting, fitted comfortably within the Australian context, and this, coupled with a simplicity of structure and minimisation of decoration, worked at a time when demand for housing was high, building materials were in short supply, and money short to spend on housing.

Most of the post-war Modernist houses that are currently in the Heritage Overlay in Boroondara are large owner-commissioned architect designed homes representative of the early Modernism that developed in Melbourne during the 1950s. As the Thematic Environment History notes, Boroondara contains many fine examples of one off architect-designed, Modernist homes designed by notable architects such as Peter and Dione McIntyre, Robin Boyd, Anatol Kagan, Graeme Gunn and Ernest Fooks.

The postwar period in Melbourne and in Australia more broadly saw a number of schemes that aimed at making well designed and affordable suburban homes possible for a greater number of people. Amongst these was the advent of the project (or display) home. Architects designed practical and attractive standard homes that could be replicated on any site. A prospective home owner could visit a display village, choose a design, and arrange to have the house built on their own block of land.

Merchant Builders was one of the most well-known of the project home building companies. They took a particularly innovative approach to catering for this sector of the market, engaging a team of professional including architects, interior designers, furniture makers, landscape architects, planners and graphic designers to present a complete and integrated approach to home design. They pioneered the introduction of energy efficient, environmentally friendly, architect designed project homes in Victoria. Some of the many innovative design principles and features they pursued included pergolas, exposed brickwork and timber beams, passive solar energy and the use of locally sourced materials.

The project or display home market was particularly strong in newly subdivided areas on the urban fringe such as Doncaster, Templestowe, Nunawading and Glen Waverley. The use of project home

services was less prevalent in the more established and wealthier suburbs of what is now Boroondara.

Merchant Builders became particularly well known for their cluster housing developments, the most notable being the Winter Park Cluster Housing development in the Melbourne suburb of Doncaster.

The following individually significant places are comparable to the subject place being designed by Graeme Gunn and built by Merchant Builders.



Figure 4 Winter Park, 137–141 High Street Doncaster (H1345, HO83) constructed in 1970 to 1974 by Merchant Builders Pty Ltd. (Source: VHD/Context 2005)

137–149 High Street, Doncaster is a cluster of 20 detached houses to a design by Merchant Builders led by Graeme Gunn, Rob White and Ellis Stones in stages between 1970 and 1974. 'Winter Park', 137–141 High Street, Doncaster, was constructed in two stages between 1970–1974 by notable building firm Merchant Builders. The project of twenty detached houses with individual private courtyards emphasised the importance of environmentally sensitive construction which integrated dwellings within both the natural landscape and communal open space. The landscape planting retained its large eucalypt trees and also incorporated stone retaining walls, boulders and native plantings. A pioneer of cluster title subdivision, 'Winter Park' won an RIAA Award Citation in 1975.



Figure 5 'Townhouses', 76 Molesworth Street, Kew (HO325), built in 1969 to a design by architect Graeme Gunn. (Source: VHD/Lovell Chen 2005)

'Townhouses' at 76 Molesworth Street, Kew, is a group of six dwellings designed by notable architect Graeme Gunn and built in 1969 by building firm Merchant Builders. The distinctive residential design sits on a sloping site, with each two-storey dwelling arranged around a central driveway in a native landscaped setting. Constructed from grey concrete block and un-planed timber in a loosely brutalist design, the bold design would characterise many architect-designed homes over the coming decade. The townhouse design won an RIAA Bronze Medal in 1970 and is only one of four

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Boroondara residential projects to receive the medal.

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1, 2 and 3 Exford Close are three individual dwellings designed by Merchant Builders led by Graeme Gunn, John Reid and Charles Duncan. Carefully sited and landscaped.

Figure 6 Houses, 1, 2 & 3 Exford Close, Donvale (HO61), built in 1972 to designs by Graeme Gunn, John Reid and Charles Duncan for Merchant Builders Pty Ltd. (Source: VHD/Context 1990)

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There is one example of the work of Graeme Gunn in the Heritage Overlay in the City of Boroondara; 'Townhouses', 76 Molesworth Street, Kew (HO325). Built in 1966 the townhouses won an RAI A Bronze Medal in 1970. Predating Merchant Builders' renown townhouse development 'Winter Park' in Doncaster, the Kew townhouses were a one off design by Gunn which represent a sophisticated response to a difficult sloping site adjacent to the Yarra River. They exhibit characteristics of the emerging influence of a Brutalist aesthetic during the 1960s and 1970s. This is evident in their use of exposed concrete blockwork manipulated to create complex sculptural forms, 45 degree chamfered corner elements and bold cantilevers. Circulation elements have been left overtly expressed and functional systems articulated with structure and service elements such as stairs and ramps left exposed.

These units are not directly comparable to the subject place for their one off multi dwelling form, sophisticated site response and use of a Brutalist aesthetic.

Further afield there are only two other known examples of Graeme Gunn's work included in the Heritage Overlay both in the City of Manningham; Winter Park, 137–141 High Street Doncaster (H1345; HO83 and 2 Exford Close, Donvale (HO61).

'Winter Park' is a carefully planned development in which groups of houses are sited to optimise available land. Houses are sited to relate with each other, to optimize privacy, solar orientation, views and physical conditions. 'Winter Park' comprises four groups of five houses that are located around communal car and pedestrian access ways, with each dwelling having a private garden in addition to a large central communal recreation space. The central idea was the free siting of houses, private garden and communal open space to achieve an integration of the built environment within the most efficient use of land.

While the development at 'Winter Park' is not directly comparable to the subject site because of its multi-dwelling form, the house at 7 Burton Avenue was built to the design of one of the houses specifically developed for the Winter Park complex; the Two Storey House TS2. Since it was built, the subject dwelling has undergone a number of alterations that has materially altered the original design aesthetic of the house. Significantly all the windows of the house have been replaced with more contemporary units with larger, mullion free panes of glass.



The house at 2 Exford Close was designed by Graeme Gunn in 1972. Built as one of three Merchant Builder display houses (the others being 1 Exford Close designed by John Reid and 3 Exford Close designed by Charles Duncan), the three houses are significant as a group of carefully sited and landscaped project homes. They retain their original native landscape settings with the house at 2 Exford Place retaining a high level of intactness and integrity. 2 Exford Place differs from the subject place as it is single storey and has been designed around a series of courtyard spaces. Retaining its place within a group of display houses as well as its original landscape setting, 2 Exford Close better exemplifies Merchant Builders project house ethos of providing affordable architect designed houses (with the house integrated with the landscape) to the middle ring suburbs of Melbourne.

Overall, whilst the house at 7 Burton Avenue is of historical interest, it does not meet the threshold as an individually significant place at the local level for the following reasons. While the project or display house was a significant development in postwar Australia, the building typology was not prevalent in the more established suburbs of Boroondara and as such does not represent an important theme within the municipality's historic patterns of development. Furthermore the house itself has had all of its original door and window joinery replaced and the original native landscape setting has also been replaced. The place does not compare well to other similar individually significant places.

### **Assessment Against Criteria**

Criteria referred to in *Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, August 2018, modified for the local context.

*CRITERION A: Importance to the course or pattern of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (historical significance).*

N/A

*CRITERION B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (rarity).*

N/A

*CRITERION C: Potential to yield information that will contribute understanding the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (research potential).*

N/A

*CRITERION D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).*

N/A

*CRITERION E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).*

N/A

*CRITERION F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).*

N/A



*CRITERION 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 (social significance).*

N/A

*CRITERION H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Boroondara's history (associative significance).*

N/A



## Grading and Recommendations

Not recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme as an individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Boroondara Planning Scheme:

Not applicable.

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### External paint controls

*Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?*

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### Internal alteration controls

*Is a permit required for internal alterations?*

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### Tree controls

*Is a permit required to remove a tree?*

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### Solar energy system controls

*Is a permit required to install a solar energy system?*

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### Outbuildings and fences exemptions

*Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?*

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### Victorian Heritage Register

*Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?*

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### Prohibited uses may be permitted

*Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?*

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### Aboriginal heritage place

*Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?*

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### Incorporated plan

*Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?*

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## Identified by:

GML Heritage 2022.



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