

‘Knottywood’ Units

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn

Name: ‘Knottywood’ Units	Survey Date: November 2021
Place Type: Flats	Architect: Roy Simpson
Grading: Significant	Builder: A.V. Jennings
Extent of Overlay: To title boundaries	Construction Date: 1961–64

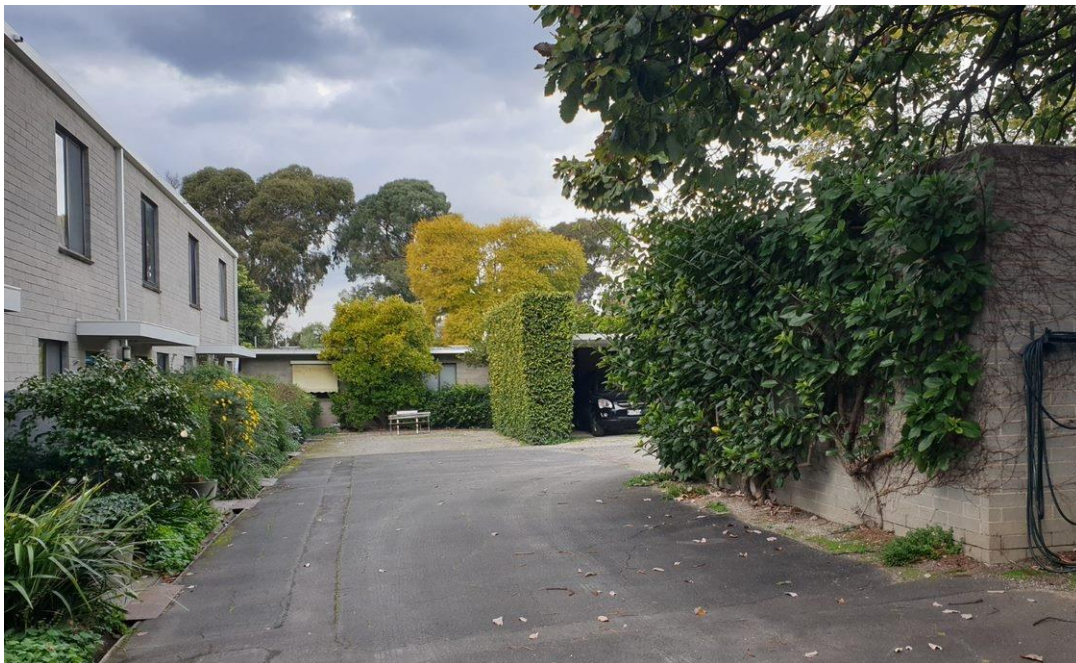


Figure 1 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn. (Source: GML Heritage 2021)

Historical Context

The area of Wattle Road, Hawthorn, is on the traditional Country of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung.

Pastoralists moved into the Boroondara district in the 1830s. In 1837 John Gardiner took up a pastoral licence over an extensive area that encompassed much of Hawthorn, including present-day Wattle Road. The land occupied by Wattle Road and adjacent streets was surveyed as Crown allotments 45 and 46 in the Parish of Boroondara and was offered for sale in 1843; these allotments were first acquired by Matthew Hughes (McWilliam 1997:20).

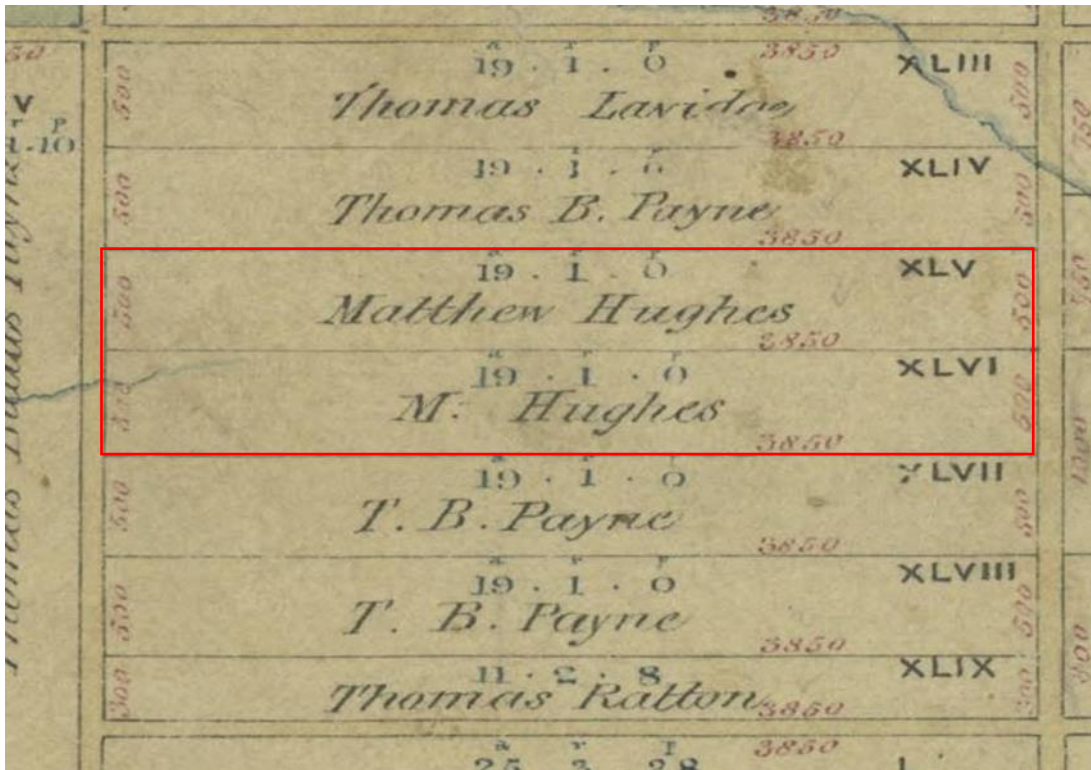


Figure 2 1855 cadastral plan showing Crown allotments 45 and 46, Parish of Boroondara. The extent of land fronting Wattle Road is outlined in red. (Source: PROV, VPRS 8168/P0002 339 with GML overlay)

The first residents in Hawthorn were an eclectic mix that included farmers, as well as those in trades, business, politics, and the military (Context 2012:4). While Hawthorn was developed primarily as a residential area, by the early 1850s agriculturalists constituted a quarter of its population. Viticulture proved a successful early enterprise, with Boroondara being the third-richest grape growing region in Melbourne (after Coburg and Bundoora) led by French, English and German communities that cultivated small plots with grape vines (Context 2012:5, Peel et al 1993:20).

The colonial politician and historian William Westgarth noted that the German community's 'industry, frugality, sobriety and general good conduct had made them excellent colonists' in South Australia. With support from the Commissioners of Emigration, Westgarth began a campaign to encourage German people who were experienced vinedressers and gardeners to emigrate to Victoria (Royal Historical Society of Victoria). The Hamburg firm of J Godfrey & Son made an appealing offer to help encourage German immigration (Meyer 1990:23). The company brought out a number of families from Silesia in Prussia from 1850. J Godfrey & Son coordinated their travel arrangements, with shipping costs covered by the Colonial Land Fund (a body in England that oversaw immigration to Australia before the colonies became self-governed) (NAA). As a result, a German community of vinedressers and gardeners was established in Hawthorn in 1850 (Meyer 1990:23). During the 1850s approximately 10,000 German immigrants arrived in Melbourne, and by the early 1860s they had settled mainly in Boroondara, Heidelberg and Malvern (Peel et al 1993:20).

Five German families (headed by Christian Finger, Gustave Kobelke, Gottlieb Aurisch, Johann Fankhauser and Karl Roemer) arrived in the Hawthorn area in 1850 (McWilliam 1978:7). A contemporary account claims that the German immigrants purchased 40 acres of land at £10 per acre (Argus, 29 November 1884:4). In 1851 Hughes sold allotments 45 and 46 to Edward Kobelke, who

then sold one-third of the land to Christian Finger and one-third to Johann Fankhauser (McWilliam 1997:30). The German settlers also purchased land in areas surrounding Wattle Road. Christian Finger purchased part of Crown allotment 64 at the corner of Glenferrie Road and Oxley Road in 1852. The same year, his son Henry Finger purchased part of Crown allotment 67, situated south of Liddiard Street (McWilliam 1997:21). Finger's property was divided by a lane (today's Wattle Road). He planted a vineyard on the site of present-day 41 Wattle Road. The natural attributes of the location made it amenable for vineyards. The land was on a gentle slope, and it was close to the Yarra River, which provided a ready water supply.

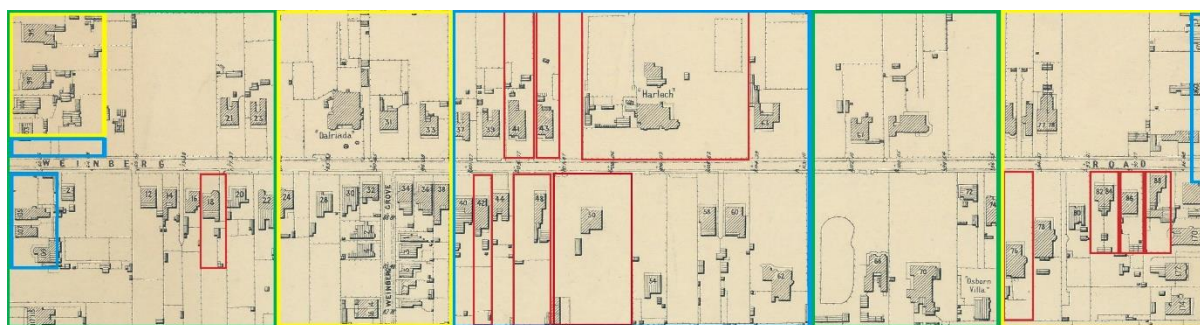


Figure 3 Extract from Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plans Nos 55 and 56 (combined), dated 1901, showing the areas of land owned by German immigrants from the early 1850s: Edward Kobelke (green), Christian Finger (blue) and Johann Fankhauser (yellow). Individual houses in this study are marked in red. (Source: State Library Victoria; McWilliam 1997 with GML overlay)

In an early history of Hawthorn published in 1910, CGA Colles and M Dew recounted the early German beginnings of Weinberg Road:

In the year 1850, five German families arrived in Hawthorn, and took up land in continuous blocks... which for some years they sedulously cultivated... These were men who changed the unfruitful earth into beautiful gardens. Weinberg-road [now Wattle Road] ... originally a lane for their carts... called by the earlier residents German Lane, was so named by them on account of the vineyards through which it passed; for one-time Hawthorn was largely a grape-growing district. (Colles and Dew 1910, quoted in McWilliam 1997:7)

By the end of the 1850s Weinberg Road was referred to locally as 'German Lane' and 'German Paddock' due to the number of German migrants who had settled there. In 1860 a group of residents, including Finger, Kobelke, Fankhauser, Schober, Aurisch, Gottke, Bruse and Bonwick appealed to the Hawthorn Borough Council to have the road developed and named. The residents asked that the road be formally named Weinberg Road, *weinberg* being the German word for vineyard (McWilliam 1997:21). This is believed to be the first officially named road in Hawthorn (McWilliam 1997:1). The narrow width of the road today is suggestive of early references to the road as a lane. Water from Yan Yean was laid on in 1868 (Argus, 1868).

The 1860s was a decade of transformation and prosperity for Hawthorn. Suburban development was spurred by the election of Hawthorn's first municipal council in 1860, making it the geographic centre of the city, alongside the opening of the railway to Hawthorn in 1861 (Context 2012:10). The coming of the railway led to an influx of middle-class residents who were able to commute between Melbourne and the suburbs. A surge of development of public and private buildings followed, including various churches and schools, to cater to the growing population (Context 2012:10).



Demand for suburban blocks is reflected in the subdivision and building of residences in the 1860s on Weinberg Road (now Wattle Road). In this decade, more than 25 properties were built on Weinberg Road, owned by 20 different families (Context 2012:10). Of these properties, Walter Bonwick, occupying what is now 28–44 Wattle Road (on the southern side), had built three houses (Gould 1992). Wilhelm Finger (son of Christian Finger) had also built three houses, having subdivided the vineyard on the northern side of Wattle Road. Of these three houses, only two houses built by the Finger family remain today, and these were rebuilt in 1883 by the Fingers (Gould 1992).

The residential composition of Hawthorn shifted again in the 1870s as the subdivision of larger estates gathered momentum when, following the death of some leading district pioneers, large properties were sold to developers, who divided them into residential lots (Context 2012:10). While a pattern of selling off portions of larger properties was true of Weinberg Road in the 1870s, no evidence has been found (such as estate subdivision plans) that indicates the land was sold to developers to be subdivided. Nevertheless by 1875 over 40 homes had been constructed on Weinberg Road, which was nearly double the number built in the 1860s.

The Melbourne land boom of the 1880s greatly stimulated speculative subdivision and residential development in Hawthorn. This period of economic buoyancy in Hawthorn was further stimulated by the extension of the railway from Hawthorn to Lilydale in 1882 and the spur railway from Hawthorn to Kew in 1887. The pattern of speculative subdivision continued in many parts of Hawthorn as the number of large private estates declined to accommodate the growing professional middle class who were settling in Hawthorn at this time (Context 2012:5). The German families sold off portions of their land through the 1880s in a more ad hoc way and, by 1890, 50 houses had been built on Weinberg Road (Poole 2018). During the 1880s the German presence in Hawthorn began to dissipate, and many of the original farming families relocated their vineyards and orchards elsewhere. The Fankhausers, for example, moved to Balwyn, where they lived south of Belmore Road.

An exception to this pattern of ad hoc land sales along Weinberg Road was Weinberg Grove (now Wattle Grove) which was subdivided and developed from the 1880s (Weinberg Grove 1886 subdivision plan, SLV).

The early 1900s brought new prosperity and the return of suburban and commercial development after the economic depression of the 1890s. The electric tramlines built between 1913 and 1918 in Burke Road, Camberwell Road and Riversdale Road provided improved public transport, connecting local residents with Hawthorn's commercial centres and providing ready access to the city (Context 2019:1). The City of Hawthorn changed the name of Weinberg Road to Wattle Road during World War I due to growing anti-German sentiment (Built Heritage 2012:37).

The first half of the twentieth century saw a number of Wattle Road's large land holdings subdivided, creating new streets and courts. These included Vivian Grove (1911), Burton Avenue (1912), New Street (1923), Carson Crescent (1924), Finchley Court (1940) and Ardene Court (1957).

The early postwar period saw significant change in Wattle Road with the demolition of a number of its early houses and the construction of large unit developments. Up until this time, many early houses had retained their substantial allotments. Similar development has continued throughout the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In recent years there has been further demolition of early Victorian houses and the construction of multi-unit developments and, more recently, substantial blocks of apartments.

Place History

The 'Knottywood' Units at 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn are a group of four distinct unit buildings constructed at the rear of the original 'Knottywood' house, which is situated on the north side of Wattle Road, between New Street and Finchley Court.

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, Crown 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).

A house known alternately as 'Knottywood' and 'Morley' was constructed in 1868 on part of Christian Finger's allotment, on the northern side of Weinberg (later Wattle) Road. The house incorporated an earlier three-roomed wooden cottage owned by Gottlieb Gottke, a gardener who had resided on the land from 1860 (City of Hawthorn Ratebook 1863; Lovell Chen 2005). 'Knottywood' house is one of the earliest dwellings constructed on Wattle Road, its grounds originally incorporating gardens and an orchard which reflected the early German farming settlement pattern of the area (Lovell Chen 2005).

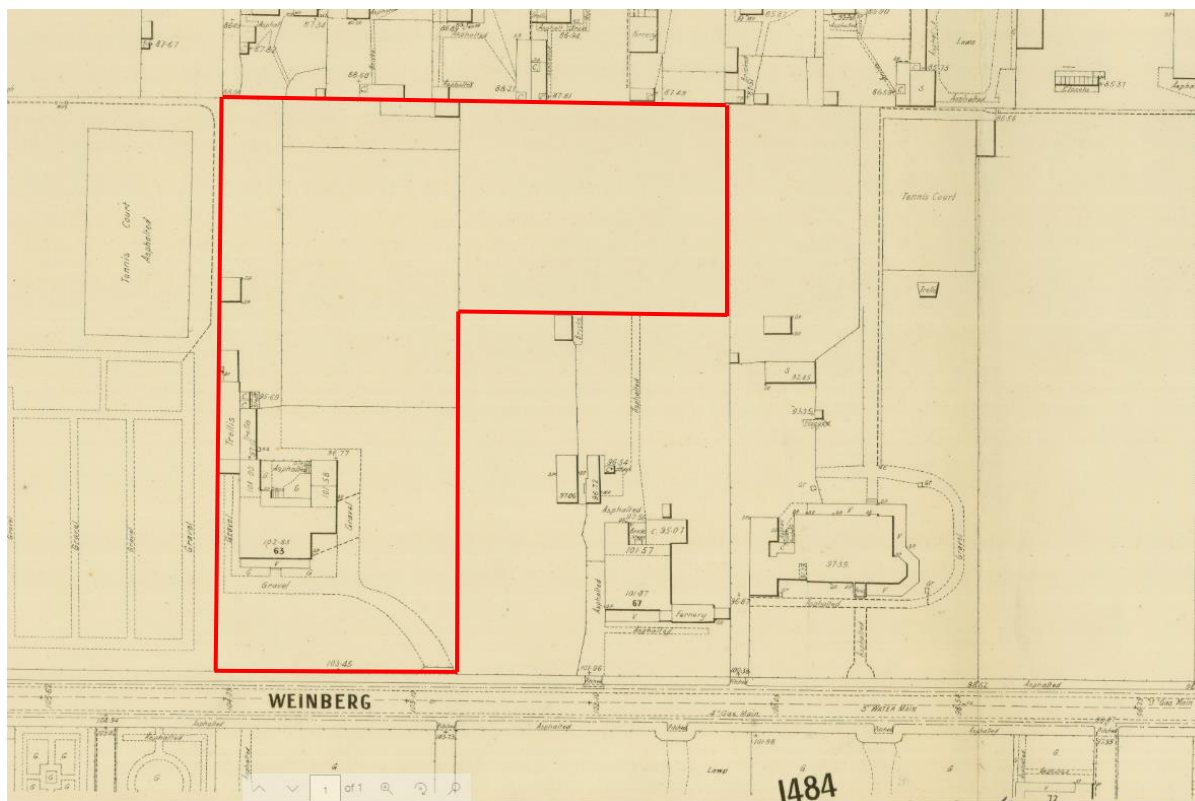


Figure 4 1902–03 Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan No. 1486 City of Hawthorn, dated 1902, showing house and grounds known alternately as 'Morley' and 'Knottywood' at 63 Weinberg (later Wattle) Road (in red). (Source: State Library Victoria with GML overlay)

Two families, the McCowans and the Simpsons, had a close association with the house in the early twentieth Century. The McCowans moved into 'Knottywood' in 1905, and their daughter Florence returned to the house with husband R.H. Simpson from the mid-1930s (S&McD 1935; Lovell Chen 2005). The Simpsons' son, Roy McCowan Simpson (1914–1997), also resided in 'Knottywood' as a boy. Roy McCowan Simpson later trained as an architect and went on to become part of notable Melbourne architectural firm Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths and Simpson.

‘Knottywood’ Units

Roy Simpson subdivided ‘Knottywood’ in 1961, initially designing a small single-storey residence for his aunt, to be constructed at the rear of the house (Lovell Chen 2005; see Block A, Figure 5) The first design phase also included a single-storey prototype unit design, designated as Block B (Figure 5)

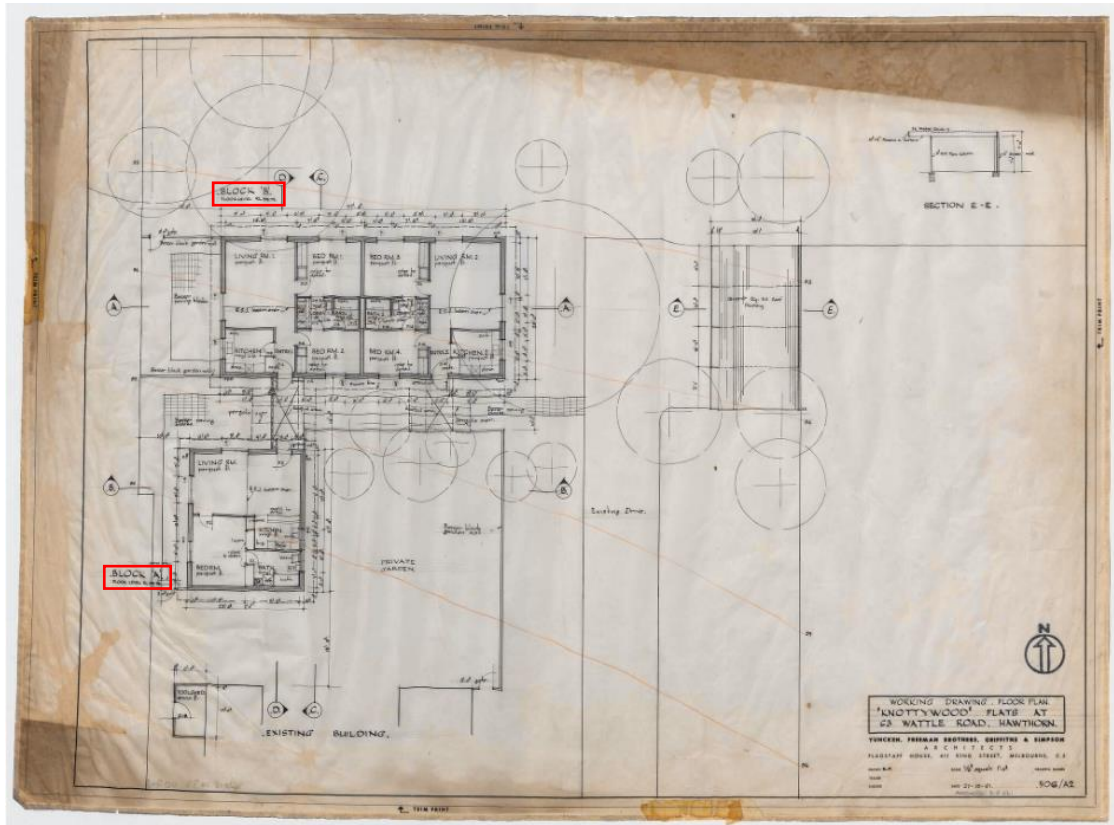


Figure 5 Phase 1 site plan for Knottywood Flats, 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, dated October 1961, showing designs for Block A and Block B (outlined in red). Reference Code 2018.0077.00708. (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives, with GML overlay).



Figure 6 Rear of Block B, one of the two original blocks constructed at the rear of the 'Knottywood' site. (Source: GML 2022)

In phase 2 of the design process (1963–64), Simpson added three new unit buildings designated as Blocks C, D and E (Figure 7). The units varied in size and offered accommodation of either two or three bedrooms, with each unit allocated a corresponding carport area (Figure 17). Unlike Blocks A and B, the second design phase incorporated individual courtyards into the unit design.

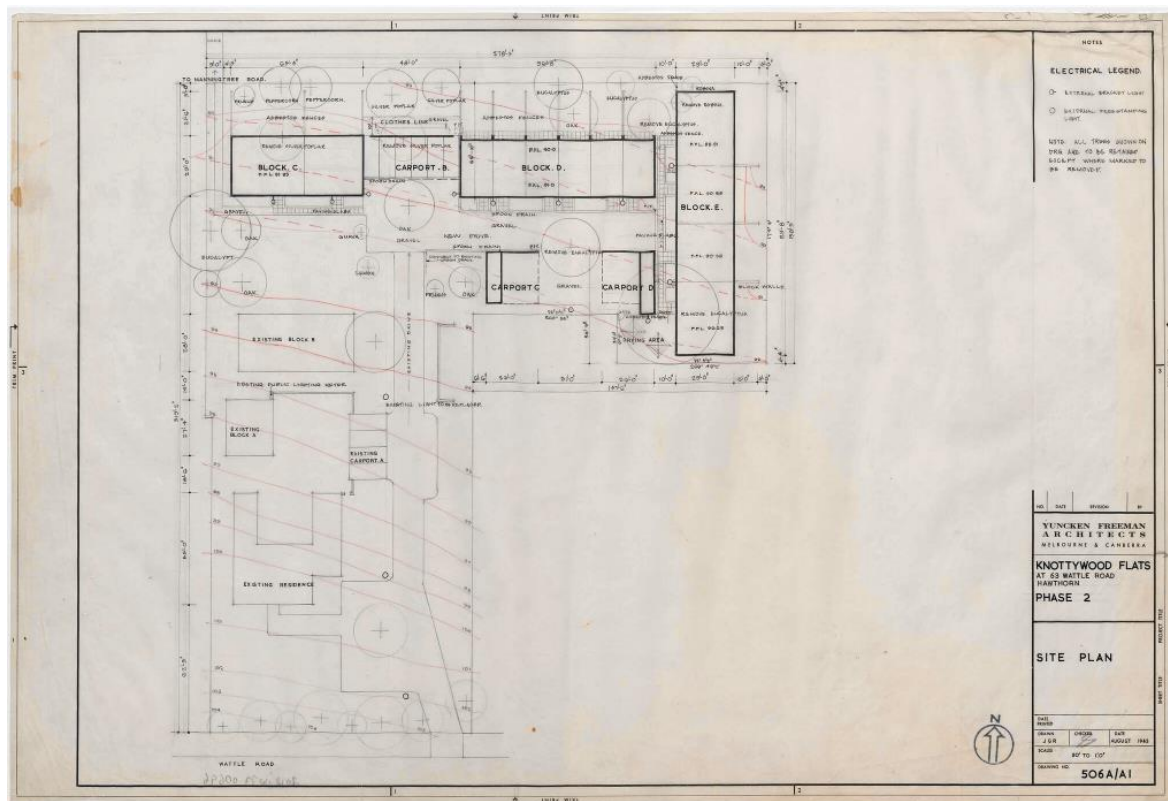


Figure 7 Phase 2 site plan for 'Knottywood Flats', 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, dated August 1963, showing plans for the construction of Blocks C–E and associated carports. Reference Code 2018.0077.00696. (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives).



Figure 8 'Knottywood Flats', c.1961–63, photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Reference Code 2018.0115.01018. Block C is visible on the left, with Block D (double-storey block) visible in the middle distance and Block E on the right-hand side. (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives).



Figure 9 Contemporary photograph of Block C, one of three single-storey unit blocks at 'Knottywood'. (Source: GML 2022)



Figure 10 View looking west from the interior of the site with Block C visible on the right side (Source: GML 2022)



Figure 11 View looking west towards Wattle Road showing main drive. Note volcanic rock roundabout along the western side of the drive. (Source: GML 2022)

Of the three new buildings, only Block D was constructed as a row of double-storey units (see Figure 13–Figure 15), with their smaller footprints compensated for by an additional level.

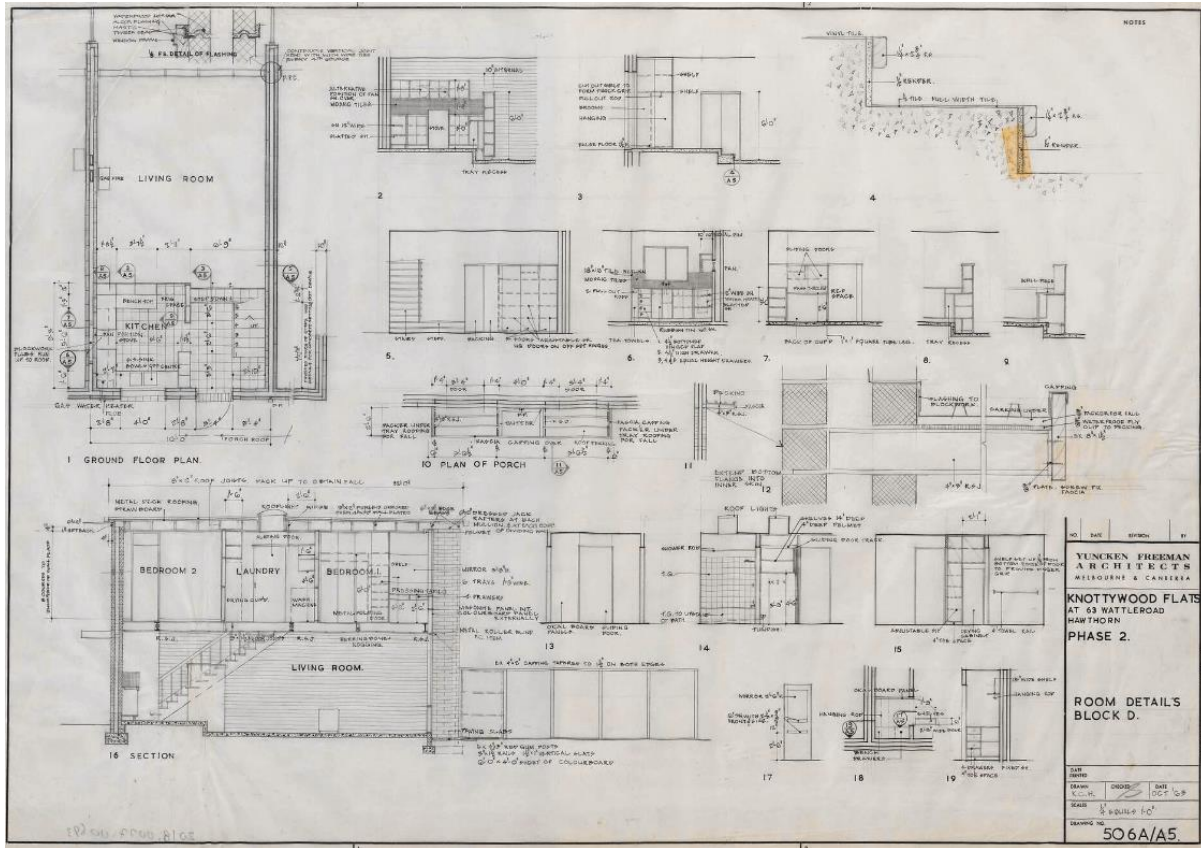


Figure 12 Phase 2 drawings for Block D, dated October 1963. Reference Code 2018.0077.00693. (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives).



Figure 13 'Knottywood Flats', c.1964, photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Reference Code 2018.0115.01016. Photograph of Block D, the only block designed as double-storey dwellings. (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives).



Figure 14 Contemporary photograph of Block D in 'Knottywood' Unit site, showing substantially intact building. (Source: GML 2022).



Figure 15 'Knottywood Flats', c.1961–63, photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Reference Code 2018.0115.01012. Photograph of Block D (left), section of Block E (centre) and carports (right). (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives).



Figure 16 Contemporary photograph of Block D (left), section of Block E (centre) and carports (right). Note the driveway surface, which appears to be gravel in the 1960s photographs, has been resurfaced with asphalt. (Source: GML 2022)



Figure 17 'Knottywood Flats', c.1961–63, photograph by Wolfgang Sievers, Reference Code 2018.0115.01013. Photograph showing carport looking south toward Wattle Road (Source: Yuncken Freeman Architects collection, copyright owned by University of Melbourne Archives).



Figure 18 Contemporary photograph of carport, with view toward Wattle Road. Note the open pergola panel to the front of the carport has been filled in (Source: GML 2022)

The interior design of the 'Knottywood' Units incorporated built in joinery, including wardrobes (some walk-in), dressing tables and cupboards (Figure 19).

The total construction numbered fifteen separate dwellings, which included fourteen units (not including Block A). A small building comprising a laundry and toolshed situated between 'Knottywood' House and Block A was also constructed c1962 (UoM Archives, Ref. 2018.0077.00707). The construction of the 'Knottywood' Units was contracted to building firm A.V. Jennings Industries (Australia) Ltd and completed by December of 1964 (*The Age*, 5 December 1964:53).

The overall design process of 'Knottywood' Units appears to have faced numerous design challenges, which may account for the lengthy period of six years from the initial subdivision in 1958 to completion

of the complex in 1964. Simpson's obituary notes that his innovative design amendments for 'Knottywood' Units were later adopted into the medium density design code (Age, 8 April 1997:26).

In 1982, the property was subdivided again, with the original Victorian house 'Knottywood' and Block A incorporated onto one title (Figure 19). This property was re-numbered as 61 Wattle Road. Block A appears to have been subsequently demolished.

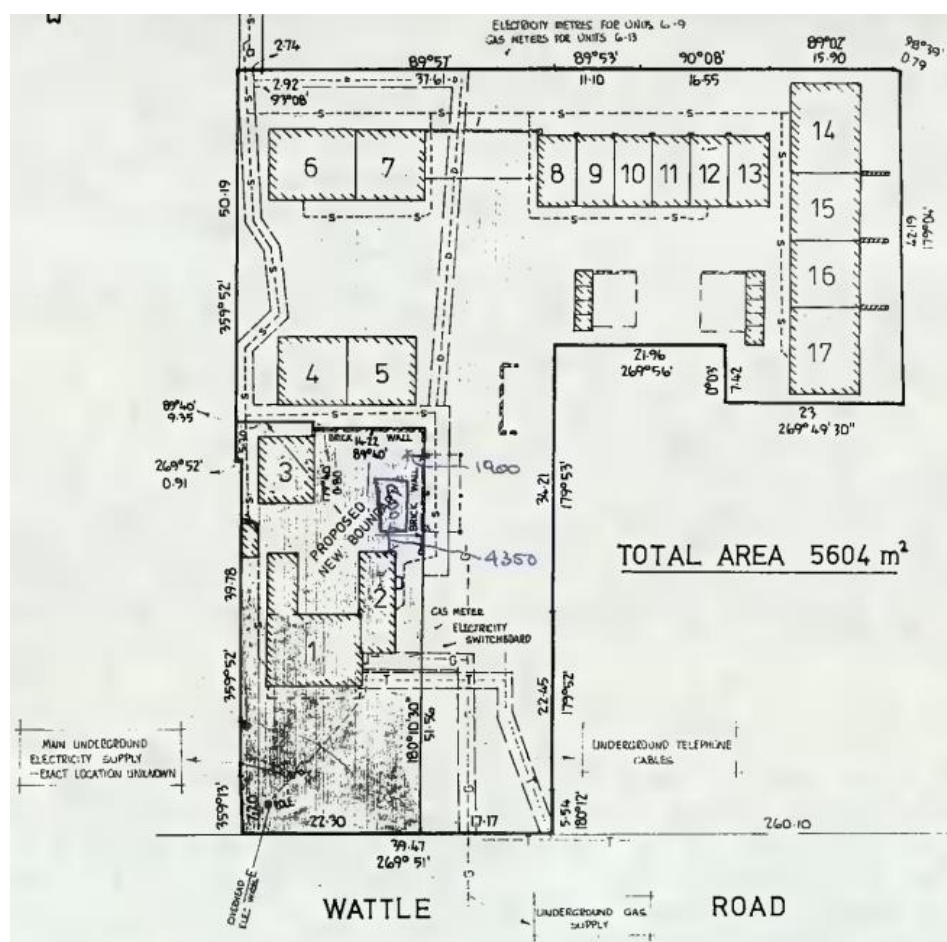


Figure 19 1982 Plan of Transfer showing Block A (marked as dwelling 3) being transferred to a new subdivision which also included the original Knottywood residence (marked as dwelling 1 & 2). (Source: Culliver & Sim, courtesy of City of Boroondara, BH_86_4190-63)

Roy Simpson

Roy McCowan Simpson (1914–1997) was a Melbourne-based architect, studying architecture at Melbourne Technical College, then Melbourne University Architectural Atelier (MUAA). Simpson was articled to church specialist Louis R Williams from 1933 to 1936 before joined the office of Leighton Irwin to work on hospitals, and in 1938, moved to Yuncken Freeman, Freeman & Griffiths. In 1939, Simpson was founding editor with friend and fellow student, Robin Boyd, of *Smudges*, an important early journal of architectural criticism. In 1940, Simpson was awarded the Haddon Travelling Scholarship, but deferred due to WWII. At this time, Simpson, alongside Otto (Rob) Yuncken, worked for the United States Army Corps of Engineers, designing camps and field hospitals (Goad and Willis 2012: 629).

Following WWII, Simpson was made a partner of the firm, becoming Yuncken Freeman Bros, Griffiths & Simpson. In 1947 Simpson was charged with designing and overseeing the Victorian Pre-cut



Housing Project, also known as 'Operation Snail', a large-scale prefabrication venture to provide low-cost housing for workers undertaking regional infrastructure upgrades. In the late 1940s through to the early 1960s, Simpson worked across a number of contemporary residential projects including flats and multi-storey apartments such as Troon Flats, Toorak (1959–60); Fairlie, South Yarra (1960–61) and Hotham Gardens, North Melbourne (1958–61) for the Housing Commission of Victoria (Goad and Willis 2012: 630).

In addition to architectural design, Simpson also specialised in institutional master planning, including landscape planning. In 1964, Simpson was tasked with the masterplan for La Trobe University at Bundoora, which was required to include building designs, but also planting, earthworks and concourse system planning. Other notable institutional master planning included the Catholic Diocesan offices adjacent to St Patrick's Cathedral (1969–71) (Goad and Willis 2012: 630).

Simpson retired from architectural practise in 1980. He was a recipient of the Order of Australia for services to architecture in 1982 and was awarded a gold medal for architecture by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1997 (*Age*, 8 April 1997: 26).

Description

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, also known as the 'Knottywood' Units, are a group of fourteen dwellings designed by architect Roy McCowan Simpson and constructed between 1961–64. The units are arranged as four separate blocks around a shared common area, with three single storey blocks and one block (Block D) which is double storey. Located on the north side of Wattle Road, the units sit at the rear of an L-shaped allotment which is accessed via a driveway between 61 and 65 Wattle Road.

Constructed in light grey concrete bricks with a flat roof, each unit block is rectilinear in plan. Block B is located on the western side of the communal drive behind the original Knottywood House. Comprising two units (units 4 and 5) this block is single storey with a very low pitched (almost flat) transverse gable roof with deep eaves, exposed rafter ends and concealed gutters. Entry to each unit is along the southern elevation with the entry doors protected by a projecting flat roofed porch supported by slender steel posts. Windows are typically floor to ceiling to the living rooms and bedrooms. The living spaces for each unit are orientated towards the north and open onto private courtyards. Directly behind these courtyards and separated by a wide gravel drive is block C. Comprising units 6 and 7, Block C is identical in design to Block B although the entry porch roofs are cantilevered rather than supported by steel posts. Block D is to the east of Block C and separated by a flat roofed carport for six cars. The roof of the carport appears to hover above a brick wall running along its rear northern side while along its southern side it is supported by slender steel posts with the front edge of the roof being an open pergola.

Block D comprises six two storey units (units 8–13) and is constructed of light grey concrete bricks with a flat roof. When viewed from the south the block appears as an austere terrace row with evenly spaced vertically proportioned windows at the upper and ground level and flat roofed cantilevered awnings over the paired front doors. Unlike the single storey blocks in the development, Block D has no eave overhang. Each unit is designed with its ground floor living space and first floor main bedroom facing north. To maximise northern light the northern wall of each unit is a double-storey glazed curtain wall with an opaque pale blue spandrel panel at first floor level and fitted metal shade awing.



Running north–south and at the eastern end of Block D, Block E comprises four single storey units (units 14–17). Detailed in a similar fashion to Blocks B and C, Block E features light grey concrete brick walls, very low pitched (almost flat) hip roof, exposed rafter ends and large walls of glazing to their easterly courtyards. The entry to each unit is demarcated by a flat roofed porch which joins to the eastern wall of block D (units 14 and 15) and to the eastern wall of the central carports (units 16 and 17)

Each unit has a designated car parking space in one of the adjoining four communal carports located across the site. The carports are discreetly designed with screening walls of light grey concrete brick walls and have low slung flat roofs supported by slender steel posts and open pergola fronts to allow for the growing of climbing plants.

The design of the complex is enhanced by its established garden setting. This includes a combination of gravel and asphalt drives that meander through the site amongst garden beds of layered mostly exotic vegetation, and exotic and Australian native trees. Features of note include the volcanic rock roundabout, early Knottywood signs, light grey concrete brick out buildings and screening walls, and several large established trees (including Moreton Bay Fig, Lilly Pilly, Chestnut-leaved Oak)

Key features of the building and landscape include:

- the planned landscape and siting of four individual unit blocks (three single storey; one double storey) and four carport structures across the site.
- the individual private courtyards to each unit
- light grey concrete brick walls with the pattern of window and door openings
- very low pitched (almost flat) transverse gable roofs with deep eaves, exposed rafter ends and concealed gutters (blocks B, C and E)
- projecting flat roofed porches supported by slender steel posts (Block B); other porches cantilevered (Block C and D) or linked to other structures (Block E)
- flat roof with no eave overhang (south elevation) to Block D
- two storey glazed curtain wall with an opaque pale blue spandrel panel at first floor level and fitted metal shade awing (Block D)
- the gravel and asphalt drives that meander through the site amongst densely planted garden beds in layers of established planting, comprising mostly exotic shrubs and understory and exotic and Australian native trees.
- volcanic rock roundabout, early signage, light grey concrete brick out buildings and screening walls, and several large established trees.

Integrity

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, is largely intact with few changes visible to original or early fabric. The units retain their original built form, flat or very low-pitched roofs, eaves detail, pattern of window and door openings, walls of light grey concrete bricks, walls of glazing and individual courtyards.

The integrity of the place is enhanced by the retention of its original site planning and landscape elements which include a combination of gravel and asphalt drives that meander through the site

amongst garden beds of exotic and indigenous shrubs and small trees. Features of note included the volcanic rock roundabout, early Knottywood signs, light grey concrete brick out buildings and screening walls, and several large established trees. Overall, the place is of very high integrity.

Comparative Analysis

The 'Knottywood' Units represent an early exemplar of medium density residential housing in a distinctly modernist aesthetic. Modernism offered an alternative to postwar housing 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. Unlike many other Modernist architects in Australia, Roy Simpson was 'committed to the idea that modernism might be able to embody civic values and be able to provide appropriate public urban space' (Goad and Willis 2012:630). Simpson had already been involved in the Housing Commission of Victoria at Hotham Gardens project in North Melbourne (1958–61), working alongside notable architects including Graeme Gunn, who later designed for the influential project house building firm of Merchant Builders in 1965 (Goad and Willis 2012:451).

In addition to being a fine architect, Simpson was also an accomplished landscape planner (Goad and Willis 2012:630), and his landscape setting of 'Knottywood' Units both reflect the broader landscaping trends of the 1950s and 1960s and enhance the amenity of the units. Landscaping of this period adopted a distinct aesthetic relationship to architecture with house designs increasingly being informed by the topographic setting. Departing from the traditional concept of the house as an isolated object bound by a polished front garden and more utilitarian backyard, the postwar period started to see many suburban gardens take on a less cultivated appearance. Changes to established landscaping techniques included the loss of the boundary fencing and greater tendency to leave plantings in their natural shape, as well as the use of Australian native plantings. Yards became zoned for outdoor living, largely focusing on privacy, comfort and leisure, with a more effective link between the indoors and outdoors (Goad 2002:253).

Unit development in Boroondara

The subdivision of large allotments in Hawthorn in the 1930s and 1940s led to a mixture of styles with cul-de-sacs and small pockets of mid-twentieth century housing surrounded mostly 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 (Gould 1993:62; Built Heritage 2012:130,132).

The introduction of Company title and Stratum title after the Second World War enabled flats to be sold individually for the first time. This was promoted as 'buy your own' or 'own your own'. With the post-war housing shortage flats were promoted as a means of quickly solving the housing crisis and this encouraged the development of higher density developments (Context 2012:17).

The self-ownership, or 'own-your-own' (OYO), model came in response to the problem of inflated building costs, which prevented economic return on investment in flats for rent (*Construction*, 21 April 1954:32). The state's first block of OYO flats were built in Hawthorn in 1949 (Heritage Alliance 2008:23). Another OYO medium density design, the maisonette, was a popular alternative to the single-level flat, and was succeeded in the post-war era by townhouse or villa unit development.

(Context 2012:17). Villa units (or units) and townhouses were generally low-rise dwellings, either single or double storey, and typically larger than apartments and maisonettes. They shared common driveways but had their own carport entry, as well as private gardens or courtyards.

Identified in Boroondara's Thematic Environmental History as demonstrating Boroondara's postwar apartment boom, the multi-unit site planning employed by Simpson at 'Knottywood' appears to have been one of the earliest, if not the earliest example of this building typology within Boroondara.

A comparable example was constructed five years later in Kew, to a design by notable architect Graeme Gunn in collaboration with project house building firm Merchant Builders. These are the only example of a unit/townhouse development in the Heritage Overlay in the City of Boroondara.



Figure 20 'Townhouses', 76 Molesworth Street, Kew (HO325), built in 1969. Graeme Gunn architect. (Source: VHD 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 landscaped native garden setting. Constructed from grey concrete block and unplaned timber in a loosely brutalist design, the bold design would characterise many architect-designed homes over the coming decade. The townhouse design won an RAIA Bronze Medal in 1970 and is one of only four Boroondara residential projects to receive the medal.

Other unit developments by Roy Simpson

Like many other large land holdings in the area, 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn was subdivided in the 1960s for the construction of medium density housing. Architect Roy McCowan Simpson was very familiar with the site, having lived in the 'Knottywood' house as a child. At the time of their construction Simpson was concurrently involved in designs for a variety of different models of medium density housing each demonstrating Simpson's skill in combining different housing types according to their different urban and landscape setting. These included 'Troon' flats in Toorak, designed in conjunction with John and Phyllis Murphy (1959–60, 'Fairlie' Flats in South Yarra (1961) and the housing Commission of Victoria development at Hotham Gardens, North Melbourne (1958–61) undertaken in association with Grounds, John Mockridge, John and Phyllis Murphy and PF Pearce (Goad and Willis 2012:630).

Of these, only 'Troon' flats in Toorak are most closely comparable to the subject site. Built in 1961, 'Fairly Flats' are a nine-storey block of Modernist flats overlooking the Royal Botanic Gardens and one of the earliest luxury high-rise blocks of flats in Melbourne. Hotham Gardens consists of one, two and three bedroom apartments spread across four low rise blocks set within landscaped gardens designed by influential Australian landscape architect Beryl Mann.



Figure 21 'Troon', 746 Orrong Road, Toorak, constructed in 1964 to a design by Roy Simpson. (recommended for detailed assessments in stage 1 (Source: VHD/Context 2011))

'Troon', 746 Orrong Road, Toorak is a complex of apartments constructed in 1964 to a design by Roy Simpson. The complex is made up of two distinct types of dwellings, the first being north-facing flats with balconies above the garages, and the second garden apartments orientated east-west which incorporate enclosed courtyards. The modernist design is expressed through a limited material palette, with grey bricks, large areas of glazing, balconies with unadorned metal balustrades and a flat roof design.

Unit developments outside City of Boroondara

Outside of the City of Boroondara, the most comparable unit development to 'Knottywood is Winter Park', 137–141 High Street, Doncaster (VHR H1345, HO83), constructed between 1970–1974 by Merchant Builders.



Figure 22 'Winter Park', 137–141 High Street, Doncaster (VHR H1345, City of Manningham HO83), constructed between 1970–1974 by Merchant Builders. (Source: VHD/Context 2005)

'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 RAIA Award Citation in 1975.

Discussion

When compared to 76 Molesworth Street, Kew (HO325) and Winter Park', 137–141 High Street, Doncaster (H1345, HO83), 63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn compares well as a highly intact, early example of a modernist medium density townhouse unit complex. Each of these early unit developments pioneered the concept of multi-unit housing in which the traditional suburban subdivision pattern of freestanding individual houses on their own piece of land was reinvented. Introducing the notion of



'clustered' housing, they all utilised the central idea of free sitting houses within communal open spaces to achieve an integration of the built environment with the most efficient use of land.

While Winter Park is widely acknowledged as being influential in encouraging the Victorian Government to introduce the Cluster Titles Act 1974, it is particularly noteworthy that these ideas were being successfully executed by Simpson at 'Knottywood' as early as 1961, more than a decade earlier.

All three of these unit developments demonstrate key characteristics of modernist architecture albeit in slightly differing variations. Simpson's 'Knottywood' utilises a stripped back Modernist aesthetic that incorporates very low-pitched roofs with exposed rafter ends, sheer wall planes of grey concrete blocks and large window walls of glass; the architectural expression of which aligns with the concept of a regional Melbourne style introduced by architect Robin Boyd, in 1947. Boyd called for an architecture that was simple, light and fresh with an unpretentious elegance; a regional expression of International Modernism. In contrast, at Molesworth Street, Kew, Graeme Gunn utilises characteristics of the emerging influence of a Brutalist aesthetic that gained popularity during the 1960s and 1970s while at Winter Park Gunn's designs appear to have been influenced by Sydney-based architect Ken Woolley's Sydney School of architecture with their steeply pitched skillion roofs and rustic brickwork.

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn also compares to 'Troon', at 746 Orrong Road, Toorak, which employs a similar design aesthetic in its choice of grey concrete block, flat roofs, sheer wall planes and large window walls of glass. Although somewhat more conventional in planning than 'Knottywood', 'Troon' also explores the concept of early multi-unit developments featuring a long two-storey block of flats looking north over the car area, with a string of units behind, which face side courts, with bridge access over a heavily-planted walkway.

In conclusion 'Knottywood' Units are one of the earliest examples of a medium density 'own-your-own' residential townhouse developments in the City of Boroondara. The units are distinguished by their sophisticated use of a stripped back modernist design aesthetic and their radical site planning which reinterprets traditional suburban subdivision patterns by free sitting modular 'blocks' within communal open landscaped spaces.

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).

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, planned and built between 1961 and 1964, is of local historical significance as one the earliest (if not the earliest) examples of a medium density 'own-your-own' residential unit development in the City of Boroondara. Its radical planning of positioning varying blocks of units across the site within connecting landscape gardens challenged the traditional concept of a single house on a quarter acre block and notably predates the introduction of the *Cluster Titles Act 1974* by ten years.

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, is of local historical significance for the evidence the site layout and the units provide of Boroondara as a locus for fine, leading architect-designed public and private buildings from the 1850s into the postwar period. Designed by noted Melbourne architect Roy Simpson, it



exemplifies the development pattern of medium density residential housing across the municipality, which intensified following the postwar subdivision of previously large estates.

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).

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, is of local aesthetic significance as a notable example of a multi-unit development designed by prominent architect Roy Simpson in the Modernist style. Unique for its time, the site is carefully planned with blocks of units carefully placed within a landscape setting. Reflecting broader landscape trends of the 1950s and 1960s, and departing from the traditional concept of the house as an isolated object bound by a polished front garden, the landscape includes a combination of gravel and asphalt drives that meander through the site with densely planted garden beds and an almost sculptural use of planting to connect the unit blocks and integrate the built form and landscape. This setting enhances the amenity of the units. Aesthetic significance is also derived from the units themselves which have a simplicity of structure and minimisation of decoration that reflects the influence and regional expression of International modernism.

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

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, designed by architect Roy Simpson, is significant.



Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include:

- original planned landscape and siting of four individual unit blocks (three single storey; one double storey) and four carport structures across the site.
- individual private courtyards to each unit
- light grey concrete brick walls and original pattern of window and door openings
- very low pitched (almost flat) transverse gable roofs with deep eaves, exposed rafter ends and concealed gutters (blocks B, C & E)
- projecting flat roofed porches supported by slender steel posts (Block B);
- cantilevered porches (Block C and D)
- porches linked to other structures (Block E)
- Flat roof with no eave overhang (south elevation) to Block D
- two storey glazed curtain wall and the opaque pale blue spandrel panel at first floor level and fitted metal shade awing (Block D)
- the gravel and asphalt drives (fabric and layout)
- densely vegetated garden beds and established vegetation
- volcanic rock roundabout, early signage, light grey concrete brick out buildings and screening walls.

How is it significant?

The 'Knottywood' Units are of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, planned and built between 1961 and 64, is of local historical significance as one of the earliest (if not the earliest) examples of a medium density 'own-your-own' residential unit development in the City of Boroondara. Its radical planning of positioning varying blocks of units across the site within connecting landscape gardens challenged the traditional concept of a single house on a quarter acre block and notably predates the introduction of the Cluster Titles Act 1974 by ten years. (Criterion A)

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, is of local historical significance for the evidence the site layout and the units provide of Boroondara as a locus for fine, leading architect-designed public and private buildings from the 1850s into the postwar period. Designed by noted Melbourne architect Roy Simpson, it exemplifies the development pattern of medium density residential housing across the municipality, which intensified following the postwar subdivision of previously large estates. (Criterion A)

63 Wattle Road, Hawthorn, is of local aesthetic significance as a notable example of a multi-unit development designed by prominent architect Roy Simpson in the Modernist style. Unique for its time, the site is carefully planned with blocks of units carefully placed within a landscape setting. Reflecting broader landscape trends of the 1950s and 1960s, and departing from the traditional concept of the house as an isolated object bound by a polished front garden, the landscape includes a combination of gravel and asphalt drives that meander through the site with densely planted garden beds and an

almost sculptural use of planting to connect the unit blocks and integrate the built form and landscape. This setting enhances the amenity of the units. Aesthetic significance is also derived from the units themselves which have a simplicity of structure and minimisation of decoration that reflects the influence and regional expression of International modernism. (Criterion E)

Grading and Recommendations

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:

External paint controls	
<i>Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?</i>	No
Internal alteration controls	
<i>Is a permit required for internal alterations?</i>	No
Tree controls	
<i>Is a permit required to remove a tree?</i>	No
Solar energy system controls	
<i>Is a permit required to install a solar energy system?</i>	Yes
Outbuildings and fences exemptions	
<i>Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?</i>	Yes – carports and other outbuildings and screening walls. early signage
Victorian Heritage Register	
<i>Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?</i>	No
Prohibited uses may be permitted	
<i>Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?</i>	No
Aboriginal heritage place	
<i>Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?</i>	No
Incorporated plan	
<i>Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?</i>	No

Identified by:

GML Heritage 2022.



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