Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Grenfell House	**HO Reference:** HO244
Address: 9 Mernda Road, Kooyong	**Citation status:** Final
	Date Updated: 24 March 2022
Designer: Godfrey and Spowers	**Year of Construction:** 1932
Builder: Unknown	



Photograph of Grenfell House (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO244.

Heritage Group: Residential Buildings	**Key Theme:** Building Suburbs
Heritage Type: Residence	**Key Sub-theme:** Creating Australia's most 'designed' suburbs – houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as a local heritage place on the HO with paint and tree controls.

Controls:	■	External paint colours	☐	Internal alterations	■ Tree controls
	☐	Victorian Heritage Register	☐	Incorporated Plans	☐ Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	☐	Prohibited uses may be permitted	☐	Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 9 Mernda Road, Kooyong (otherwise known as Grenfell House) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale, setback and detailing of the 1932 Arts and Crafts inspired interwar era house is of local significance, as well as the landscaping and mature oak (*Quercus*) tree. The front fence and gate, and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Grenfell House is of local representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington, and is associated with well-known architect Godfrey and Spowers. In addition, the landscaping has associative significance with prominent landscape designer Edna Walling, while the mature (*Quercus*) oak tree has historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The oak (*Quercus*) tree has historical significance as a very mature tree that pre-dates Grenfell House and therefore likely relates to the former landscape of the 1840 Glen Ferrie Estate. (Criterion A)

Grenfell House is a good representative example of an Arts and Crafts inspired interwar era house, a style which drew on the Federation Arts and Crafts movement that stood for the integration of art into everyday life through the medium of craftsmanship in architecture. Key details include the use of sandstone, brick and render to express certain features of the façade, catslide roof, wide eaves and exterior chimney breast. (Criterion D)

Grenfell House has aesthetic significance as a highly intact, fine and visually striking example of an Arts and Crafts inspired interwar era house owing to the use of sandstone and brick, the catslide roof form, scale and its placement on an estate-like lot as opposed to directly fronting a street. The mature oak (*Quercus*) tree also has aesthetic value as a large and visually prominent tree on the site that is clearly visible from the street. (Criterion E)

Grenfell House is associated with Godfrey and Spowers, well known architects early to mid 20th century architects who deigned a large number of houses, warehouses and institutional buildings, along with numerous bank buildings in Melbourne. Its grounds are also associated with the influential landscape designer Edna Walling, who was particularly renowned for the use of stone and dense greenery in residential gardens. (Criterion H)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The oak tree has historical significance as a very mature tree that pre-dates Grenfell House and therefore likely relates to the former landscape of the 1840 Glen Ferrie Estate.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.

C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	Grenfell House is a good representative example of an Arts and Crafts inspired interwar era house, a style which drew on the Federation Arts and Crafts movement of concerning the integration of art into everyday life through the medium of craftsmanship in architecture. Key details include the use of sandstone, brick and render to express certain features of the façade, catslide roof, wide eaves and exterior chimney breast.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	Grenfell House has aesthetic significance as a highly intact, fine and visually striking example of an Arts and Crafts inspired interwar era house owing to the use of sandstone and brick, the catslide roof form, scale and its placement on an estate-like lot as opposed to directly fronting a street. The mature oak (*Quercus*) tree also has aesthetic value as a large and visually prominent tree on the site that is clearly visible from the street.
F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	The place does not meet this 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 the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	The place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	Grenfell House is associated with Godfrey and Spowers, well known architects early to mid 20th century architects who deigned a large number of houses, warehouses and institutional buildings, along with numerous bank buildings in Melbourne. Its grounds are also associated with the influential landscape designer Edna Walling, who was particularly

		renowned for the use of stone and dense greenery in residential gardens

Description

- ### Physical Analysis

Grenfell House is an Arts and Crafts deviation of the Interwar Old English style. The residence is a brick and render structure painted a cream colour. The main structure is double storey with a double gable roof clad in dark terracotta tiles. The front façade roof profile includes projecting dormers with brick apexes. It has a main transverse gable with a catslide roof running across the front façade, with arched windows and arched main doorway lined with unpainted brick. The entry wing is defined by a triple reveal with three small windows with arched voussoirs and tapestry brick to mirror the arched entryway. There are two additional feature windows on the projecting front façade including an eighteen pane leadlight rectangular timber window on ground level and an arched leadlight grid window on the upper level. The other windows on the front façade behind the projecting gable are twenty-eight pane leadlight rectangular timber casement windows.

The main feature along with the projecting catslide roof is a wide central chimney breast extending framing the front façade. The chimney has a sandstone base and decorative sandstone bricks located along the front of the chimney. The sandstone base extends away from the chimney to an area capped with terracotta which creates a solid form grounding the front façade of the residence. There is a small access pointed door with corresponding brick lintel along the sandstone base. There are three additional simplistic and unornamented painted brick chimneys located on the structure.

The grounds are heavily landscaped. There is a very mature oak (*Quercus*) tree dominating the front garden that pre-dates Grenfell House and therefore likely relates to the landscape of the 1840 Glen Ferrie Estate. Other garden features include its distinct use of curved edges and dense greenery. Exposed aggregate concrete paving and a lawn path in front of the house extends from the main wrought iron gates in a sweep to the side carport and terminating at the rear garage. The backyard has a lawn area, timber deck extension and play equipment. The boundary of Grenfell House is defined by a high white brick wall laid in a running bond and painted the same colour as the main residence. The brick wall is capped with vertically laid bricks in a varying dark brown to red colours to contrast the light colour of the wall and residence.

Grenfell House is set on a north south axis with the front façade facing due south and overlooking Mernda Road. It is located just off the junction of Toorak Road and Glenferrie Road and is close to the Kooyong Railway Station, Kooyong commercial area and several sports and recreational spaces north of the train line.

Grenfell House is currently used as a residential property and is considered in good condition. The original leadlight windows, timber window frames, roof riles, brickwork and sandstone appear intact and the house is considered to be of high integrity.

- Alterations and Additions

- Exposed aggregate driveway paving.
- Side car port extension with corrugated iron awning.
- Garage and storage building added to the backyard.
- Play equipment added to the backyard.
- Timber deck with shade structure added to the rear of the house.
- Addition of antenna to roof.

History

- Historical Context

For thousands of years preceding European colonialism, the area now known as Stonnington was the traditional home of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. This environment would have provided Traditional Owners with access to pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot), and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), in a rolling landscape on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay. It is important to note that the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington did not end with colonialism—it has a rich presence to this day.

The suburb of Kooyong was historically associated with the estate of solicitor Peter Ferrie, who purchased from the Crown Portion 21 in June 1840. This portion comprised sixty acres of land bounded by Glenferrie Road, Cardiners Creek, Avenel Road, and Toorak Road. This land would in turn form a portion of the future City of Malvern. Ferrie would lose his property due to financial constraints in 1843, and the property was taken up by many different owners over a period of twenty years. In 1865 it was purchased by one James Fergusson. A lithographer by trade, Fergusson constructed a palatial property of fourteen rooms with auxiliary outbuildings and gardens. This building would later be demolished in 1854. All sixty acres of the original grounds were subdivided, making way for the streets of Kooyong.

In 1890 the new railway line to Glen Iris cut a swathe through both the Glen Ferrie Estate and Bailey's land, cutting off the flood-prone river flats. Chinese market gardeners continued to use the land between the railway and the creek well into the 20th century. Today, Kooyong is characterised by a mixture of Federation/Edwardian and interwar private residences.

- Place History

Grenfell House was designed by architects Godfrey and Spowers for Hugh Randall Syme in the early 1930s, with the building being completed in 1932. Other notable buildings designed by Godfrey and Spowers include the Argus building, the former Bank of New South Wales and The National Mutual Centre. A naval officer, bomb disarmer and newspaper proprietor, Hugh Randall Syme was the grandson of David Syme, the publisher and editor of The Age (Refshauge 2002).

Grenfell House was initially occupied by Syme and his first wife Olive Alyson Clark. Its original exterior featured both deep cream brickwork and brown texture bricks at sills. As illustrated in the original architectural plan by Godfrey and Spowers (1931), the first floor comprised a large sitting room and study that was connected by double doors to a dining room and service wing, while the upper floor featured two bedrooms with built in wardrobes, a sleepout, dressing room, bathroom and maid's room (Stonnington History Centre Collection). A 1935 feature magazine article on Grenfell in Table Talk make

notes of a carefully landscaped English-like front garden characterised by shady oak trees and a winding pavement (Table Talk 1935, 2-3). These exterior features and plantings were predominantly the work of notable landscape designer Edna Walling. With the exception of several alterations, such as the removal of stone paths in the front garden and the addition of concrete paving, the curved edging and overall form of Walling's original design continues to be reflected Grenfell's current state.

During the early years of the house, the back garden was used as a space to hold luncheons. Changes in occupancy took place upon Harvey Syme and Olive Clark's divorce in 1940, and Syme's ensuing marriage to Joan Campbell Syme (née McCay) in 1943, the daughter of prominent journalist Delamore McCay (Refshauge 2002). Over the next decade, Harvey and Joan went on to have three daughters, Ione (birth date unknown), Eve (birth date unknown) and Belinda (b. 1952), further expanding occupancy at Grenfell House.

A MMBW Plan from 1947 reveals that a garage/workshop structure was added to the back of the house by this year. This addition likely took place following Joan's occupancy at Grenfell House.

Probate for Grenfell House was obtained for £106, 914 upon Hugh Randall Syme's death in 1965. It subsequently remained in the Syme family until it was sold in 2001 to an unknown proprietor; the sixty-nine year occupancy of Grenfell House by the Syme family was quite extraordinary. The new occupant modernised the residence while retaining the Arts and Crafts style of the original exposed timber interior. It was auctioned and sold again in 2019.

Comparative Analysis

The suburb of Kooyong is characterised by large group of interwar era dwellings, including the Old English style, Arts and Crafts deviations of the Interwar Old English, as well as Streamline Moderne style. Grenfell House is one of the best examples an Arts and Crafts deviation of the Interwar Old English style in Kooyong, a style which drew on the Federation Arts and Crafts movement of concerning the integration of art into everyday life through the medium of craftsmanship in architecture.

There are three clear comparative examples within the suburb:

- **35 Talbot Crescent, Kooyong (HO181 Kooyong Precinct).** The dwelling at 35 Talbot Crescent compares very favourably with Grenfell House as a high-quality example of an Arts and Crafts inspired Interwar dwelling. Both buildings share the same overall built form, roof form (inclusive of the façade skillion), height, exterior façade chimneys and decorative detailing which involves the use of painted render and exposed masonry to highlight features such as window and door surrounds or chimney breasts. Unlike 35 Talbot Crescent which utilises face brick for this decorative work, Grenfell House integrates both brick and sandstone as the masonry elements. This gives Grenfell House a unique and striking visual aesthetic. The chimneys at 35 Talbot Crescent are noted to be of higher quality through the profiled capping, as opposed to Grenfell House which includes un-profiled brick chimneys. With respect to siting, Grenfell House is notable in its placement on an estate-like allotment as opposed to directly fronting a street like 35 Talbot Crescent.
- **53 and 59 Talbot Crescent, Kooyong (HO181 Kooyong Precinct).** The dwellings at 53 and 59 Talbot Crescent compare quite favourably with Grenfell House as high-quality examples of an Arts and Crafts inspired interwar dwellings. All three buildings share the same overall built form,

roof form (inclusive of the façade skillion) and height. Unlike Grenfell house which utilises render and masonry (sandstone and brick) to highlight features such as window and door surrounds or chimney breasts, 53 and 59 Talbot Crescent have a clear separation between face brick and timber panelling on the façade. Although this façade finish is of aesthetic value, the difference in approach gives Grenfell House a unique and striking visual aesthetic in comparison. Other differences include the considerably smaller building footprint of 53 and 59 Talbot Crescent, lack of a front facing façade chimney breast and siting fronting the street as opposed to a setback within an estate-like allotment.

As shown by the above examples, Grenfell House compares very favourably with a number of local heritage buildings in terms of built form, roof form and some aspects of the materiality. While this is the case, Grenfell House stands out as the most unique, high quality and visually striking example of the group through the use of sandstone, the scale of the dwelling and its setback on an estate-like lot as opposed to directly fronting a street.

Grenfell House was designed by Godfrey and Spowers, well known architects who designed a large number of houses, warehouses and institutional buildings, along with numerous bank buildings for the Bank of NSW and others (Goad and Willis 2012, 279). Notable buildings completed by Godfrey and Spowers include the Argus building, the former Bank of New South Wales and The National Mutual Centre. A search of heritage Victoria's database HERMES shows that there are no comparable dwellings designed by Godfrey and Spowers (or their later business entities) that are afforded heritage protection and can be compared to Grenfell House. In fact, much of the work that is afforded heritage protections relates to churches and bank buildings.

References

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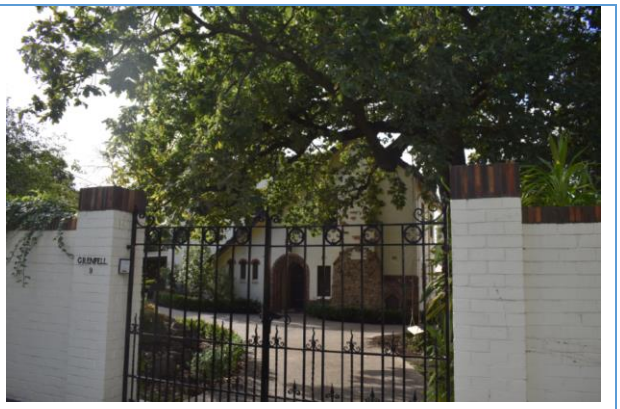
Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

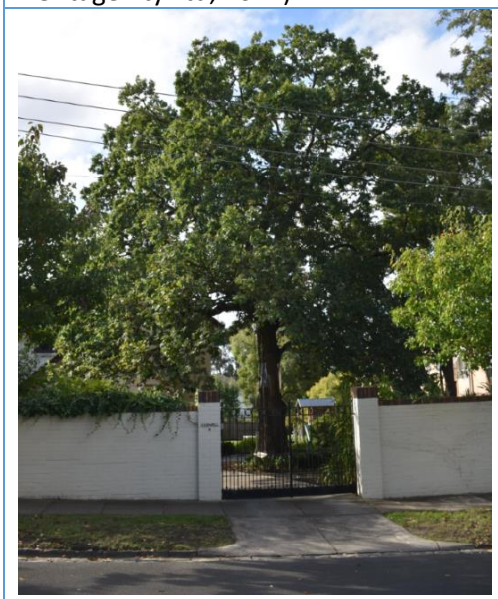
Further Images



Overview of the dwelling and landscaped front garden from the front gate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



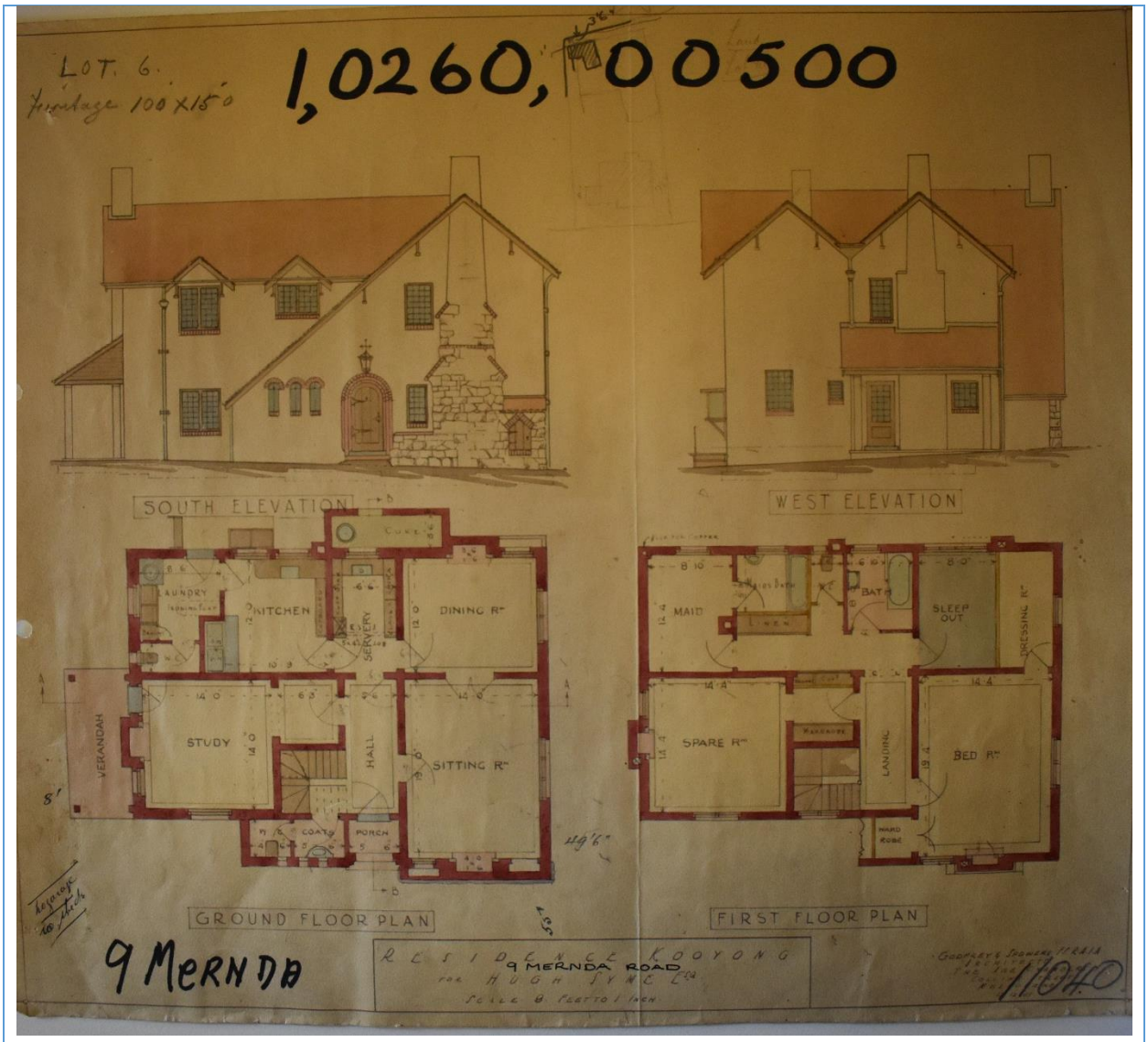
View of the dwelling behind the front gate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Large oak (*Quercus*) tree in the front setback. The tree pre-dates Grenfell House and therefore likely relates to the landscape of the 1840 Glen Ferrie Estate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Overview of the site from Mernda Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Original 1931 drawings of Grenfell House (source: Godfrey & Spowers. (1931, December). *Residence Kooyong for Hugh Syme* [architectural plan]. Stonnington History Centre collection).

Authors

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