

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Gelbart House
Address: 5 Heyington Place, Toorak

HO Reference: HO733
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 28 February 2022

Designer: Holgar and Holgar
Builder: Goldstein Engineering Pty Ltd

Year of Construction: 1971-72



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



Location map and extent of 5 Heyington Place, Toorak.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings
Heritage Type: House

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Functional, eccentric and theatrical – experimentation and innovation in architecture

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Recommended for the Heritage Overlay as an individual place.

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 5 Heyington Place, Toorak, (otherwise known as Gelbart House), is significant. The built form, scale, setbacks, fenestration and materiality of the Post-war Modernist house is of local significance, along with the original garage. The landscaping and later alterations and addition are not significant.

How is it significant?

Gelbart House is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington. The building also has associative significance as a structure designed by the significant Modernist architectural partnership Holgar and Holgar.

Why is it significant?

Gelbart House is historically significant as a Post-war Modern residence that was erected after the post-war development of residential enclaves in Toorak, seeing the creation of cul-de-sacs along generous residential roads, and thus forms a tangible link to this period of planning and development in Toorak. As a house designed by European émigré architects for European émigré clients in the post-war period, Gelbart House is also historically significant in demonstrating the significant design contributions architects such as Holgar and Holgar and their progressively-minded clients made to residential development within the municipality. (Criterion A)

Gelbart House is aesthetically significant as a highly intact, bespoke and unique Post-war Modernist design with a striking streetscape character and a Hollywood inspired visual appeal. Illustrative of the unique style associated with the architectural firm of Holgar and Holgar, physical elements contributing to the overall aesthetic significance of the house include the rectilinear form and proportions, concrete arched buttresses, recessed entrance treatment with overhead steel screen, the floor-to-ceiling glazing and unhindered views to the building from the northern and eastern elevations owing to a lack of fencing. The buttresses in particular express the structure of the residence while creating a sense of movement with its arched form. (Criterion E)

Gelbart House is of associative significance as a highly distinctive residential design by the architectural partnership Holgar and Holgar. (Criterion H)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Gelbart House is historically significant as a Post-war Modern residence that was erected after the post-war development of residential enclaves in Toorak, seeing the creation of cul-de-sacs along generous residential roads, and thus forms a tangible link to this period of planning and development in Toorak. As a house designed by European émigré architects for European émigré clients in the post-war period, Gelbart House is also historically significant in demonstrating the significant design contributions architects
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<i>B</i>	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>C</i>	<i>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>D</i>	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Gelbart House is aesthetically significant as a highly intact, bespoke and unique Post-war Modernist design with a striking streetscape character and a Hollywood inspired visual appeal. Illustrative of the unique style associated with the architectural firm of Holgar and Holgar, physical elements contributing to the overall aesthetic significance of the house include the rectilinear form and proportions, concrete arched buttresses, recessed entrance treatment with overhead steel screen, the floor-to-ceiling glazing and unhindered views to the building from the northern and eastern elevations owing to a lack of fencing. The buttresses in particular express the structure of the residence while creating a sense of movement with its arched form.
<i>F</i>	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>G</i>	<i>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</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

H	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	Gelbart House is of associative significance as a highly distinctive residential design by the architectural partnership Holgar and Holgar.
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Description

• Physical Analysis

Gelbart House is a double storey residence built in the Post-war Modernist style. The concrete and steel structure is finished with a smooth white render and employs a flat roof with trim deck cladding. The roof is hidden behind an unbroken flat parapet. The residence has a C-shaped plan with a private enclosed square courtyard, formerly the location of a pool, defining the structure bordering the west boundary.

The structure is characterised by a strong rectilinear form. The façade addresses Heyington Place and the northern elevation addresses Glendye Court. Its prominent corner location is emphasised by its scale and repetitive façade detailing. Strong vertical elements are layered over the horizontal form of the structure. This includes the prefabricated concrete arches that sit in front of the façade and supporting the overhanging roof. The arches create bays that define the four single garage doors at the ground level. The lower level is recessed and mostly hidden from view behind a slight gradient decline and tall formal planting. The upper level extends over the ground level with full height steel glazed windows running the length of the façade. The main entrance is also located on the façade. It is raised and set into the residence, accessible from a flight of stairs. The entrance consists of white double doors and sidelights at full floor to ceiling height. Above the entrance is a patterned steel screen.

The northern elevation also employs the concrete arches set at a lower level to accommodate the gradient change and frames the tall full-length windows behind. The northern elevation features a set of tall white steel louvres at the north-eastern corner. The enclosed courtyard includes a paved area and a centred square shaped lawn. The elevations opening up to the courtyard include recessed entrance with hipped glass framed awnings and an open steel framed structure extending from the roof.

The landscaping in front of the façade includes the concrete laid pathway, short driveway to the main entrance and flanking low garden beds with shaped formal plantings. The northern elevation with Glendye Court has a deeper set back than the front facade. However, the street side is completely covered in verge plantings which extend into the property with a defined garden bed abutting the main structure. This visually extends the open space at its corner location, giving the structure increased prominence in the streetscape.

Gelbart House is located close to Naliandrah, a similar structure by the same architectural firm situated at the end of the Glendye Court cul-de-sac.

Gelbart House remains in use as a residential property. The property is considered to be in good condition and is of high integrity.

• Alterations and Additions

- Removal of the pool at the rear.
- Alterations to the landscaping over time.

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.

Following the establishment of Melbourne in 1835, squatter John Gardiner and many others like him sought out land in what would become present day Toorak and surrounds on account of its densely timbered landscape, undulating terrain and proximity to water. By 1840, crown land sales marked the area's transition to pastoral settlement, and later in 1851, with the purchase of land in Hawthorn by Thomas Herbert Power, the surrounding environments gradually became a place where the early merchant and squatter elite of Melbourne built their homesteads. In Toorak, this is best represented by the purchase of lot 26 by James Jackson, associate in Jackson, Rae & Co. soap and candle merchants. Jackson was described by politician William Westgarth as 'Melbourne's greatest merchant of this early time' (Forster 1999, 10). It is only fitting that his house, called Toorak House, would be the namesake of what would become arguably the most affluent suburb in Melbourne. Following the discovery of gold in the 1850s and the wealth this produced for ancillary trades, the Toorak area drew in Melbourne's newly wealthy. Today, over a century later, Toorak still has connotations of wealth and prestige as best represented in its history and built environment (Forster 1999, 5–26).

- **European émigré architects and Modernism in Toorak**

Combining luxury in architecture with Modernist design, Post-war residential Modernism in Toorak existed at the nexus of local émigré consumption cultures and the emergent practices of European émigré architects. While Toorak's strong tradition of patronage by wealthy residents allowed for architectural experimentation in the Modernist idiom amongst prominent architects like Roy Grounds and Robin Boyd from the late 1930s (Context 2009, 138), the arrival of both émigré architects and clients following the rise of 1930s antisemitism and World War II created a distinct modern design aesthetic that built upon and yet diversified existing trends.

In Toorak, this tended towards a combination of luxurious high-end eclecticism and European Modernist design principles by the 1960s (Reeves 2016, 571). This was most readily evident in the works of Polish-born duo Holgar and Holgar. Their Toorak-based Modernist designs were grand in scale and typified by palatial fittings and finishes. Designs like Naliandrah (1969) at 3 Glendye Court evoked an image of post-war opulence and grandeur in its luxuriant curves, terrazzo floors, and imported furnishing (Goad 1999, 14). Although arguably toned-down, this tendency towards luxury is also evident in local works by figures like Czech-born Ernest Fooks and Russian-born Anatol Kagan, who made use of lavish inbuilt European-influenced furnishings while extolling functionalism and minimalist forms, with Fooks arguing for variety, flexibility, and good craftsmanship in interiors as opposed to the uniformity and formality. While many of these elements were rooted in European approaches to Modernism, such high-end

Modernist eclecticism was undoubtedly inflected by the post-war aspirations of wealthy, often Jewish, diasporic clients who had settled in the elite suburb of Toorak. Taken together, this wave of post-war émigré architects and clients alike pioneered new approaches to residential Modernism that fundamentally enriched and transformed the Anglocentric Modernism that was being practiced within the municipality (Edquist 2019, 31).

- **Place History**

The land on which Gelbart House is presently situated formerly comprised the substantial grounds of the Victorian era Beaulieu Estate (now St. Catherine's) (MMBW 1905). The Beaulieu mansion (formerly Sherren House) was erected in the 1880s. The estate was gradually subdivided in the early 20th century, though still retaining a large parcel of land. This process reflected the wider pattern of subdivision and development that was taking place across Toorak during the early 20th century and interwar period. While the subdivision of large estates was taking place as well before this period, rising labour costs following World War I made the cost of servants and other works to maintain the estates prohibitive (Context Pty Ltd 2006). This resulted in intense urban character changes in the area, particularly in the form of grand architect designed homes situated on generous allotments.

Gelbart House was designed by Holgar and Holgar in 1970 and built in 1971-72 for Mr B. Gelbart (Holgar & Holgar 1970; Reeves 2016, 575). Holgar and Holgar was a husband-and-wife architectural partnership comprising the Polish born Helen Ptaszynska-Holgar and Wladyslaw Aleksander Janusz Ptaszynski-Holgar, who would later anglicise their names to Helen and John Holgar. . The pair trained in Italy and were employed as architects in England, before migrating to Australia in 1952 and establishing their own practice in 1959 (Reeves 2016, 569). The quintessential Holgar and Holgar mansion was described by Simon Reeves as 'palatial in every sense: grand staircases, cabanas, conversation pits, sunken baths, gold-plated taps, travertine, chandeliers, imported/bespoke furnishing, carefully chosen by the much-travelled architects' and designed to cater to 'moneyed clients who craved opulence not seen since the 1930s' (Reeves, 2016). While their initial designs were more in line with conventional Modernism, their style eventually evolved to include a luxurious eclecticism defined by lavish fittings and finishes (Reeves 2016).

Original architectural plans depict an impressive five bedroom one-storey house distinguished by arched buttresses, a long horizontal form and excavated sloping allotment (Holgar & Holgar 1970). According to the floor plan, the substantial residence comprised a cabana, billiard room, study, sunroom, kitchen, living room, dining room and internal courtyard with a swimming pool and landscaped lawns (Holgar & Holgar 1970). Its basement is also a significant feature, and includes a cellar, garage, plant room and store.

The Australian Jewish News published on the 25th of May, 1990, that the Gelbart House was for sale. It was advertised as follows:

In a prestigious local, close to many sought-after amenities, the home at 5 Heyington Place, Toorak offers all you could wish for in family living and entertaining, along with the added attraction of home/office accommodation... (The Australian Jewish News, 25th May 1990, pg. 14).

Today, Gelbart House is still privately owned and remains in use as a residence.

Comparative Analysis

Gelbart House exhibits key architectural features that have come to be recognised as being quintessentially associated with the notable firm of Holgar and Holgar, specifically comprising concrete arches, a flat roof, a geometric steel screen in the recessed entrance treatment, and floor-to-ceiling glazing. To date, there are no Holgar and Holgar properties included on a Heritage Overlay in Victoria. However, there are a number of notable Holgar and Holgar designs within the municipality, including:

- Naliandrah, 3 Glendye Court, Toorak (currently being reviewed by this study, and externally for inclusion on the VHR);
- 23 Linlithgow Road, Toorak (under review by this study); and
- 4 Nola Court, Toorak (under review by this study).

In addition, there is a Holgar and Holgar located at 344 Beach Road, Black Rock. This building shares some clear similarities with the Gelbart House including the floor to ceiling glazing, concrete buttresses and recessed entrance.

With this, though works associated with the firm have not historically been provided with heritage protections, Holgar and Holgar's body of work is now in a period of intense assessment for potential inclusion on statutory heritage registers.

Given that there are no comparable Holgar and Holgar designs on the Heritage Overlay, comparable examples executed by other architects include:

- **Lind House, 450 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North (VHR H2387, City of Glen Eira HO156).** Designed by Anatol Kagan in 1954–55, the Lind House is comparable to the Gelbart House as an example of a high-quality Post-war Modernist house constructed in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Both houses share similar characteristics, including the rectilinear built form and top-heavy design, with a projecting second storey. The Lind House however is more utilitarian than the Gelbart House, which exhibits a greater sense of luxury and opulence. Both properties are also reflective of the post-war migration of European Modernist architects.
- **Fenner House, 228 Domain Road, South Yarra (HO6, and VHR No. H2350).** The Fenner House was constructed in 1964 to designs prepared by Neil Clerehan. Fenner House, though quite different to the Gelbart House, abides by similar design principles, most specifically that of form. Both Post-war Modernist buildings are low, bunkered structures with long horizontal form. Both buildings share similar entrance treatments with recessed, sheltered, and centralised entrances accessed via stairs. The use of a staired entrance establishes a sense of proportioning and stature, composing a façade with the garages partially buried and the foyer elevated. Clear differences, however, include the lack of ornament at Fenner House, which is evident at the Gelbart House. These differences are readily associated with the different architects, with Neil Clerehan recognised for his minimal restraint and Holgar and Holgar known for their ornamented luxury.

As demonstrated by the above comparative analysis, the Gelbart House is a highly intact and bespoke Post-war Modernist residence designed by notable European émigré architects Holgar and Holgar. Gelbart House is a good representative example of their work and draws direct similarities with the qualities found in other important Post-war Modernist residences such as Lind House and Fenner House. Gelbart House exhibits a level of architectural opulence and luxury equal to both of these properties,

while also reflecting Holgar and Holgar's Hollywood-inspired aesthetic which was bold and flamboyant at times. Given there are no examples of Holgar and Holgar's work currently protected by a municipal Heritage Overlay, Gelbart House would make a fine and justified inclusion on the City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay.

References

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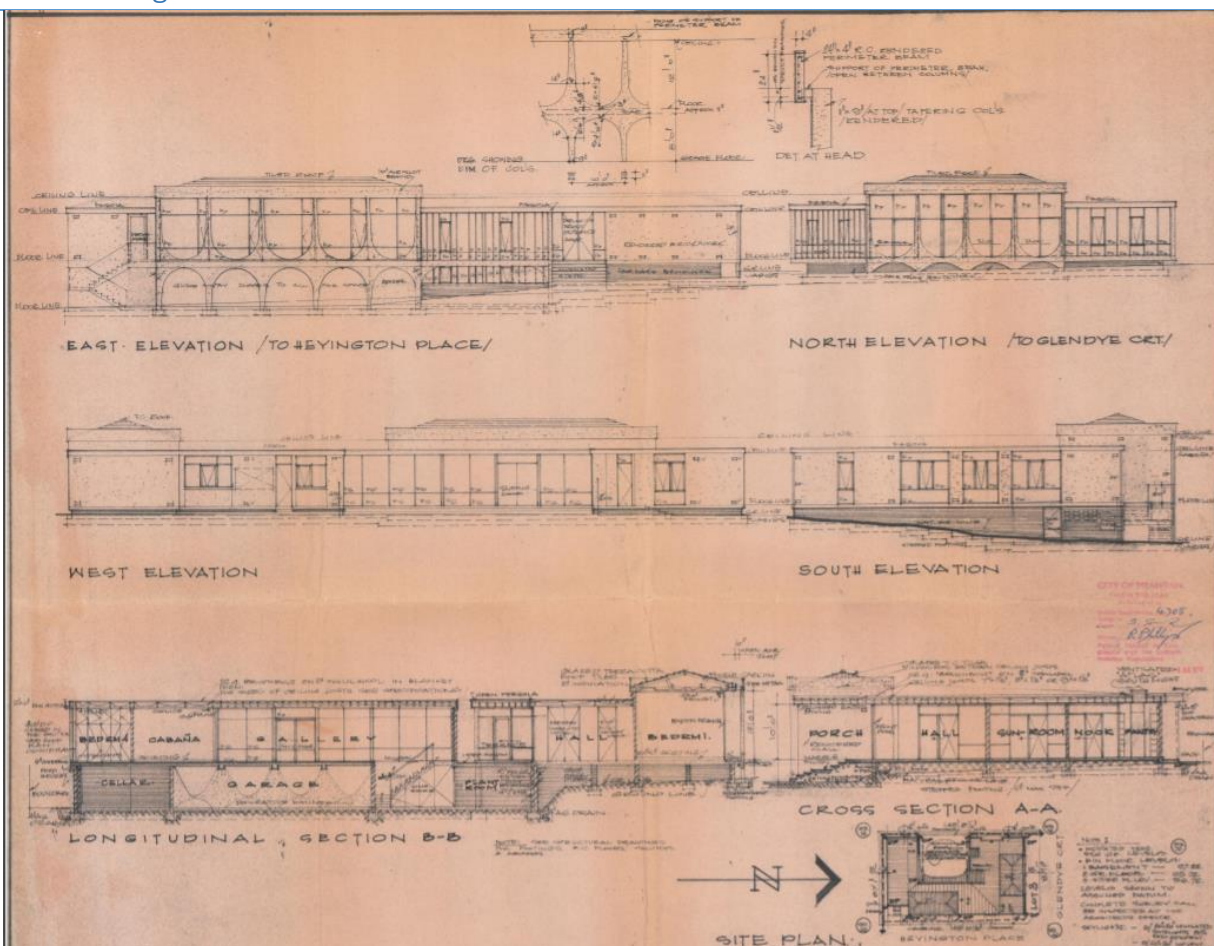
Residential Property Toorak property offers style, locale (1990, May 25). *The Australian Jewish News (Melbourne, Vic. : 1935 - 1999)*, p. 14

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works, detail plan No. 931, dated 1905.

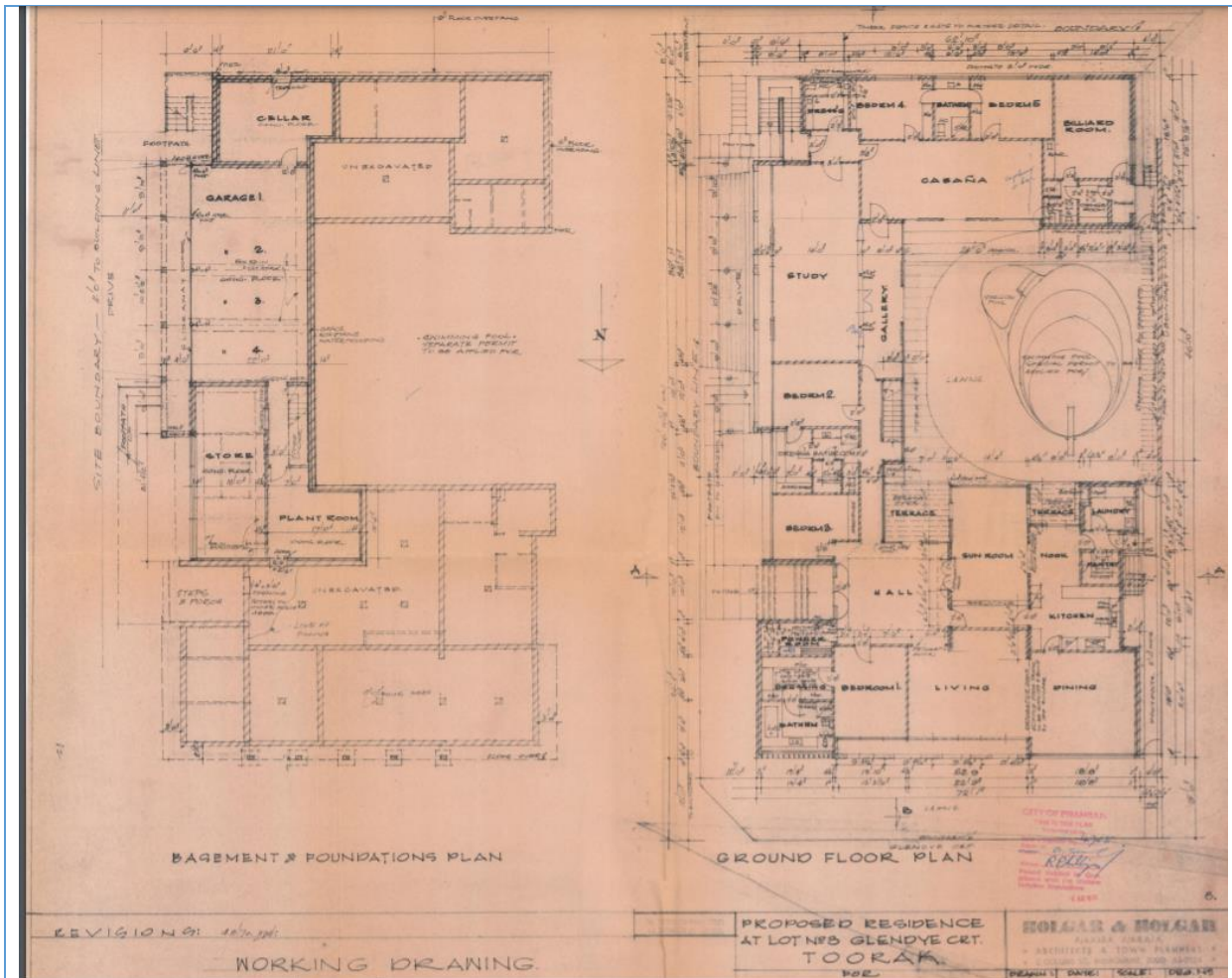
Limitations

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



Original elevations and section plans, dated 1970 (source: Holgar & Holgar. (1970, June). *Proposed Residence at Lot No. 3 Glendye Court, Toorak for Mr B. Gelbart* [architectural plan]. City of Stonnington).



Original floor plans, dated 1970 (source: Holgar & Holgar. (1970, June). *Proposed Residence at Lot No. 3 Glendye Court, Toorak for Mr B. Gelbart* [architectural plan]. City of Stonnington).



Overview of Gelbart House, looking southwest (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Front facade, looking southwest (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Façade and entrance (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Recessed entrance (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Oblique view of northern elevation, looking southwest (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of the northern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

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