
Silver Birches (formerly 'Hillsborough') and garden



Silver Birches, 129-131
Yarrbat Avenue Balwyn



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Location

129-131 Yarrbat Avenue BALWYN, BOROONDARA CITY

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Incl in HO area indiv sig

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO880

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 7, 2021

What is Significant?

'Silver Birches', formally known as 'Hillsborough', and garden, at 129-131 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, built in 1936 on the Canterbury Park Estate, is significant. The house was designed by architects A S and R A Eggleston, and the garden by Edna Walling. Significant elements of the place include the house and garage, front and rear garden layouts and associated elements, including original capped sections of the front fence, curved drive wall

and entrance gates, mature plantings (in particular the mature specimen Oak), and pond, low rubble stone walls and other hard landscaping features in the rear garden.

The raised section of the front fence and alterations made in 1970 are not significant.

How is it significant?

The residence and garden at 129-131 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn, is of local architectural (representative), aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

'Silver Birches' is a representative and externally intact example of a two-storey Georgian Revival dwelling. It embodies the principal characteristics of the style, including the understated restraint in detailing, cream brick walls, steep hipped slate roof, presentation of the pedimented entrance, and near symmetry in the arrangement of fenestration. (Criterion D)

The residence and garden at 129-131 Yarrbat Avenue is aesthetically significant as a particularly well designed and detailed architect-designed residence that is carefully sited within an extensive garden designed by Edna Walling. Tiled in slate, the roof's ridge lines have concealed transverse flashings under the slates removing the need for ridge capping. This heightens a sense of simplicity and clarity in the design and demonstrates the restrained and simplified detailing often evident in Georgian Revival architecture. The capped sections of the painted brick front fence, including the serpentine wall extending from the front drive gates towards the house's entrance, is part of this original garden design. The property's aesthetic significance is further enhanced by other remaining garden elements mature plantings (in particular the mature specimen Oak), and pond, low rubble stone walls and other hard landscaping features in the rear garden. (Criterion E)

The residence at 129-131 Yarrbat Avenue, Balwyn is significant for its association with Douglas Gray George, managing director of Georges department store in Melbourne, established in 1880 by brothers William and Alfred George. In 1889, the business moved to its famous location at 162-168 Collins Street. By 1901 Georges was a 'favoured spot with most of the smartest people in Melbourne', becoming an icon of genteel shopping and epitomising the exclusive image of Collins Street. It was a pioneer in Australian retailing, being one of the first stores to introduce lifts, a cash discount system, and a bargain basement 'on the American principle'. After William George died in 1935, his son Douglas Gray George became managing director of Georges Ltd for four years until his death in 1939. Georges closed its city and suburban stores in October 1995. (Criterion H)

Heritage Study/Consultant Balwyn Heritage Study Peer Review Stage 2, Context, 2020;

Construction dates 1936,

Architect/Designer Eggleston, A.S. & R.A.,

Hermes Number 207068

Property Number

Physical Description 1

'Silver Birches' (formerly 'Hillsborough'), 129-131 Yarrabat Avenue, Balwyn, is a substantial two-storied interwar Georgian Revival residence built in 1938. Constructed of brick with a slate roof, the house is located on the north side of Yarrbat Avenue, bound by Fitzgerald Street to the west and Narrak Road to the east, and is located on a generous allotment. Set within established gardens, the property's Yarrbat Avenue boundary is enclosed by a painted face brick wall punctuated by a pair of wrought iron driveway gates and a single solid timber service gate close to its eastern boundary. The capped sections of the front fence and wrought iron gate are original. There is

a cross fall to the site, falling gently from south to north, and west to east, giving views to the north east.

The house is set under a high-pitched hip roof with bell-cast eaves. Tiled in slate, the ridge lines have concealed transverse flashings under the slates removing the need for ridge capping. This heightens a sense of simplicity and clarity in the design and demonstrates the restrained and simplified detailing often evident in Georgian Revival architecture. Eaves are understated with soffit linings in painted smooth sheeting. The roof is punctuated on its eastern side with a large painted brick chimney capped with simple corbeling and a pair of early terracotta chimney pots. A similar chimney punctuates north face of the roof line at its western end.

Whilst asymmetrical in form, the southern elevation, facing Yarrbat Avenue, further demonstrates an understated restraint in detailing prevalent in Georgian Revival architecture. The main entrance is marked by a simple smooth rendered door surround and pediment with a wrought iron security door. Positioned centrally within a section projecting from the main facade line, a series of five casement windows above provide a contrasting horizontal element to the otherwise vertical proportions of the elevation. The remaining fenestration on the upper level, are simple pairs of side hung casements with horizontal mullions dividing the glass into three equal panes. Sills are of unpainted brick. On the ground floor the windows are multi-paned double-hung windows of vertical proportions. A rendered string course is positioned three quarters of the way up the wall demarcating the ground and upper floors.

'Silver Birches' is positioned towards the front of a substantial allotment with large mature deciduous trees in the front yard and expansive rear gardens including a swimming pool. A garage, which is original to the house, is positioned in the south east corner of the allotment and is concealed from the street by a serpentine wall of painted brick extending from the front driveway gates towards the house's entrance. This wall is a part of the original garden designed by Edna Walling. The painted brick front fence is horizontal in height from its eastern corner until the second drive gate pier. It has a simple painted concrete capping and is inset with a letter box, newspaper tube and entrance gate that appear early. The fence then continues, uncapped where it has been raised, following the fall of the land for the remainder of the boundary. The house name 'Silver Birches', fashioned out of mild steel and applied to the front fence, is a later addition.

'Silver Birches' is of very high integrity with very few changes to original or early elements of the place. The building retains its original building form, slate roof, original fenestrations painted brickwork, garage and most garden elements associated with the Edna Walling garden design.

The integrity of the house is greatly enhanced by the high level of intactness of these main elements, which includes details such as the slate roof, multipaned casement and double-hung windows, unpainted window sills, walls of painted brick work, entrance door surround and pediment, rendered string course, original chimney and chimney pots, the garage and elements of the Edna Walling garden including the capped sections of the front fence, curved drive wall and entrance gates, mature plantings (in particular the mature specimen Oak), and pond, low rubble stone walls and other hard landscaping features in the rear garden.

Alterations and additions made in 1971 include the installation of a pool and change rooms, the demolition of some internal walls in the kitchen and a small extension to the family room to the east. Further alterations included replacing the kitchen window along the southern (principal) facade of the house. This window had its sill height lowered although the head height and width of the window remained the same and the detailing (including sill detail) matches that of the original. The installation of the pool resulted in changes to the raised patio area across the rear of the house altering Edna Walling design to this part of the garden. The original garage door has been replaced.

These additions are not visible from the street and do not impact on the integrity of the house. The 1975 and 1982 alterations were internal.

The front driveway was originally of Lilydale topping and has since been paved. Overall the form of the garden layout, including the driveway, reflects that shown in Edna Walling's design, with the exception of the changes made at the rear of the property to the raised patio area when the pool was installed. Required maintenance has been undertaken to the low rubble stone walls and a renewal of plantings has occurred. Other required maintenance works has included the internal resurfacing of the pond.

The large specimen Oak in the front yard is believed to be an original planting from Edna Walling's design although the slate paving at its base and adjacent steps are recent additions. The integrity of the place is very slightly diminished by the raising of the original fence height west of the driveway pier.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>