

Camberwell Conservation Study 1991
BUILDING CITATION

**House,
43 Kireep Road, Balwyn**



Study Grading: A
Construction Date: 1952
First Owner: Gillison, D & J
Architect: Boyd, Robin

History

Douglas Napier & Joan Mary Gillison commissioned the building of a nine roomed, 'weatherboard' house on this site in 1952². The Gillisons lived here until after 1962, probably until the time of Douglas Gillison's death in 1965³. By 1974 J.T. Brock resided here⁴. The architect was Robin Boyd⁵.

Douglas Gillison was born in England and educated in Brisbane and Melbourne. His father was the Presbyterian minister, Padre Gillison, who was killed while trying to bring in a wounded soldier at Gallipoli. From 1937 until 1941 Mr. Gillison was a sub-editor with *The Age*. He was also a General President of the Australian

Journalists' Association for a time. During the Second World War he served in the RAAF and was public relations officer in the Pacific and in London. He wrote the first of the air series in the Australian Official War History, RAAF 1939-42. In 1946 he became the Press Secretary to the Minister for Air. Later he became Public Relations Officer for the Department of Civil Aviation and in 1959 he was appointed Director of the Australian News and Information Bureau in London, a position he retired from in 1964. He died at the age of 66 on November 1st, 1965⁶.

Joan Gillison was a biographer and historian who began writing after the death of her husband. She first published the story of her grandfather's family. Later she published the history of Melbourne's Lyceum Club and *Margaret Cunningham of Fintona*. The latter history was commissioned in 1976 and was a history of Fintona Girls'

School and the life of the founder Miss Margaret Cunningham¹. Joan and Douglas Napier had a son and two daughters².

The architect, Robin Boyd was a nationally famous architect and writer (see 666 Riversdale Road citation).

Description

Contemporary accounts noted the 4"X1" timber window mullions used on the diagonal as structural framing and the remote upper-level box-like writer's 'perch' with its Ned Kelly slot to selectively view the then rural landscape. Then a two-storey block, with two window-wall modules facing north, the main house stood at the corner of the lot. Connected to it via a slim glazed link at ground level, only, were another four bays of diagonal glazing. Above it, isolated from the other upper levels was the writer's study with a horizontal window slot which allowed a view only if the occupant stood up³. The whole had the look of stacked building blocks, some with the modish diagonal geometry that provided functional 'structural decoration'. A similar isolationist approach for a study was designed by Boyd for the writer-historian, Manning Clark's Canberra house.

Comparative Examples

The following Camberwell sites may be compared with this site.

- 106, WHITEHORSE ROAD, 1940-1
- 1, MONTANA STREET, 1940
- 1297, TOORAK ROAD, 1940
- 91, MAUD STREET, 1940c
- 133, MAUD STREET, 1940c
- 56, RIVERSIDE AVENUE, 1940c
- 15, WALBUNDRY AVENUE, 1940c
- 417, WHITEHORSE ROAD, 1940c
- 113, YARRBAT AVENUE, 1940c
- 123, MONT ALBERT ROAD, 1941-2
- 2, BEATRICE STREET, 1941
- 6, BULLEEN ROAD, 1941
- 171, DONCASTER ROAD, 1941
- 4, MAYSIA STREET, 1941

2 RB 1952, 26954
3 D1952; D1954; D1962; *The Age*, 2.11.65, p.5
4 D1974
5 *Cross-section* July 1953
6 *The Age*, 2.11.65, p.5; *Herald*, 3.10.64

1 *The Free Press (Camberwell)*, 17.3.1982, p.2
2 *The Age*, 2.11.65, p.5
3 N Clerehan, a friend of Boyd's

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BUILDING CITATION (Continued)

46, THE BOULEVARD, 1941
1, KELBA STREET, 1941c
666, RIVERSDALE ROAD, 1946-7
119, DONCASTER ROAD, 1948
1, KALONCA ROAD, 1948c
166, WHITEHORSE ROAD, 1951-2
2, TAURUS STREET, 1951c
32, URSULA STREET, 1951c
6, CARRICAL STREET, 1952
43, KIREEP ROAD, 1952
1, MADDEN STREET, 1952
2, CARRICAL STREET, 1954
16, CARRICAL STREET, 1954
129, WINMALEE ROAD, 1954
14, ORION STREET, 1954c
J2, BALWYN ROAD, 1955c
45A, NARRAK ROAD, 1955c

External Integrity

Changes since that date include the uniting of the upper levels and the absorption of the famous Ned Kelly room by replication of the diagonal glazing modules.

Streetscape Contribution

On a corner site but unrelated to the mainly Bungalow housing in Kireep Road and the mixed housing in that part of Yarrbat.

Significance

Historically, significant occupiers, Douglas Napier Gillison and Joan Gillison. Their careers straddle important changes in the literary and popular history writing of the period 1940-1980. Douglas Gillison's work on the Official History of the RAAF is an important contribution. An unusual couple in that both took up popular historical writing: of Regional importance.

Architecturally the design epitomizes Boyd and other Melbourne Modernist's approach to design, with a minimalist external cuboid expression adorned only by 'structural decoration' as implied by the triangular bracing to windows. Like the nearby Stargazer house(q.v.), it also took the form-follows-function dictum to a visual extreme, in the design of the writer's study: of State importance.
