

## INDIVIDUAL HERITAGE PLACE – CITATION

HO157

**NAME OF PLACE:** Duplex

**OTHER NAMES OF PLACE:** Banks house.

**ADDRESS / LOCATION:** 17,17A Iona Avenue, Toorak

**PROPERTY INFORMATION:** part Crown allotment 28

**LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Local.

**ASSESSED BY:** Graeme Butler, Francine Gilfedder.

**ASSESSMENT DATE:** March 2002

**REVISED ASSESSMENT** October 2003

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

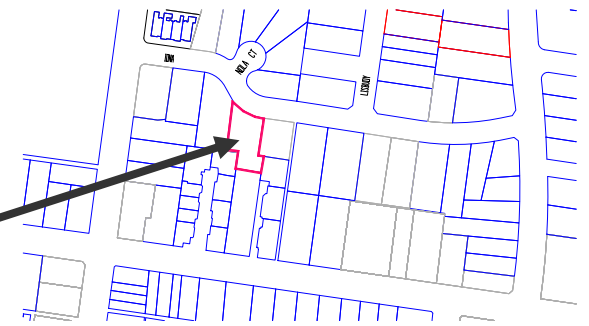
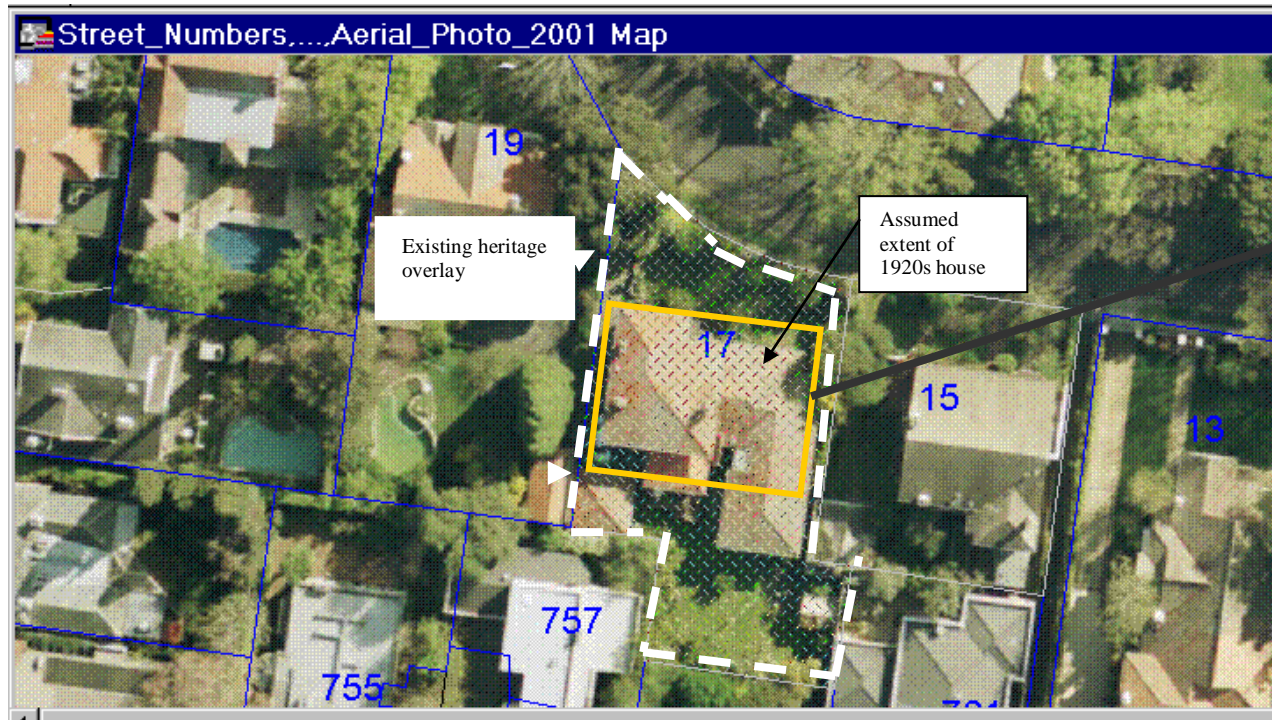
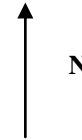
### (as visible from the street)

The former Banks house at 17, 17A Iona Avenue is Locally significant architecturally and historically:

- as an externally well preserved example of the Burley Griffin school of architectural design in Australia, a highly distinctive style which derived from the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and its interpretation by Griffin and his apprentices (Criterion B2);
- for the distinctive details and form of the design, seen in the nested roof forms, and the unusual glazing bar patterns (Criterion B2).
- for the association with Griffin's period in Melbourne as an era when local design standards were questioned by Griffin and his work and influence were highly publicised, particularly his role in the design of the national capital (Criterion H1);
- for the close association with Billson who won national architectural acclaim (Criterion H1)

# PLAN

**NAME:** Duplex  
**OTHER NAMES:** Banks house  
**ADDRESS / LOCATION:** 17,17A Iona Avenue, Toorak  
Not to Scale<sup>1</sup>  
**17 AND 17A IONA AVE, TOORAK**



<sup>1</sup> Cadastral plan and aerial photograph supplied by the City of Stonnington

**PHOTO:**



(Source: Graeme Butler & Associates **March 2002**) **View from street**

## DESCRIPTION:

(as assessed from the street)

This clinker brick two-storey duplex has low-pitched nested hipped roof forms clad with terra-cotta Marseilles pattern tiles. The most distinctive elements in the design are the window joinery and window grouping, with horizontal window groups and timber chevron-pattern glazing bars. Other unusual details include the planter-box incorporated into the window sills, the flat porch roof held up on a slim pipe support, the planter boxes at the entry, and the staggered window placement at the porch.

The present owner states that there was provision for service ducts in the house design.

### Interior

Not inspected.

### Condition & integrity

(as assessed from the street)

Publicly visible external fabric is near original, along with the landscape setting. A matching southern addition appears to have been made to the east wing (17 Iona Ave), presumably allowing its conversion to a duplex in the period c1949-50. Changes were made to the front elevation at that time to allow for two entrances and, by the Modernist character shown in the new west entry canopy, probably by Billson. A further addition is thought to have been made at the rear in 1983.

### Context

Set between two inter-war houses, on sloping terrain and distinctive winding street pattern: offering a comparison with other more mainstream design work

## HISTORY

### Historical background

(see History of the Development of Prahran

By George Tibbits, for Nigel Lewis and Associates, Architects and Conservation Planners, 1983)

#### Development in Toorak (20th century)

The Toorak area was also the scene of intensive development in the period of 1920 to 1930. An important group of residences were erected near the corner of Heyington Road and Toorak Road, designed by architect Harold Desbrowe Annear. Annear also designed the garden for Sydney Myer's Cranlana, 62 Clendon Road in 1930. Annear employed the Italianate style with the inclusion of fountains, ferns and statues. Nearby in Clendon Road, Walter Burley Griffin's office had designed Clendon Lodge in 1923 for Mary Williams. Three years later Griffin designed the Langi flats also for Mary Williams. Another contribution to the architecture of the 1920s in this area was 'Mullion' (6 Stonehaven Court) designed by Eric . Nicholls in 1927-28 for W H Smith. The building was erected when Sir Francis Ormond's property at the corner of Clendon and Orrong Roads was subdivided and many of 'the mature trees from his garden were retained on the site of Mullion. South of Mullion another subdivision, Stradbroke Avenue was developed at a slightly later period. Buildings were all constructed of rough cast and masonry and today the feeling of the road conforms very much to its original appearance although. recent exterior redecoration to many residences has slightly lessened the overall effect.

The large allotments in the elevated areas of Toorak have seen two major subdivisional stages after the first large mansion allotments were created. This (aerial) view in 1950 of Irving Road shows the first pattern of subdivision of the original allotments which took place mainly from the 1880s (and) 1920s. The 1960s and 70s have seen a further subdivision of many of these allotments.

### Specific History

1920

A subdivision created the western end of Iona Avenue.

1927

Thomas Banks purchased lot 5 from Walter Nelson. Alfred A Billson, father of Edward Billson, owned land in Iona Avenue, the second block to the west of 17 Iona Avenue.

1928

A number of houses were built in this part of Iona Avenue in the 1920s including a brick house for Gladys Banks in 1928 designed by Edward Billson. Rate books for 1927-8 list Gladys Banks as the owner of a 6 room brick house but her name was crossed out in favour of Thomas Banks, traveller, as the rated occupier. The daughter of Gladys & Thomas Banks (Mrs Walkingshaw, 2002) states that her mother's name was Grace and the house was originally 9 rooms. The room count may vary with definition of rooms.

She also states that Thomas Banks worked with Peters Icecream.

1945

Aerial view shows present house plan but without south extension to east wing, also flowering gum as mature specimen.

'Directory of Victoria' lists Thomas Banks at 11

1949-50 Decision to divide the house into flats, as house was too big once daughter (Mrs Walkingshaw) had married: changes to entry and extension done on east wing, flat let for a period.

1950

'Directory of Victoria' separately lists Thomas Banks at 11 and Theodore G Waugh at 11.

A member of this Waugh family ('Hub' Waugh, Architecture Dean 1948) and a friend of the Banks family was involved in setting up the architecture school at Melbourne University around that time.

1951

The house is listed in Council rate records as two rateable properties, one of five rooms and the other of seven rooms (rented out).

1982-3 Changes made to added east wing. Part of the grounds from the adjoining property owned by the Banks family on the south (759 Malvern Road) was annexed to 17 Iona Ave and the remaining property sold. 2002

The duplex is still owned and occupied by the Walkingshaw/Banks family.

### **Edward Fielder Billson**

The following is Billson's entry in international reference: 'The Grove Dictionary of Art'

(born Melbourne, 1892; d 17 April 1986).

'Australian architect. He was the first recipient of Melbourne University's diploma in architecture, which had been instituted in 1906 but not brought immediately into operation: he completed the course in 1913 and the diploma was granted two years later. In 1916 he entered the office of American architect Walter Burley Griffin, as his first Australian assistant. While with him, Billson designed his own father's house (1918) in Toorak in a chunky manner reminiscent of Griffin's American work and much influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright; and the Margaret Armstrong house (1919), Caulfield. A year later Billson and a fellow employee, Roy Lippincott, were successful in the competition for the Arts building (completed 1926; for illustration see AUCKLAND), University of Auckland, New Zealand. Lippincott left for New Zealand late in 1921, and Billson resigned from Griffin's office in 1922 but remained in Melbourne. In 1922 Billson and Lippincott received an honourable mention for their entry in the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition'.

Billson was a friend of the first owner (Banks) and a subsequent tenant of one of the flats (Waugh) had links with the setting up of the Melbourne University architecture school in the late 1940s. The owner of the Griffin designed house at 16 Glyndebourne Avenue, Stan Salter, was a relation of the Banks and Waugh families as well as a friend of Griffin<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Walkingshaw 2002

## ANALYSIS

### Thematic context

The Principal Australian Historic Themes (PAHT) have been developed by the Australian Heritage Commission to allow assessment of historical significance within a national historical thematic framework.

PAHT	Subtheme	Category
Building settlements, towns and cities	Making suburbs	house, urban

## Comparative analysis

### Summary

The North American landscape architect, Walter Burley Griffin, created considerable interest in Australia after his arrival here to carry out the design of the Australian Capital. He is now internationally known as an innovative designer. Among those who worked with him in his Melbourne office were Edward Billson, JFW. Ballantyne, his brother-in-law Roy Lippincott and Eric M. Nicholls. Each developed a distinctive architectural style which drew from the Prairie school designs, Griffin's own work in Australia, and the emerging Californian Bungalow and other residential styles. Their work is a definable 'school' of design in the State and typically was innovative among the mainstream of architectural design.

Billson was internationally acclaimed with his entry for the Tribune prize and New Zealand Arts Building, Auckland, as well as local recognition. This house is made more interesting by the fact that Billson was a friend of the first owner and that a subsequent tenant of one of the flats (Waugh) had links with the setting up of the Melbourne University architecture school in the late 1940s.

### Billson's work

Billson rose to international prominence with an honourable mention in the Chicago Tribune design competition of 1922. He and Lippincott came fourth in the Victorian War Memorial Competition in 1923 but their entry for the New Zealand Arts Building, Auckland, won first prize. Lippincott left for New Zealand to supervise its construction, never to return. There was some controversy around this prize-winning design but the neo-Gothic result of 1929 has 'seldom been equalled in New Zealand's architectural history. The integration of the building's English collegiate Gothic detailing is one of its most admirable features.'

Earlier houses designed by Billson used the gabled form, notably, the A A Billson house, Toorak (1918), the Margaret Armstrong house, Caulfield (1918-19), the George Silcock in Hawthorn (c. 1926), - a design theme also favoured by Walter Burley Griffin.

The hipped roof form of Iona Avenue shows the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright. Billson's Woodlands Golf Club House (1925-1929) and the house for Dr Carl Stephens in Healesville (1926) and particularly the 41 Shakespeare Gr, Hawthorn.

Listed below are other works by Billson identified as of potential heritage significance in the City:

- House, at 28 Clendon Road, Toorak built 1918
- House, at 9 Toorak Avenue, Toorak built 1920
- House, at 2 Selbourne Road, Toorak built 1923
- House, at 11-12 St. Georges Court, Toorak built 1943

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Places designed by Billson identified outside of the City

House, 12 Rowan Street, Bendigo 1919

House, Lyndon Street, Elsternwick 1923

House, Rockbank Road, St Kilda East 1924

House, 236 Cotham Road, Kew 1924-25

House, 25 Lithgow Street, Collingwood 1925

House, 16 Glenroy Street, Hawthorn 1925

Woodlands Golf Club White Street, Mordiallic 1925-29

House, 41 Shakespeare Grove, Hawthorn 1928 (similar to this house)

House, Birdwood Avenue, Brighton 1929

Maratimo Flats, 1 Marne Street, South Yarra c1930

Sanitarium Health Food Company, Warburton Highway, Warburton 1936- (won the RVIA medal, on Victorian Heritage Register)





## Assessment against the criteria adopted by the Australian Heritage Commission

### Summary of Australian Heritage Commission criteria

Code	Summary	Assessment at local significance	Assessment at contributory significance
A.4	Association with important events or historical themes		reflects an era when local design standards were being questioned by Griffin from within a rising, holistic landscape/architecture/environmental movement
B.2	Rarity or distinction among a comparable group	well preserved example of the Griffin school of architectural design in Australia, a highly distinctive style which derived from the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and its interpretation by Griffin and his office for the distinctive details and form, seen in the nested roof forms, and the unusual glazing bar patterns	
H.1	Association with important person or group	association with Griffin's period in Melbourne, Griffin being one of the most noted figures in this era of Australian architectural history when his work and influence were highly publicised; close association with Billson who won national architectural acclaim	

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The house and land should remain in the heritage overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme.

### Proposed extent of heritage place for the heritage overlay

The house and land, limited to external fabric from the 1920s.

### Planning Scheme Protection in a heritage overlay: Recommended

### Other heritage registers

Heritage Victoria Register: No

Register of the National Estate: Recommended

## REFERENCES

### Raworth & Foster 1998 cite:

Board of Works Plan 977, 40' to the inch. 1895.  
City of Prahran rate books, Toorak Ward, 1925-1952:  
Toorak Ward, 1928/9, no. 1776.  
1926/7, no. 1650.  
1951/2, no. 2964.  
Context Pty Ltd, City of Prahran Conservation Review, 1993.  
Malone, Betty, Section 14, unpublished manuscript.  
Nigel Lewis, City of Malvern Heritage Study, 1992.  
Also  
'Builders Gazette', 11/1/27;  
Robin Boyd, 'Australia's Home'

### Further references:

Johnson, DL 1977 'The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin': 156  
Macmillan Publishers Limited 2000 'The Grove Dictionary of Art'  
'Architecture in New Zealand Changing & Conservative Architecture 1910-1930'  
MMBW property service plan, earliest available from South East water 1984;  
City of Prahran rate books, Toorak Ward, 1927-8, 1688;  
Mrs Walkingshaw, 2002:

- Mrs Walkingshaw had lived at this address since she was 10 years old (except for a period in the 1970s).
- The name of the original owners were 'Grace' (not Gladys) and Thomas Banks;
- Thomas Banks was employed by Peters Ice-cream;
- The original house was a nine room home (not five room);
- Billson (the architect) was a friend of the family, and then lived in Clendon Road;
- In 1949-50 it was converted to 2 flats. The daughter (Mrs Walkingshaw) and husband eventually moved into one flat. The rear wing and porch were added at that time as the new front door of one flat The original front door was indicated as to the east of the existing.
- The property was let in the 1970s.
- In 1982-3, alterations were made to the two storey rear addition. The title to No 759 Malvern Road was changed (which added more land to No 17 Iona) and the remainder of 759 was then sold.
- The mother and son now each live in one of the two flats.

### Further work

VPRO: MMBW property service plan field books - verify change in description to duplex

## Appendix 1 Previous citation

Council has considered a series of amendments to the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme. During the exhibition period of former Amendments L47 and L61 objections to the inclusion of some properties in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay were received. Therefore Council resolved to undertake further analysis of the heritage citations of affected properties prior to holding an independent panel hearing. The amendments are now known as C5 and C6(2) respectively. The following citation was exhibited with amendment L61.

### INTRODUCTION

This report has, been prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd with Di Foster, historian, to investigate the significance of the building at 17 and 17A Iona Avenue, Toorak, in order to determine the appropriateness of its inclusion within the schedule to the Heritage Overlay within the planning scheme. The report builds on work carried out by Context Pty Ltd in the City of Prahran Conservation Review, 1993.

The City of Prahran Conservation Review graded the building as A2+ (almost certainly of regional significance). It is not presently listed on the Victorian Heritage Register or the Register of the National Estate or classified by the National Trust.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that the building at 17 and 17A Iona Avenue is of regional significance and should be added to the schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the local section of the Stonnington Planning Scheme and nominated to the Australian Heritage Commission for inclusion in the register of the National Estate.

### HISTORY

In 1852 Alfred Ross purchased Crown allotment 28, which included 55 acres of land between Irving Road and Clendon Road. Orrong, the first house to be built in the area, was located midway between Gardiners Creek Road (Toorak Road) and Commercial Road (Malvern Road). Orrong's large estate was gradually subdivided and Clendon Road was created in 1877 [1]. By this time Toorak was considered the 'vice-regal district' and land in close proximity to Toorak House, Victoria's first Government House, attracted Melbourne's wealthy families. Grand homes, including Mandeville Hall, Dunraven and Coonac, were soon built on land facing the main roads [2]. However land at the south east corner of Clendon Road and Malvern Road remained undeveloped and dairyman James Swindell used the land during the 1860s to the 1880s [3,4].

A subdivision of this land created the western end of Iona Avenue in 1920. A number of houses were built in this part of Iona Avenue including a brick house of six rooms for Thomas Banks and Gladys Banks in 1927-28 [5] to designs by Edward Billson [6]. Thomas Banks had purchased lot 5 the previous year [7] from Walter Nelson. The house remained in the Banks family until at least 1962. From 1951 the house is listed as two rateable properties, one of five rooms and the other of seven rooms, the latter being rented out. This suggests that additions had been made at or prior to that time to increase the accommodation and enable separation into the two residences. Inspection from the street suggests that the additions included a single storey extension to the east and to the rear, including introduction of a second entrance.

It is of interest to note that in 1927, Alfred A Billson, father of Edward Billson, owned land in Iona Avenue, the second block to the west of 17 Iona Avenue [9].

### DESCRIPTION

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17 and 17A Iona Avenue is a pair of flats located in a tree-lined street, north east of the intersection of Malvern and Orrong Roads in Toorak. The avenue occupies an undulating site in a quiet, residential section of the suburb.

Iona Avenue winds through hilly terrain between Irving and Clendon Roads. It is paved in bitumen with concrete footpaths and kerbs. Nature strips are narrow by local standards but still support a large number of mature trees which provide a dense canopy of foliage above the street. Fences throughout the area tend to be unobtrusive, allowing the private gardens and roadside plantings to combine, creating a wild and rambling character not usually found in suburban Melbourne.

The front boundary of 17 and 17A is marked by an ornamental hedge which follows the curve of the road and encloses a modest garden of shrubs and small trees that partially obscure the building beyond. 17/17A was originally constructed as a two storey house but was converted to flats around 1951. It is principally of red and clinker brick construction with white-painted cement dressings and subtly contrasting decorative brickwork around doors. The low pitched, hipped roofs are clad in Marseilles tiles.

The form of the building draws heavily upon contemporary American architecture and the horizontal massing and low pitched roofs suggest the influence of the American Prairie School architects, most notably Walter Burley Griffin, with whom the architect, Edward Billson, had served articles. The window joinery, with its unusual composition of window mullions inset with small leadlight panels, is also characteristic of Griffin's work and that of architects trained in his office. This window joinery recurs in combination with hung shingles in a bay window located at the west side of the building and in the doors to the garage at the rear of the property which appears to date from the original construction.

When the residence was converted to flats in 1951 six additional rooms were created. These additions appear to be located on the ground floor at the east and rear of the building, but are well integrated and have only a modest impact on Billson's original design. A canopy above the entry to 17A may date from the same period, but even if an addition results in only minor detriment to the facade.

Although much of the leadlight has been replaced in plain glass, the building appears to be in good and substantially original condition.

## ARCHITECT

The architect of 17 and 17A Iona Avenue was Edward Fielder Billson. The son of politician, Alfred Arthur Billson, Edward Billson was a noteworthy Australian architect. He was the first person to enrol in the University of Melbourne Architecture course, the first Australian to serve articles under noted American architect Walter Burley Griffin, and eventually became a pioneering advocate and exponent of modernism in Australia.

Billson applied for admission to the Melbourne University Architecture course in 1913. The university was initially reluctant as it had been planning the architecture course for some time but had received no previous applicants. A makeshift course was organised<sup>10</sup> and Billson commenced a course of architectural study at the faculty of engineering. He received the first Diploma of Architecture awarded by the University of Melbourne in 1916 and began working for Walter Burley Griffin, thus becoming the first Australian articled within Griffin's office [11].

During his time with Griffin, Billson became part of a circle of architects which was instrumental in establishing the Prairie School in Melbourne [12]. The influence of Prairie School architecture is present in Billson's early work such as his first independent commissions Wooragee in Clendon Road, Toorak (1918-1919), and the Margaret Armstrong house, Caulfield (1918-19), through to the Woodlands Golf Club House (1925-1929) and the George Silcock house, Hawthorn (c. 1926) [13].

In 1921, Billson and the head draftsman in Griffin's office, Roy Lippincott (Griffin's American brother-in-law) won the competition for the arts building at the University of Auckland [14].

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Billson took this opportunity to travel through Europe and it was here and in later similar trips that Billson first encountered the Modernist architecture that was to become an enduring influence in his work. After the depression, when he had established his own Melbourne practice, Billson became one of Melbourne's foremost exponents of Modernist architecture. Notable examples of his work from this later, post-Griffin period include the Sanitarium Health Foods Co. and Signs Publishing co. buildings, Main Street, Warburton (1936) [15].

## ANALYSIS

The introduction of Prairie School architecture to Australia is largely credited to the work of Walter Burley Griffin and that of colleagues and students working at his influential Melbourne practice. Billson along with JFW. Ballantyne, Roy Lippincott and Eric M. Nicholls were each associates of Griffin and each developed an early architectural style combining Prairie school design, the emerging bungalow styles and Walter Burley Griffin's own distinctive domestic work. By the time Walter Burley Griffin left Australia in 1935 a sizeable body of local architecture had been created by Griffin and his circle. The building at 17 and 17A Iona Avenue is an unusually intact and readily recognisable example surviving from this important body of work.

The building at 17 and 17A Iona Avenue demonstrates Billson's proficiency in this field. Earlier houses designed by Billson, notably, the A A Billson house, Toorak (1918), the Margaret Armstrong house, Caulfield (1918-19), the George Silcock in Hawthorn (c. 1926), are typified by dominant gable roofs and heavily buttressed external walls. Many of Griffin's North American buildings had evidenced a similar interest in bold gabled roofs poised over horizontal building forms and his influence on these early buildings is unmistakable. While the building at Iona Avenue still shows Griffin's influence, its broad hipped roofs signal a shift toward the broader vocabulary of the Prairie School and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>16</sup> Billson's work in Iona Avenue and elsewhere during this period, such as the Woodlands Golf Club House (1925-1929) and the house for Dr Carl Stephens in Healesville (1926), is typified by hovering, low pitched roofs over simple building masses.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The two storey house at 17 Iona Avenue, Toorak, was designed by noted Australian architect Edward Fielder Billson for Thomas and Gladys Banks in 1928. It is of regional significance as a fine and substantially intact example of Billson's work and as a demonstration of the influence of American architecture on Melbourne residential architecture through the office of Walter Burley Griffin.

Edward Billson, the first graduate in Architecture of the University of Melbourne, was articled within the office of Walter Burley Griffin where he became a proficient exponent of a Griffin influenced, Prairie School idiom before turning to modernist modes in the 1930s. Through his work in Griffin's off-ice and then in his own practice, Billson was instrumental in the introduction and dissemination of the American Prairie style in Victoria.

Converted to flats through sympathetic additions in the early 1950s, 17&17A Iona Avenue is a substantially intact to its exterior and stands as a clear exemplar of the Griffin influenced domestic idiom. It is also of architectural significance as a key example of Billson's work in the years subsequent to his departure from Griffin's office and prior to his adoption of modernist modes in the years following the Depression.

## FOOTNOTES

1 Clendon Road. Proclamation 25.11.1877

2 Board of Works Plan , 40' to the inch. 1895

3 Betty Malone, Section 14, unpublished manuscript, p.4

4 Iona Avenue was proclaimed in 1920 under a private street scheme.

5 City of Prahran rate book, Toorak Ward, 1927/28, no. 1688.

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6 Edward Billson called tenders for a brick residence in Iona Avenue, Toorak in the 'Builders Gazette', 11/1/27. Since most of the building stock in Iona Avenue predates this and of the remainder, only nos 17 and 17A recall Bilson's contemporary work, it seems reasonable that the tender notice relates to this property.

7 Ibid., 1926/7, no. 1650.

8 Ibid., 1951/2, no. 2964.

9 City of Prahran Rate Book, 1927-28, no. 1690.

10 Johnson, op cit, p 118.

11 Robin Boyd, 'Australia's Home', p 84.

12 Nigel Lewis, City of Malvern Heritage Study, Appendix 1: Architects of Malvern, Billson.

13 Johnson, op cit, p 120,

14 Ibid, p 117.

15 Registered historic place H384.

16 Johnson, op cit, p 130.

## REFERENCES

Board of Works Plan , 40' to the inch. 1895.

City of Prahran rate books, Toorak Ward, 1925-1952.

Context Pty Ltd, City of Prahran Conservation Review, 1993.

Malone, Betty, Section 14, unpublished manuscript.

Nigel Lewis, City of Malvern Heritage Study, 1992.