

HERITAGE CITATION

Units, 11-13 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern



Figure 1. 11-13 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern (GJM Heritage, May 2021).

DATE: June 2021

UNITS, 11-13 SORRETT AVENUE, MALVERN

Place type: Units	Architect: Bruce Morgan
Construction Date: 1968	Builder: Descon Projects
Recommendation: Include in the Heritage Overlay	Extent of Overlay: To the extent of the property boundary

Locality History

The City of Stonnington stands on the Traditional Lands of the Woi wurrung and Boon Wurrung Peoples of the East Kulin Nations. Archaeologists believe that Aboriginal People have been in Victoria for more than 30,000 years. Throughout this long history their relationship with the landscape (where and how they live) has changed according to factors such as climate change, resource availability, and cultural change (Context 2006:10).

The first European settler in the Malvern district was John Gardiner in 1835, a pastoralist from New South Wales who was one of the first overlanders to Port Phillip. He pastured his stock near the junction of Gardiner's Creek and the Yarra River and is the namesake of Gardiner's Creek, Gardiner's Creek Road (now Toorak Road) and both the locality and the Shire of Gardiner (before they were re-named Malvern). The first recorded use of the name Malvern was in January 1854, when barrister Charles B. G. Skinner named his hotel on the corner of Malvern and Glenferrie roads the 'Malvern Hill' after a district in England. The name for the Shire of Malvern was derived from Malvern Hill Estate, a private subdivision in the area dating to 1856 (City of Stonnington [CoS]; Context 2006:34).

The first land sales in the area were held in 1854 and most original Crown grantees subdivided their allotments for resale (Context 2006:41; 2009:4). Gardiner's Road District was proclaimed in 1856 before Gardiner Shire was formed in 1871, which was renamed Malvern Shire in 1878 (CoS). The municipal boundary comprised the current localities of Malvern (previously Gardiner), Malvern East, Glen Iris (south of Gardiners Creek), Kooyong, Armadale (east of Kooyong Road), Toorak (east of Kooyong Road) and Chadstone (west of Warrigal Road). Early directories listed Malvern and Malvern East as the one locality, until 1910.

The former Malvern Shire saw slow population growth to 1881, by which time it totalled just under 2,000 people (Victorian Places). In 1879, the Oakleigh Railway Line was opened along the southern extent of the municipality, through Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and Hawksburn to join the existing line at South Yarra. The arrival of the Oakleigh railway coincided with the start of the land boom, which resulted in considerable urban growth. In the 1880s the district comprised substantial residences on large allotments, as well as pastoral and agricultural holdings (including market gardens and orchards) and commercial development (Context 2006:41, 65-6). During the 1880s boom period, the municipality saw a dramatic increase in population, quadrupling to approximately 8,000 by 1891, and steadily increasing to 10,000 by 1901 (Victorian Places). In the 1890s a number of timber houses were built in Malvern as an economy measure, but some residents complained that wooden houses would degenerate into slums. Concern about this development led to a slum abolition movement and subsequently, c1912, Malvern Council began to declare brick areas, where timber houses were not permitted. By 1916 the Council had also fixed a minimum area for individual housing allotments at 6000 square feet, with minimum frontages of fifty feet (Context 2006:128).

The railway line along the northern extent of the municipality was established in 1890 through the Glen Iris Valley from Burnley. Stations were established at Heyington, Kooyong, Tooronga, Gardiner, Glen Iris and Darling, however, expected residential development in their vicinity stalled during the 1890s following the

economic collapse (Context 2006:66). The 1893 *Australian Handbook* (as cited in Victorian Places) described Malvern as ‘an elevated residential suburb’, served by a line of omnibuses from Prahran, with many leading merchants and professional men living in the area in pleasantly situated ‘dwellings of a superior class’. The entry noted that a number of notable mansions had been erected by this date, and that the market gardens and orchards were ‘steadily being reduced, and cut up into building allotments, on which [were] being erected many handsome villas and business establishments’ (Victorian Places). The municipality saw rapid development and urbanisation from 1900 and it was declared a Borough and then a Town in 1901. In 1911 the municipality was declared a City, with a residential population of 16,000 (Context 2006:86; Victorian Places).

The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust was established in 1908, with electric tramlines opening along High Street in 1910-14, Glenferrie Road in 1910-13, to the south along Wattletree Road in 1910-12, and Malvern Road in 1915. The arrival of the tramlines further drove the development of commercial centres in the immediate vicinity and residential development beyond. New train stations were built at Armadale, Hawksburn, Malvern and Toorak between 1908 and 1918, and at Malvern East in 1929 (Context 2006:70-2, 113; Victorian Places).

Residential development during the early twentieth century generally occurred on newly subdivided estates or on nineteenth century subdivisions that had remained partly or wholly undeveloped during the 1890s depression (Context 2009:5). In 1912 it was reported that 800 houses a year were being built in the (by then) City of Malvern, which boasted ‘a progress unprecedented by any other suburb’ (Context 2009:128). In the decade between 1911 and 1921 the population in the City of Malvern doubled, from 16,000 to 32,000 residents, and then increased steadily to 43,000 by 1933 (Victorian Places). This population growth saw development spread to the Glen Iris Valley and the outer reaches of the City, in Malvern East. The housing stock in this eastern part of the municipality was more characteristically uniform and unadorned in comparison to housing in Malvern. Kooyong’s development was substantially completed by the end of the 1920s (Context 2006:128, 131).

By 1946 the *Australian Blue Book* (as cited in Victorian Places) stated that Malvern was one of the ‘leading residential suburbs of the Metropolis’. It comprised the substantial homes of many of Melbourne’s leading citizens, in what was termed ‘The Garden City’ due to the number of parks and public gardens. Development in the City of Malvern steadied from the 1930s, with the population averaging 45,000 until the 1990s (Victorian Places). The City of Malvern amalgamated with the City of Prahran in 1994, to form the City of Stonnington.

Place History

The units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue were built in 1968 to designs by architect, Bruce Morgan. The complex was built on land subdivided from the former Nerrena Estate to the east of Glenferrie Road. This early estate was renamed Sorrett in 1882 when Donald Wallace purchased the property. In 1886 Sorrett was acquired by George Duncan and the following year he subdivided land fronting Glenferrie Road, forming The Avenue (now Sorrett Avenue) on the site of the former carriage drive (SHC MP14157). Sorrett, and the remaining seven acres of the estate were later sold to Frederick Throssell.

Sorrett Avenue remained vacant until 1889-90 when a row of brick and timber houses were constructed on both sides of the street as part of the Malvern Grange Estate (Lewis 1992). Timber houses, both with seven rooms, were constructed at 11 and 13 Sorrett Avenue (Malvern Valuation Field Card 1902) (Figure 2). The two near identical houses can be seen in a 1920s oblique aerial and a later 1945 aerial (Figures 3 and 4).

The two properties were purchased by Descon Projects in 1968 (Malvern Valuation Field Card). In the same year, a planning permit was issued for the construction of five units with carparks on the consolidated site. The units were designed by architect, Bruce Morgan. Morgan was a director of Descon Projects, which he

established to develop and market his design for a pre-fabricated 'fold-up' house, called the 'Descon House' (*The Bulletin* 1975:25; *Age* 18 January 1975:9).

The five units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue were designed to be entered via double carports at the front of the property, with each unit comprising a kitchen/dinette, dining room, large living room, family room or study, and three bedrooms, plus laundry and bathrooms (*Age*, 10 September 1983:35). The units were praised for their 'generous accommodation, privacy and seclusion' and the way they were 'designed to capture the sun in every room' through the clever use of courtyards and skylights (*Age*, 17 September 1983:41). The strata title units were first sold in 1969 and continue to be used as individual residences.

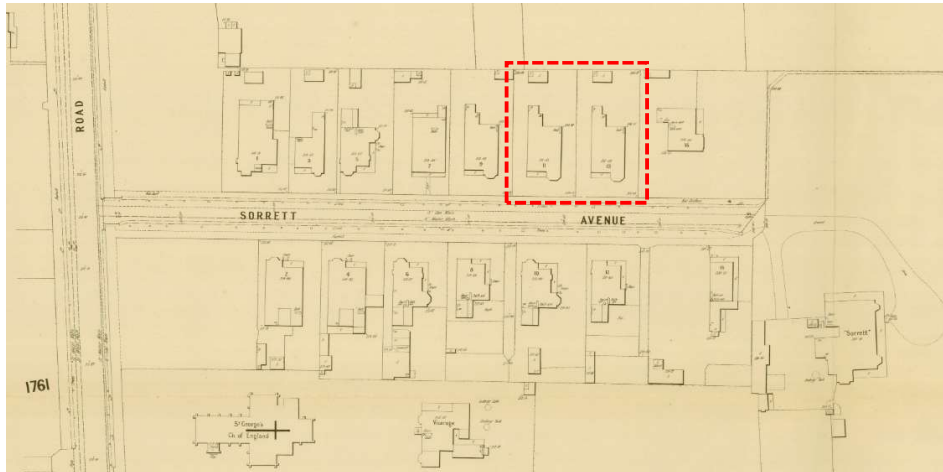


Figure 2. MMBW Detail Plan No 1760 showing the extensive landholding of 'Sorrett' prior to subdivision, 1902. The original timber houses at 11 and 13 Sorrett Avenue are indicated (SLV)



Figure 3. Sorrett Avenue, 1920. The original timber houses at 11 and 13 Sorrett Avenue are indicated (SLV)



Figure 4. Aerial showing Sorrett Avenue, Malvern, 1945. The original timber houses at 11 and 13 Sorrett Avenue are indicated (Landata)

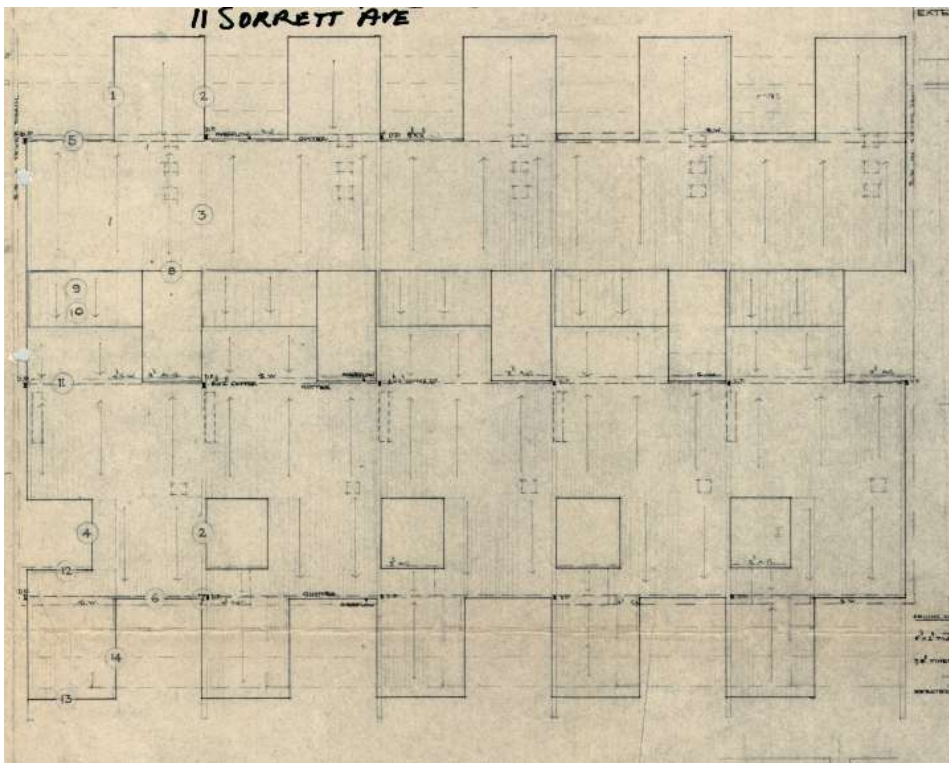


Figure 5. Roof plan of units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue, 1968 (Council Building Files)

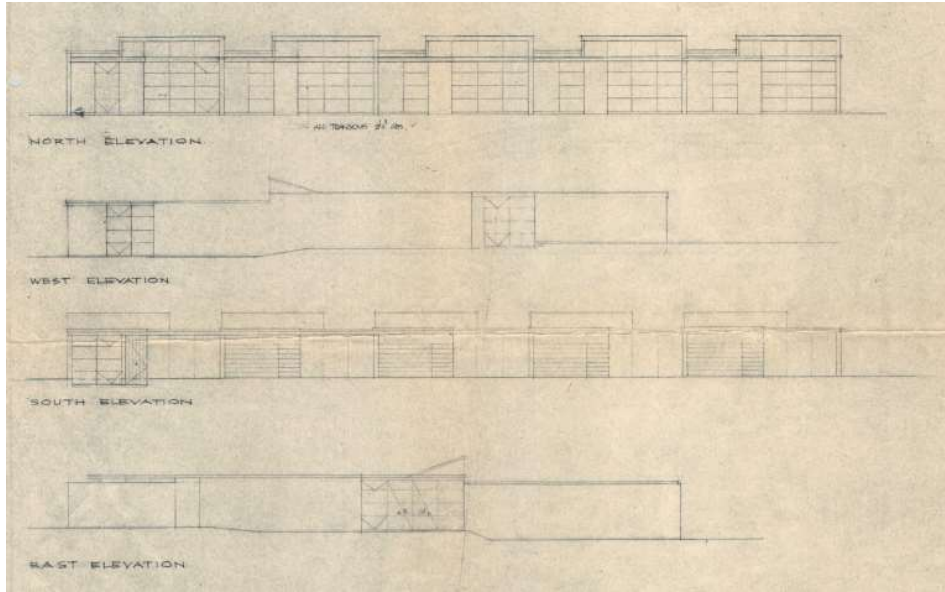


Figure 6. Elevations of units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue, 1968 (Council Building Files)

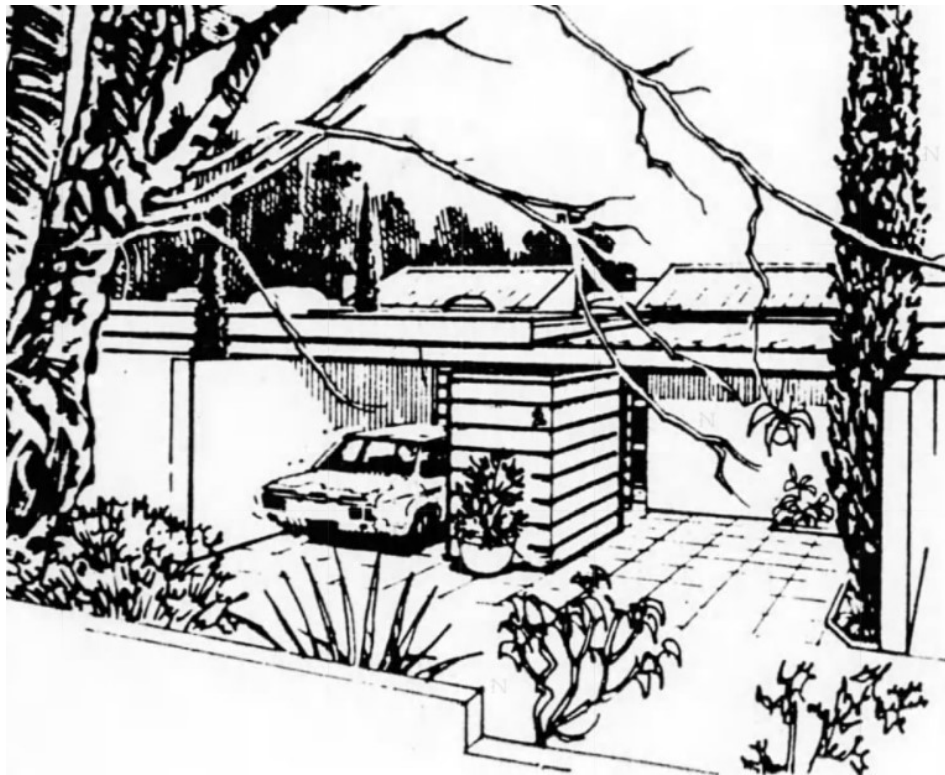


Figure 7. An artist's impression of one of the units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue (Age, 10 September 1983:35)

Bruce Morgan, architect

Bruce Morgan (1940-2010) studied dual degrees of architecture and building at the University of Melbourne and established his own private architectural practice in 1965 soon after graduating (*The Bulletin* 1975:25). Morgan's practice ranged from architectural design through to construction management, and a key aspect of his practice was his ability to guide a project through the entire building process from start to finish.

In the early 1970s, Morgan's interest in prefabricated concrete panel constructions led to his invention of the 'Descon House', a timber-framed prefabricated folding house that could be factory built, transported to a site,

and erected within a matter of weeks (Bruce Morgan Architects + Construction Managers). He established the construction management company, Descon Projects, to develop and market the folding house (*The Bulletin* 1975:25). Morgan designed a number of flats and houses across Melbourne and on the Mornington Peninsula and also undertook various projects for primary and secondary schools and the Ministry of Housing (Bruce Morgan Architects + Construction Managers; *Age*, 16 June 2010). Morgan passed away in 2010 at the age of 69.

Historical Themes

The place illustrates the following themes as outlined in *Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes*:

- 6 Building towns, cities and the garden state
 - 6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Description

The units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern are located on the north side of Sorrett Avenue, east of Glenferrie Road. The site is a large, rectangular lot subdivided into five approximately equal rectilinear properties that extend to the northern boundary from Sorrett Street. Each property has frontage to Sorrett Avenue with an open carport which is accessible via a shared driveway. Two vehicular entries to the complex are provided at the eastern and western ends of the Sorrett Avenue boundary, which is otherwise secured by a mid-height (approximately 1.5m) (later) rendered and overpainted masonry wall. The wall and driveway arrangement creates an informal open forecourt, with (recent) concrete finish and modest plantings, beyond which the rhythm of the repetitive carports is visible. This rhythm is notably undermined by the westernmost unit (No. 1), which has been substantially altered.

Each unit, excluding alterations to No. 1, is identical in plan and together read as a single building in both elevation and aerial views. Each unit is built to the side boundaries of their allotment where they abut adjacent units. They are of (overpainted) masonry construction, are single-storey, and feature flat roofs that are notably interrupted with shallow skillion sections that allow for north-facing clerestory windows. The roofs are clad in profiled metal sheeting with shallow parapets that are exaggerated by a broad fascia that is almost flush with the exterior walls. The overflashing and fascia are picked out in a dark colour (previously a deep red, now a charcoal) to contrast with the lighter-coloured walls. Each unit has two private internal courtyards – one at the southwestern corner of the unit and another at the approximate centre of its plan. Skylights are also positioned over the kitchen and ensuite areas. Windows and doors (which are floor-to-ceiling sets, in some cases double sliding doors), address the courtyards and north-facing rear gardens, and are bronze-coloured and aluminium framed with transoms that are typically wider than the mullions, creating a horizontal emphasis. This horizontal emphasis is also evident at the fascia/parapet detail, the low single-storey profile of the building, the (mostly) flat roofs, and the timber cladding of the wing walls and cabinetry around the carports. Chimneys – one per unit – are truncated such that they are barely perceptible and do not interrupt this horizontality as viewed from Sorrett Avenue. The separation of vertical elements (side walls and storage cabinets) from the roofs at the carports creates a thin clear space through which light passes, creating a 'floating' effect, which represents another architectural device employed to subtly emphasise the horizontal planes of the building.

Original landscaping elements appear limited to the square concrete pavers that remain extant as the carport floor treatments, the brick paving to garden/courtyard pathways, and the general relationship of internal and courtyard/garden spaces

Key Features:

- Low-profile, single-storey building reading as a single building



- Repetitive matching carports, including timber cladding and ‘floating’ roof effect, square concrete tiles floor finish and storage cabinets
- Masonry walls (overpainted), with timber elements picked out in darker/contrasting paint colours profiled metal roof
- Profiled metal roof with skillion-roofed clerestory windows
- Internal courtyards and private rear gardens
- Shared vehicular access and forecourt.

Intactness/Integrity

Excluding No. 1, the units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue retain a high degree of integrity in fabric, form and detail. While units 2-5 have undergone some minor alterations, these do not diminish the ability to understand and appreciate the complex as an intact example of a post-war multi-unit development designed in a Postwar Modernist style.

Comparative Analysis

The units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue are of note as a largely intact example of a 1960s multi-unit development designed in a Postwar Modernist style.

From the 1950s, well-known architects such as Robin Boyd, Graeme Gunn and Peter McIntyre began to focus their attention and skills on the concept of affordable homes. Working closely with project builders in an effort to provide lower-cost options, these architects began designing small, deceptively simple houses that offered economical and contemporary options suited to a suburban family lifestyle.

As noted in *Designer Suburbs: Architects and Affordable Homes in Australia* (2012):

The project home was synonymous to many with the embodiment of the ‘Australian dream’, that saw home ownership as the foundation of family life. It became a new cultural phenomenon through the link between affordable construction and architectural ideas representing aspirations about living in suburbia (O’Callaghan & Pickett 2012:vii).

The introduction of energy efficient, environmentally friendly, architect designed project homes in Victoria in the 1960s and 1970s was pioneered by influential project housing company, Merchant Builders. The company, which was particularly invested in increasing density in Melbourne’s inner and outer suburbs without losing the connection with landscape, promoted the idea that house, interiors, landscape and site should be harmoniously integrated, a concept that was adopted by a number of practicing architects in the ensuing years (MSD 2015:61).

The units at 11-13 Sorrett have few comparators in the City of Malvern and no examples of post-war multi-unit developments are currently included in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme on an individual basis.

11-13 Sorrett Avenue is notable for its generally high level of integrity to its period of construction and its clear association with the shift towards affordable housing and higher density living which characterised suburban development in the inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne in the late-twentieth century.



Assessment against Criteria

Following is an assessment of the place against the recognised heritage criteria set out in *Planning Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay* (August 2018).

Criterion A: Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history

The units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue are illustrative of post-war suburban development in the City of Stonnington and demonstrate the shift towards lower-cost, architect-designed housing which characterised suburban development across Victoria in the late-twentieth century.

Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments

The units at 11-13 Sorrett Avenue are an intact representative example of a Postwar Modernist multi-unit development built in the City of Stonnington. The complex displays typical features of Modernist housing, which was common across Victoria in this period, including low-profile buildings with a strong horizontal emphasis, flat roof forms, private courtyards, a neutral colour palette, and the use of typical materials such as timber and rendered concrete.

Grading and Recommendations

It is recommended that the place be included in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme as a locally significant heritage place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Stonnington Planning Scheme:

External Paint Controls?	No
Internal Alteration Controls?	No
Tree Controls?	No
Outbuildings or Fences not exempt under Clause 43.01-3?	No
Prohibited Uses Permitted?	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place?	No

Extent of the Recommended Heritage Overlay

To the extent of the property boundary as shown in Figure 8 below.



Figure 8. Recommended Extent of Heritage Overlay



References

Bruce Morgan Architects + Construction Managers, <http://brumor.com/works.php>, accessed 28 April 2021.

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J B Cooper, *The History of Malvern, From its First Settlement to a City*, Melbourne, 1935.

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