

BARTON RESIDENCE

Address	56 Thomas Street, Brighton East
Significance	Local
Construction Dates	1950 (south wing) and 1964 (north wing)
Period	Post WWII
Date Inspected	Early 2019



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The Barton Residence at 56 Thomas Street, Brighton East, is significant including both the original (1950) southern wing and later (1964) north wing as well as the original carport to the south side. The form with low pitched roof, painted brick walls, and original timber-framed openings, are all significant elements of the design.

As the walls of the building were painted from the outset, it is appropriate to have paint controls so that a complementary colour scheme is applied to the building.

The rear garage, built during the mid-1950s, is not visible but may be a significant element.

How is it Significant?

The Barton Residence is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Glen Eira.

Why is it Significant?

The Barton Residence is of historical significance as it reflects the Post WWII phase of development in the Bentleigh/East

Brighton area, which was a secondary, but nonetheless key phase of growth. It is one of the few architect designed houses in the area and was the first house designed by the eminent architect, Neil Clerehan, after he had set up as a solo practitioner, but probably in collaboration with one of the original occupants, Norman Barton, who was undertaking his architectural studies at the time. Barton however was himself responsible for the second part, added in 1964. Initially completed in 1950, the house is a likely rare, early example of Modernism in the municipality. (Criteria A and H).

The Barton Residence is aesthetically significant as an intact Post WWII house, which was built in two stages – initially in 1950 and an addition in 1964. The addition complemented the design of the original section, as was often allowed for at the time due to the various building restrictions. It displays the hallmarks of the contemporary progressive, Modernist design approach in its site orientation, use of plain geometry, restrained palette of materials, extensive areas of glazing, and blank presentation to the street. (Criterion E)

Description

The single storey, Modernist house is largely obscured from the street by a high timber fence as well as some established trees and shrubs on the site.

Occupying much of the allotment, the house consists of two opposing, but co-joined skillion roofed wings (north and south) of varying lengths to overall form a low gable roof, clad in metal sheeting. The two wings – larger original 1950 southern wing and smaller northern 1964 wing – have brick walls and are setback about 7 metres and 9 metres respectively. The more visible southern wing has a wider, timber lined soffit with exposed rafter ends, whilst the narrower eaves of the northern wing are lined but lacks exposed rafter ends. Solar cells are surmounted on both wings.

The front wall of the southern wing is blank and a section of 'hit and miss' brickwork is evident to its return (north wall). The brick walls and timber-framed windows, some full height, are painted off-white. There is a relative lack of windows to the front section of the building as compared to the rear parts, which are not visible, to provide privacy.

An original carport is attached to the entry/middle part of the southern elevation and a mid-1950s garage is located in the south-east corner of the site, though barely visible from the street.

The elements of the subject building which are indicative of the Modernist style are use of a geometric form, lack of decoration, flat walls, substantial areas of glazing, and a low pitched (skillion) roof. The use of light colours externally, especially white, is also typical of the style.

The Modernist (or International) style developed from the late-1920s with the work of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius in Europe. Modernism was adopted internationally, hence the alternate term, the International Style, although several strands evolved.

Modernism was related to the aesthetics of the machine wherein the design of buildings became sleeker and more functional. It was often promoted in revolutionary terms and represented a break with the past and most traditional building styles. Modernism came to be slowly adopted in Australia from the mid-1930s onwards, though with few residential examples prior to World War Two (WWII), as there was considerable resistance to it especially in a suburban context. This design approach was increasingly accepted in the post-WWII years when there was a need for much construction but concomitantly severe building restrictions. Although initially more commonly employed to commercial buildings, it should be noted that '... while the CBD still produced spectacular examples of the new architecture, the privately commissioned suburban house remained the design laboratory'.¹ In addition, with contemporary building restrictions and difficulty in obtaining some materials, architects at this time had to be inventive in regards to their choice of materials and an approach developed that sought lightness of structure and sparseness of detail.²

History

The subject site formed part of Henry Dendys Special Survey, also known as the Brighton Estate, an 8 square mile (5,120 acres) holding in the Parish of Moorabbin acquired by Henry Dendy on 18 October 1841. Special Surveys were a particular method of survey permitted between 1840 and 1841 in which the Crown sold 8 square mile allotments and allowed the internal

¹ Neil Clerehan '1955-1970', in Phillip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, Sydney 1999, p176

² N Clerehan '1955-1970', in P Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, p174

configuration of the land to be determined by the purchaser.³ Its boundaries are reflected in the existing names of the streets of North Road, East Boundary Road and South Road, with Port Phillip Bay as the western boundary.⁴

Limited development occurred in the area during the 19th century, when it was widely employed for market gardens, particularly by people of Irish descent.⁵ The railway reached Bentleigh in 1881 – initially the station was known as East Brighton, but was renamed Bentleigh Station in 1907 after the Victorian Premier, Sir Thomas Bent (1838-1909), who was raised in the area. Although some subdivision occurred during the 1880s, few sites were developed until the electrification of the railways during the 1920s, which allowed for more, and faster, services.

In 1877, Thomas Bent, the local parliamentarian and property developer, acquired a large holding consisting of about 156 acres, which extended between Centre Road (south) and McKinnon Road (north) on the east side of Thomas Road.⁶ A month later he transferred it to Walter Robert Johnson,⁷ before regaining it during September of that year.⁸ Soon after Bent subdivided the holdings and Robert Gray Ford of *Whitmuir Hall*, Thomas Road, Brighton (now at 32 Huntley Road) acquired nearly 14 acres which included the subject site.⁹ The holding changed hands a few times until in 1922, when Annie Margaret Crozier of *Killearnan* (previously *Whitmuir Hall*), Thomas Road, procured it.¹⁰

With the rapid development that took place in the area during the 1920s, it was an opportune time to take advantage of the circumstance and so these holdings were subdivided into suburban allotments, advertised as the 'Killearnan Estate' and auctioned on 10 May 1930.¹¹ A contemporary aerial photograph shows the land associated with the Killearnan Estate as undeveloped, except for the original house (now located at 32-46 Huntley Road, Bentleigh) which has been much altered for its use as the Bentleigh Club.¹² The photograph also shows that Yawla Street had not been laid out, and whilst suburban development had occurred in the vicinity, cropping also continued in the nearby fields.

³ John B. Parker, 'Surveying', *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, eds. Andrew Brown May & Shurlee Swain, p703. Only three special surveys were approved

⁴ Parish Plan of Moorabbin, County Bourke, VPRS 16171, P1, Plans Ma-Na

⁵ John Cribbin, *Moorabbin: A Pictorial History 1862-1994*, pp33-35. The soil, initially thought to be poor, responded well to fertilisation and careful management

⁶ Certificate of title, vol. 944/folio 756, 11 June 1877

⁷ Certificate of title, vol. 963/folio 539, 6 July 1877

⁸ Certificate of title, vol. 979/folio 800, 13 b September 1877

⁹ Certificate of title, vol. 1009/folio 774, 16 January 1878

¹⁰ Certificate of title, vol. 4531/folio 140, 3 February 1922

¹¹ LP 13,229; Stonnington History Centre, MH621

¹² Only the fountain is intact. It is included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay as HO117.



1931 aerial photograph showing approximate location of the subject site in relation to the Killearnan estate (dashed)
(Source: Landata, Maldon Prison, Project No. 1931, Run 25, Frame 2480)

The subject site was lot 1 of 70 of the Killearnan Estate subdivision, but was not sold until May 1936 to Richard Francis O'Sullivan, a Collins Street surgeon.¹³ Development was slow within the estate as by 1946-47 only two or three houses at the west end of Yawla Street had been constructed and a similar number to Thomas Street north of Yawla Street.¹⁴ On 19 January 1949, Ruth Sara Rachel Posner, spinster, and Norman Benjamin Barton, (architecture) student, both of 30 Tennyson Street, Elwood became the joint proprietors of the site, which they retained for 42 years.¹⁵ The couple had been recently engaged (late 1948)¹⁶ and were married during February 1950 at the Melbourne Synagogue in Toorak. Prior to their marriage, Norman was alternately said to be residing in Wando Grove, East St Kilda.¹⁷

The original, larger part of the extant single storey brick dwelling was designed by noted architect, Neil Clerehan, probably in collaboration with Norman Barton, soon after the site was acquired. It was a wedding present of Ruth's father,¹⁸ and had been completed by December 1950, when the Bartons took possession of the new dwelling.¹⁹ The original section of the Barton House was essentially designed with a long rectangular footprint with a small southern extrusion that housed the kitchen and laundry. It had a concrete slab floor, skillion roof, and no windows to the narrow street elevation. The building was purposefully located to the southern end of the block to provide a garden area to the north side – the 'solar plan' including a ten-metre long, prefabricated glazed wall that lighted the main living areas (the living room was separated from the dining room by a short length of wall with a fireplace).²⁰

¹³ Certificate of title, vol. 6044/folio 799

¹⁴ Aerial Survey of Victoria, Adastra Airways, 849C1C, 1946-47

¹⁵ Certificate of title, vol. 6044/folio 799

¹⁶ 'Engagements', *Argus*, 1 December 1948, p12

¹⁷ Marriage registration 6549/1950; 'Sequins and Pearls', *Herald*, 28 February 1950, p12

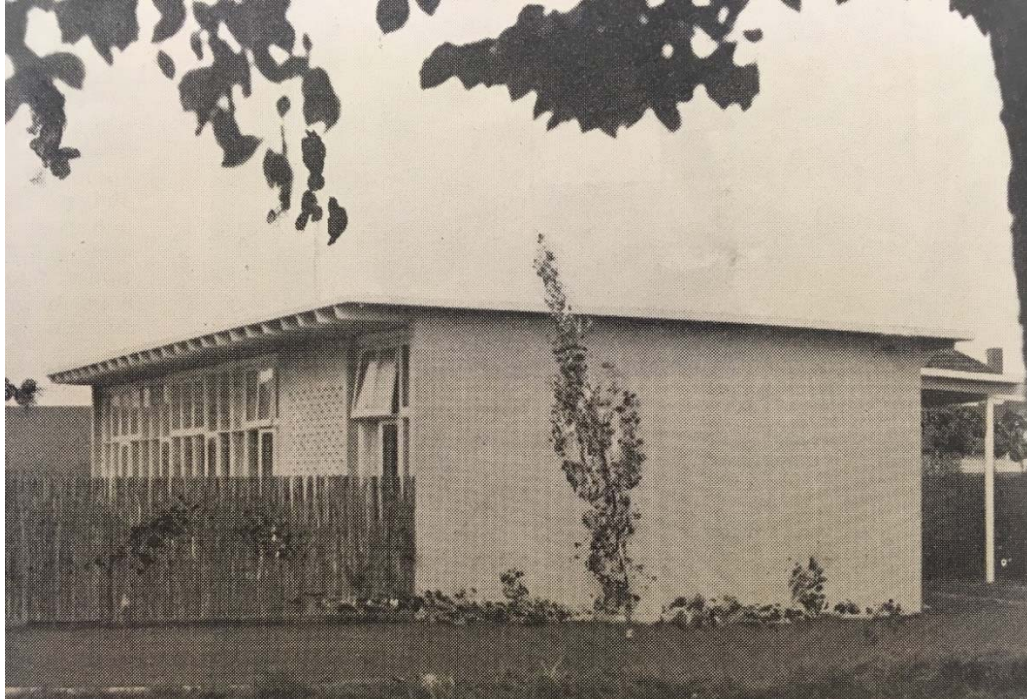
¹⁸ Harriet Edquist & Richard Black, *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*, Melbourne 2005, p25

¹⁹ 'Contrasts in Colour and texture', *Age*, 9 March 1951, p5. At the time of the article, the Bartons' were said to have '... moved only four months ago'

²⁰ H Edquist & R Black, *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*, p25

Over the next few years, there were several articles in local and international newspapers about the house, where it was used as an exemplar of modern living. It typified the economic planning of the day where halls and corridors were avoided as much as possible. In particular, the first article of April 1951 provided extensive details of the house as follows:

... this home is also distinguished by its use of open planning (dispensing with internal walls wherever possible), which gives the impression of a much larger area than the house actually covers. Most of its area is devoted to the living room, which measures 24 by 17 feet, and appears even larger because long glass windows, reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling, run the whole length of this room on both sides. On one side they extend for 40 feet, forming one wall of the dining area, where both living and dining rooms look out on to the private side garden.²¹



Original phase (southern wing) from the north-west. Note the open front garden and continuous window wall to the north elevation (relating to a bedroom, the living room and dining room).

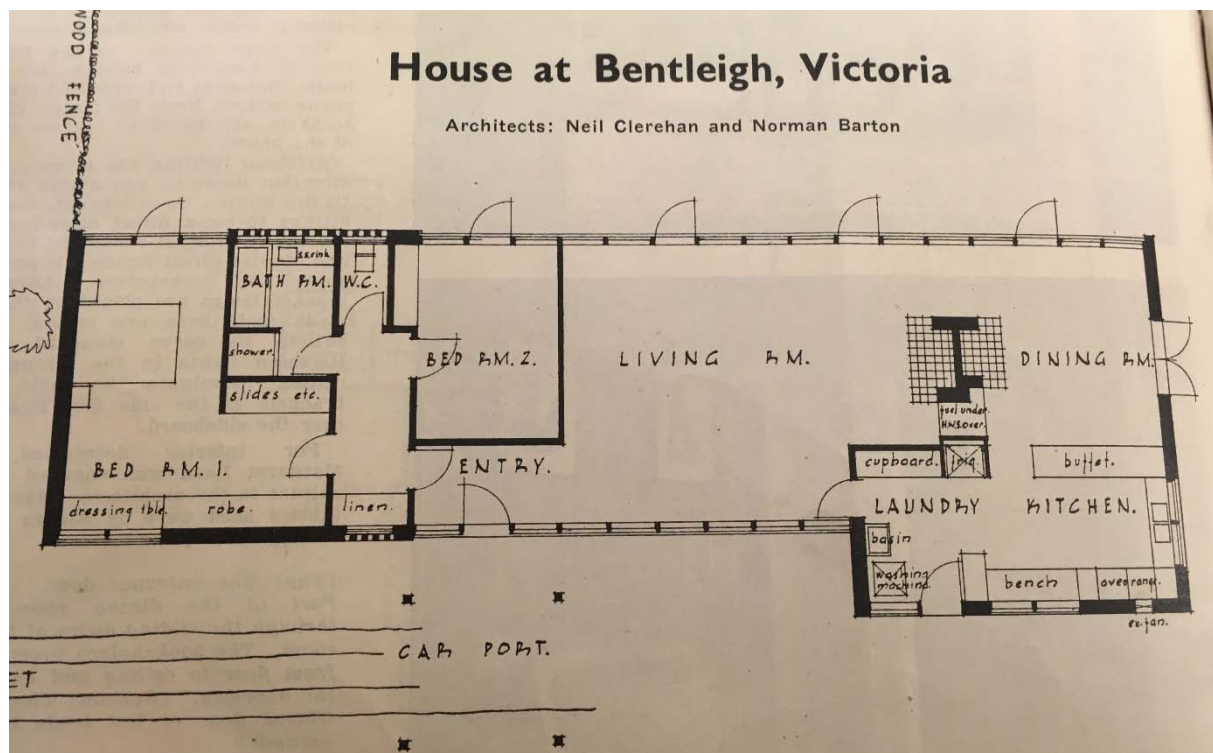
(Source: *Architecture*, October-December 1952, p116)

Internal finishes included light cork tiles to the floor and pine boards to the walls and buffet defining the kitchen, and a bold use of colour – painted brickwork of soft French grey (and curtains) with contrasting areas of red and cobalt blue (living and dining room fireplaces) and turquoise (main bedroom). Much of the furniture was designed by Grant Featherston.²² Specific aspects of the planning were also noted in subsequent articles during 1951, with the laundry and kitchen in May and built-in boxes rather than bedside tables in June.²³

²¹ 'Contrasts in Colour and texture, *Age*, 9 March 1951, p5

²² 'Contrasts in Colour and texture, *Age*, 9 March 1951, p5

²³ 'These halls do double duty', *Age*, 25 May 1951, p5; 'The Built-in Bedroom', *Age*, 8 June 1951, p5



Plan of original house

(Source: *Architecture*, October-December 1952, p116)

The Barton House has been identified as Clerehan's first independent work and the design likely evolved from his involvement with the Small Homes Service (SHS), established in 1947 by noted architect Robin Boyd. The SHS was a low-cost home service that sought to bring 'the ideas of leading domestic architects to the smallest home builder via the Institute.'²⁴

Whilst the design of the first stage of the house has been solely attributed to more eminent architect (Clerehan), it has also been identified as a collaboration with Norman Barton, though the extent of Barton's involvement is not clear. Although Barton was not initially mentioned in relation to the design in local newspaper during 1951, the design was attributed to both when the house was featured in two contemporary architectural journals in the United Kingdom during the following years – in *Architecture* during late 1952 and in the *London Daily Mail's* 1954 edition of the *Ideal Homes Book*.²⁵ Barton's involvement may have officially been noted at this time as his Bachelor of Architecture degree was conferred during September 1952.²⁶ The two had known each other for some years, having been boyhood neighbours in 1933.²⁷ It is likely that the lead role was taken by Clerehan, who was slightly older and more experienced in the field of architecture. He was conferred his Bachelor of Architecture degree in mid-April 1950,²⁸ which allowed for him to be Acting Director of the SHS whilst Boyd went on 'an extensive tour to investigate housing and general architectural developments overseas'.²⁹

The garage was constructed within a few years of the completion of the house as it is evident on a 1956 aerial photograph. By this time, the surrounding part of the Killearnan Estate had been fully developed.

²⁴ H Edquist & R Black, *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*, pp20 + 25

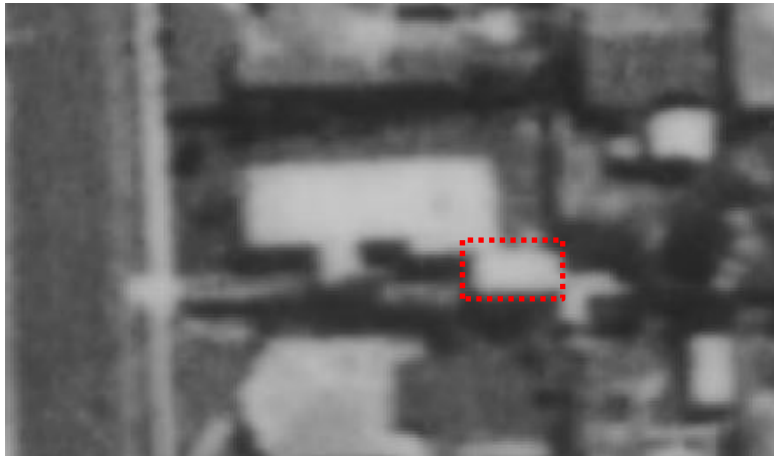
²⁵ 'House at Bentleigh, Victoria', *Architecture*, October-December 1952, p116; 'Wood is not what it used to be', *Herald*, 19 January 1954, p12

²⁶ 'Degrees and Diplomas', *Age*, 2 September 1952, p5

²⁷ H Edquist & R Black, *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*, p25

²⁸ 'Results of University Examinations ...', *Argus*, 17 April 1950, p15

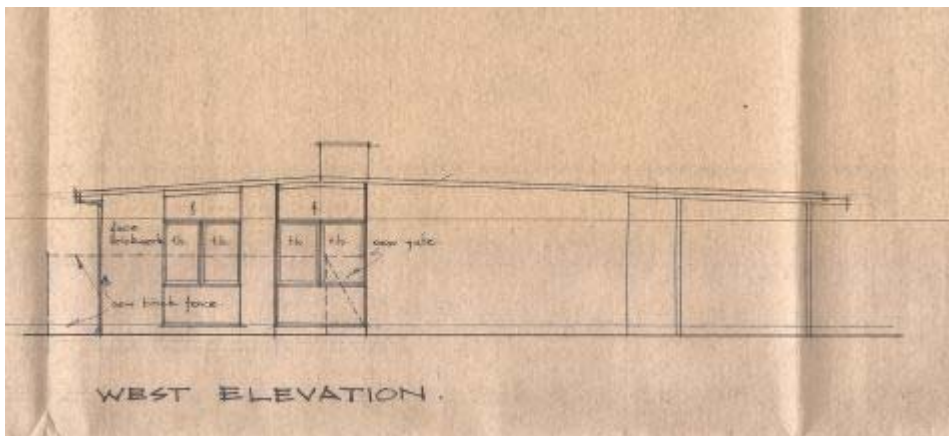
²⁹ 'Director on tour', *Age*, 31 May 1950, p6



1956 aerial showing garage

(Source: Landata, Melbourne Outer Suburbs Project, Project No. 250, Run 28, Frame 99)

In 1964, Norman Barton, by then practising as an architect for over a decade, designed a complementary skillion roofed addition (northern wing) for his family so that the overall roof form became a low-slung gable.³⁰ The new northern wing provided an additional bathroom and two bedrooms, as one of the original bedrooms was converted to a study and connecting area. A section of the original northern window wall was removed to accommodate the additions.



West/street elevation 1964

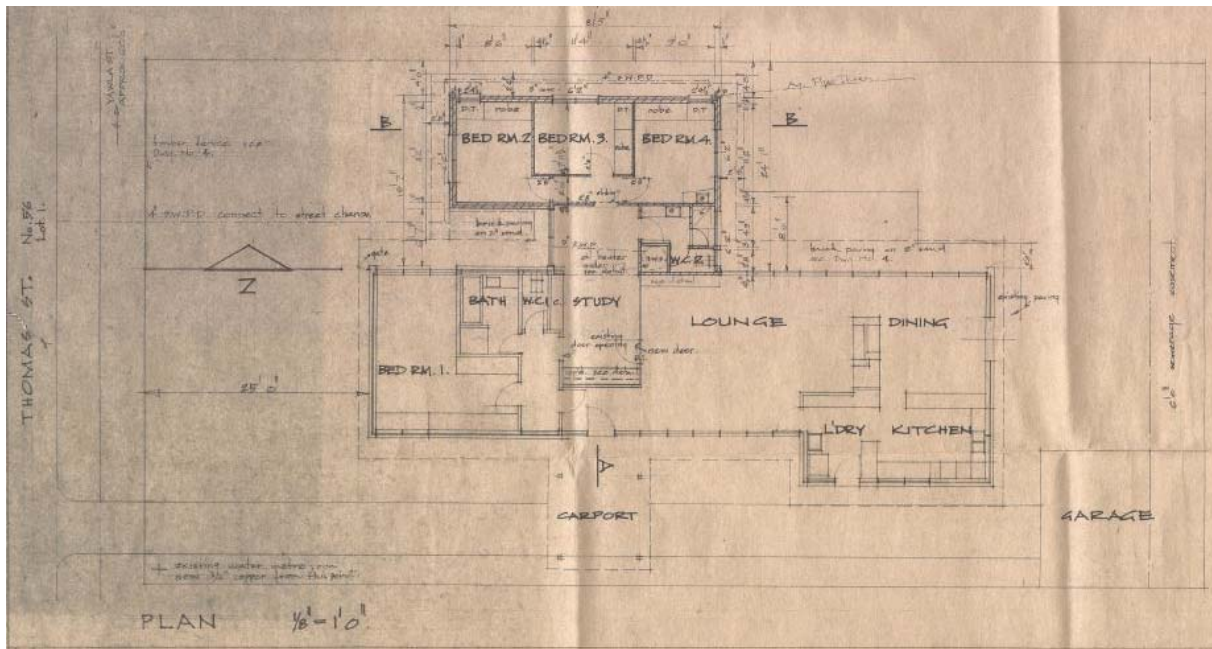
(Source: 'Proposed Alterations and Additions to Existing Residence', Building file)

It is likely that an addition of some type was envisaged at the outset as the house only contained two bedrooms. This circumstance was typical of the time as the building restrictions that followed WWII were not lifted until 1952, though it was some further years before materials were readily available. The idea that a house could be extended – usually by a combination of permeable and semi-permeable components – was central to the SHS designs. Clerehan operated in this context, exploring these ideas through the use of skillion roof forms and attached carports.

The flexibility and ease of being able to add to the original section is evident with the northern wing extension. A symmetrical format was created to the street and a private garden area was retained, along with most of the solar plan. The final form of the Barton House was reminiscent of the approach evident in some designs popularised by the SHS, which consisted of two parallel rectangular wings, often of varying size, connected by a narrow element.³¹

³⁰ Building File, 'Proposed Alterations and Additions to Existing Residence', Norman Barton, November 1964

³¹ Examples include T359 (1955), V268 (1956), and V270 (1956) in H Edquist & R Black, *The Architecture of Neil Clerehan*, pp114-115



Plan 1964
 (Source: 'Proposed Alterations and Additions to Existing Residence', Building file)

The house was captured by eminent architectural photographer Peter Wille soon after the second phase was completed. At this stage, a high timber fence (similar to the existing) was extended to the street boundary in front of the new, northern wing but the site remained open in front of the original wing (with its blank wall providing privacy). There was less planting to the south side such that the details of the articulation of that elevation were visible, including the full-height glazed section at the entry and the slender supports of the attached carport. The driveway was paved and had a central grass island.



Front, circa late 1960s
 (Source: SLV, Peter Wille collection, H91.244/1539)



Front, circa late 1960s
 (Source: SLV, Peter Wille collection, H91.244/1540)

The Bartons are known to have resided at the property until at least 1980,³² and likely to 1991, when they sold the property.³³ Norman Barton was born on 27 February 1923 in Melbourne and died in January 2003. During WWII, he served in 2nd AIF (Australian Imperial Force) from 1939 to 1948.³⁴ It is not known when Ruth Posner was born, but she grew up in St Kilda.³⁵

³² Electoral Role, Subdivision of Bentleigh, 1980, p1601-2

³³ Certificate of title, vol. 6044/folio 799

³⁴ Ancestry.com, JewishGen online worldwide burial registry and Australia, WWII Military Service Records

³⁵ *The Age*, 31 December 1931, p1

Neil Clerehan

Neil Clerehan (1922-2017) was born in Melbourne and studied at both RMIT and the University of Melbourne but his studies were interrupted as for many young architects by wartime service in the AIF, for which he was stationed mainly in New Guinea. He established his own practice in 1949, travelled and worked in the USA during 1952-53, and on his return took over the directorship of the SHS (1954-61). He began writing weekly articles in the *Age* noted for their 'great perspicacity and wit' as well as producing designs for the SHS and running a private practice. He is most known for his residential buildings and among his most significant houses are two in South Yarra; his own in Walsh Street (1958) and the Fenner House in Domain Road (1964). In 1980, he went into partnership with David Cran and took on more commercial work. Clerehan was active in the profession – for instance he was elected president of the AIA Victoria Chapter (1975-76) – and in particular within heritage circles, being involved with the National Trust (VIC.) and the Historic Buildings Council.³⁶

Clerehan designs have been described as 'determinedly modernist, planned for convenience of their owners, and unassuming in their encouragement of open plans, generous glazing and discreet privacy from the street',³⁷ characteristics clearly evident at the Barton House.

Thematic Context/Comparative Analysis

City of Glen Eira Heritage Management Plan – vol. 1 (Historical Background):

- Not relevant as there is no discussion of the Post-WWII phase of development in the HMP.

Known comparable places in the City of Glen Eira:

Only two other Modernist houses have individual overlays however a project is underway to review the heritage value of other houses built after WWII in the municipality. The Barton house is the earliest example of this group.

- Lind House, 450 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North (HO155/VHR 2387) – built a few years later during 1954-55, it is a two storey dwelling with an undercroft, part supported on piloti. It has a butterfly roof which extends forward with a wide soffit. Externally it is cream brick with sections of random stone cladding, vertical timber battens and navy spandrel glass panes.
- Ernest Fooks House, 32 Howitt Road, Caulfield North (HO150/VHR 2191) – erected some 15 years later, being designed in 1964 and completed in 1966. The single storey house has a blank presentation to the street with a car port to the front. The walls are of tan brick and the roof is flat with a clerestory section.

Condition

Good

Integrity

Mostly intact

Previous Assessment

D grade (local interest) – Andrew Ward, Bentleigh survey, map 1, March 1996

Survey of Post War Built Heritage in Victoria: stage one, Heritage Alliance, 2008

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	Yes
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and/or Fences	No

³⁶ P Goad, 'Neil Clerehan', in P Goad & J Willis (eds), *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Melbourne, 2012, pp154-155

³⁷ P Goad, 'Neil Clerehan', in P Goad & J Willis (eds), *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, p154

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent of the heritage overlay would be the parcel of land associated with 56 Thomas Street, Brighton East.



Recommended extent of heritage overlay
(Source: Nearmap, depicting April 2019)