

IDENTIFIER	HOUSE	Citation No	HG13
Other name/s	Lloyd House (former)	Melway ref	58 F12
Address	15 Rockbrook Road ST KILDA EAST	Date/s	1924
Designer/s	Lippincott & Billson	Builder/s	Lydster Brothers



Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, October 2019



Location map and extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
Heritage Category	House	Intactness	Excellent
Thematic context	6.7 Making homes for Victorians		
Recommendation	Include on heritage overlay schedule as an individual heritage place		
Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> External Paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The former Lloyd House, at 15 Rockbrook Road, St Kilda East, is a single-storey red brick house with low gabled roof and asymmetrical facade incorporating forms and motifs associated with the Prairie School of Walter Burley Griffin and his circle, including vertical piers, chunky rendered ornament, and windows and doors with geometric mullions and leadlight glazing. Designed for the Lloyd family in 1924, the house was designed by Lippincott & Billson, a partnership between two former members of Griffin's office.

The significant fabric is defined as the entire exterior of the building.

How is it significant?

The former Lloyd House satisfies the following criteria for inclusion on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Glen Eira planning scheme:

- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics

How is it significant?

The former Lloyd House is aesthetically significant as an excellent example of the Prairie School style associated with Frank Lloyd Wright, largely introduced into Australia by Walter Burley Griffin, and popularised, for over two decades, by not only by Griffin but also his staff, associates and others. The work of someone who had been the Griffins' first Australian employee, employed by them for six years, and was still sharing office space with them when this house was designed, it can be considered an especially confident articulation of this distinctive style, which is extremely rare in the City of Glen Eira. The house evokes the Midwestern American precedents of Wright and Griffin through its low horizontal expression, broad gabled roof, vertical piers and geometric rendered ornament including chevrons, angular capitals and cornices, chunky faceted embellishment, as well as doors and windows with matching geometric mullions and leadlight glazing. Its bold use of face brickwork, with expanses of red brick contrasting with clinker brick piers, is especially unusual in the context of Billson's residential work in this style, which was more typically characterised by a rendered finish. (*Criterion E*)

History

The house at 15 Rockbrook Road, St Kilda East was erected in 1924 for the five adult children of the Lloyd family, to a design by Lippincott & Billson. Although the Lloyd siblings were all born in Victoria, their parents were British. William Leonard Lloyd (1839-1901) and wife Jane, *nee* Mary Jane Embrey (1863-1937) married in London in 1884 and migrated here within two years, when the birth of their first child, Mary (1886-1952), was registered in Broadford. Three more daughters and two sons followed: Frances Amy (1888-1959), Edward Leonard (1891-1941), Margaret Elizabeth (1893-1961) and Charles Thomas (1895-1979). After residing in Broadford for three decades, the family moved to Melbourne in the mid-1910s, with the widowed Jane and her five adult children sharing a house in Williamstown. After WW1 (during which son Edward served with the 25/4th Light Horse Regiment), the family moved to Grosvenor Street, Balaclava. By then, Jane Lloyd and her daughters Margaret and Frances were working as school teachers, Edward as a leather dresser and Charles as a bank clerk. Intending to build a new house for their joint occupation, the family acquired land at the end of Rockbrook Road, a dead-end street that aligned with Grosvenor Street. To design the house, the Lloyds engaged the architectural firm of Lippincott & Billson. This was formed in 1921 by architect Edward Fielder Billson (1892-1986) and his American colleague, Roy Alston Lippincott (1885-1969), who had met while both were employed in the Melbourne office of Walter Burley Griffin. A graduate of New York's Cornell University, Lippincott became involved with the Prairie School after joining the Chicago office of Herman von Holst, an early associate of Frank Lloyd Wright. He went on to become Walter and Marion Griffin's head draftsman and, after the couple won the competition for the design of Canberra in 1911, he travelled with them to Australia (along with Griffin's sister, Genevieve, whom Lippincott married in 1913). Commencing practice in Melbourne, the Griffins engaged Billson, Melbourne University's first architecture graduate, as their first local employee. Seven years apart in age, Billson and Lippincott established a rapport and later collaborated on the design of a window stay (patented in Australia in 1918, and in the USA the following year). By then, Billson had already begun designing buildings under his own name, including a house for his parents in Clendon Road, Toorak (1918) and another for a family friend in Balaclava Road, Caulfield (1919). Far from objecting to their staff undertaking private commissions, the Griffins encouraged it by initiating an unusual reciprocal co-operative contract, whereby profits from such outside projects would be shared.

Lippincott and Billson formerly entered into partnership after winning first prize in a competition for the Arts Building at the University of Auckland. Required to open an office there, both men initially moved to New Zealand, although Billson would return to Melbourne "for family reasons" (as he later put it). Thus, the partnership of Lippincott & Billson split into two: the Auckland office run by Lippincott, and the Melbourne office under Billson, assisted by draftsman George Ozanne (who, much later, would become MCC City Architect).

As the partnership had been conceived for the sole purpose of overseeing the Auckland project, it was formally dissolved when the building was completed in 1925. Over the ensuing four years, Lippincott & Billson's Melbourne office (which operated from the Griffins' address at 395 Collins Street) undertook over a dozen projects. Most were suburban houses (along with a group of three pisé dwellings at Balranald, NSW), with other work including a flat conversion in St Kilda, a stable in Pascoe Vale and a hotel renovation in Swan Hill. There was further success in architectural competitions: highly commended for an entry in the Ideal Home Competition (1923), fourth place in the National War Memorial competition (1924) and third place for a scheme to complete St Paul's Cathedral (1925). After the partnership ended, Lippincott continued to practice under his own name in Auckland (eventually returning to the USA in 1939). Billson followed suit in Melbourne and, aside from the short-lived partnerships of Billson & Cheetham (1927) and Billson & Mewton (1939-41), he would maintain a notable sole practice into the post-WW2 period, carried on for two generations by his like-named son and grandson.

While original drawings for new house in the Rockbrook Road have not been located, evidence suggests that the project was commissioned by the Lloyd children, rather than their elderly and widowed mother. In 1988, Philip Goad sighted some (unspecified) documentation relating to the house, then held in the (now-defunct) offices of Edward Billson & Partners in Jolimont, which identified the clients as "the Misses Lloyd". This clearly refers to the three unmarried daughters, Mary, Frances and Margaret. In June 1924, Lippincott & Billson called tenders for construction of a "brick villa, Rockbrook Road, St Kilda" (*Cazaly's Contract Reporter*, 03/06/1924:1). Six weeks later, it was reported that the City of Caulfield had issued a building permit, identifying the builders as Lydster Brothers, and the contract sum as £1,500 (*Cazaly's Contract Reporter*, 17/07/1924:10). Construction was still in progress two months later, as per the date on the bottom of the MMBW sewerage plan for the property (PS 138891, 08/09/1924).

The house first appeared in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* for 1925, listed as "house being built" between existing dwellings at Nos 13 and 25. The following year, it was definitely designated as No 15, and its principal occupant named as Mrs M J Lloyd. Electoral rolls, however, confirm that all five of her children resided there as well. After Mrs Lloyd's death in 1937, directories listed her second daughter, Frances, as principal occupant. Edward died in 1941, followed by Mary in 1952 and Frances in 1959. The last of the three daughters, Margaret, was then briefly listed as principal occupant until she died in 1961. Thereafter, the house continued to be occupied solely by the last surviving child, the unmarried Charles Lloyd, until his own death on 9 July 1979.

Description

The former Lloyd House, at 15 Rockbrook Road, St Kilda East, is a single-storey gable-roofed red brick bungalow with asymmetrical double-fronted façade dominated by a wide projecting bay to the left (east) side, with an off-centre recessed porch. Designed by an architect who had a direct link with Walter Burley Griffin, the house expresses the distinctive Prairie School style associated with the work of the Griffins and their circle. This is broadly evident in the low gabled roofline and the rectilinear division of the façade with vertical pier-like elements (in contrasting clinker brick) and horizontal rendered banding at the window head line. Where the piers intersect with the banding, they have elongated wedged-shaped rendered capitals with trademark Griffinesque geometric mouldings. Above these capitals, the piers extend to the top of the gable end, each divided by vertical grooves to form three narrower sub-piers. At the apex of the gable end, the central pier incorporates a Griffinesque rendered chevron motif, while the plain brick chimneys are enlivened with similarly angular rendered mouldings. The Prairie School influence is also evident in window and door treatment. The wide picture window between the two piers contains six narrow metal-framed casement sashes with coloured leadlight glazing in a geometric pattern of rectangles and diamonds, while the front door is set between a pair of sidelights with vertical and diagonal glazing bars and coloured textured glass.

Comparisons

The work of Walter Burley Griffin, and his circle, tends to be well represented in suburbs where those architects resided. Griffin, for example, was notably active in Heidelberg (where he and brother-in-law Roy Lippincott occupied adjacent houses in Glenard Drive), while Eric Nicholls did much work in Hawthorn and Kew, J F W Ballantyne in Malvern, and Billson in Toorak. None of these architects, however, seem to have had any enduring association with the Caulfield area. Griffin himself only completed one project in what is now the City of Glen Eira: the renovation of an inter-war house at 20 Labassa Grove, Caulfield (1924), owned by recurring client Sydney Keith. While the house still stands (included on the heritage overlay schedule as HO126), Griffin's input is not evident when seen from the street. Griffin's only other known project in the municipality was an unbuilt scheme for a municipal incinerator (1934), which was an unsuccessful tender by RIECo, the incineration company with which he enjoyed a fruitful association in the 1930s.

While Billson had no enduring links with Caulfield *per se*, his work in the broader St Kilda East/Balaclava area includes three houses straddling the municipal boundary. Aside from the Lloyd House, the other example in the City of Glen Eira is the former Armstrong House at 45 Balaclava Road, Caulfield (1919). Predating his partnership with Lippincott, this house (currently on the heritage overlay schedule as HO6) is similar to the Lloyd House in its broad gabled roof, vertical piers, and windows with geometric mullions and leadlight glazing. However, its roughcast rendered finish and attic-storeyed scale contrast with the face brick and spreading horizontality of the single-storey Lloyd House. Billson's other house in area, located in the City of Port Phillip, is *Tintara*, the former Keane House, at 20 Linden Street, Ripponlea (1923). While its attic-storeyed form, broad roof and piers evoke the earlier Armstrong House, the use of face brickwork clearly anticipates the Lloyd House, designed the following year.

In the broader context of Billson's other houses in the Prairie School mode, the Lloyd House shows some recurring themes. Its low horizontality, distinct from the attic-storey houses cited above, is most akin to the Warren House at 12 Rowan Street, Bendigo (1919), which also has red brickwork and a six-bay leadlight picture window between broad piers. This approach was revisited, albeit on a much simpler and smaller scale, in the tiny Gaunson House at 25 Lithgow Street, Abbotsford (1927). These houses of face brick construction are distinct from the rendered ones that tend to characterise Billson's output at the time, typified by his parents' house at 28 Clendon Road, Toorak (1918), the Pierce House at 9 Toorak Avenue, Toorak (1922), the Silcock House at 16 Glenroy Street, Hawthorn (1924) and the Cox House at 236 Cotham Road, Kew (1925). In a much later published memoir, Billson himself acknowledged this early interest in the use of face brickwork, recalling that he was able to cheaply purchase over-burnt clinker bricks because, at that time, no other architects wanted them. While he would design a few buildings in the Prairie School style in the later 1920s, most notably a new timber clubhouse for the Woodlands Golf Club in Mordialloc (1927; based on an earlier scheme from 1925), he had rejected the aesthetic by the end of the decade. During the 1930s he embraced a more conventionally progressive modernist mode, ably demonstrated by his stylish factory at Warburton for Sanitarium Health Foods (1936), which won him the RVIA Street Architecture Medal in 1940.

References

- Edward Billson, "A Life in Architecture", *Architect*, September/October 1968, pp 22-24.
- Donald Leslie Johnson, *Australian Architecture 1901-1951: Sources of Modernism* (1980), pp 109-131.
- Philip Goad, "Preamble: Tintara, Ripponlea", 4pp typescript, dated 13 October 1988.
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Identified by

Andrew Ward (C graded list)