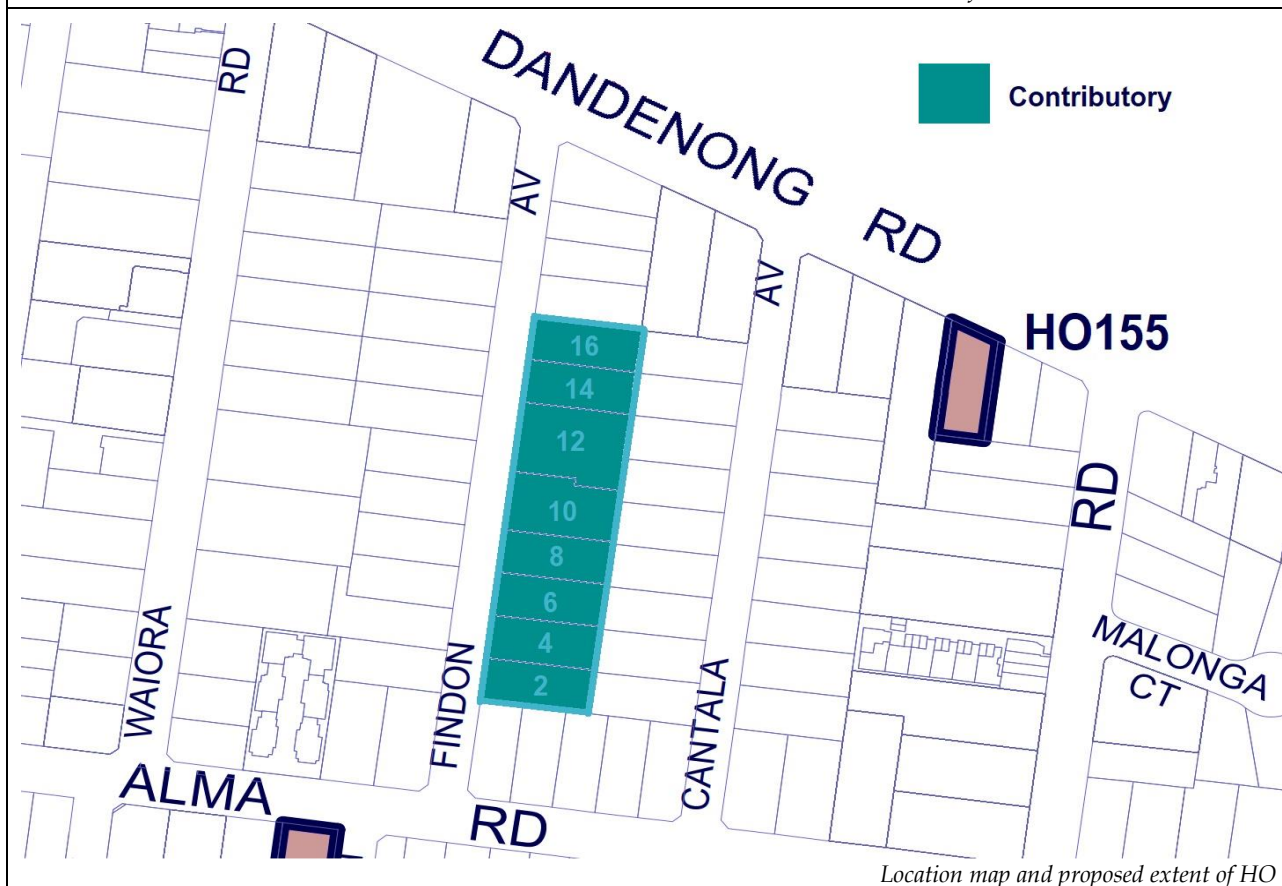


IDENTIFIER	FINDON AVENUE PRECINCT	Citation No	P03
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 H12
Address	2-16 Findon Avenue CAULFIELD NORTH	Date/s	1939-1941



East side of Findon Avenue, October 2019



Location map and proposed extent of HO

Heritage Group	Residential building (private)	Condition	Excellent
Heritage Category	Residential precinct	Intactness	Excellent (generally)
Recommendation	Include on heritage overlay schedule as a heritage precinct		
Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> External Paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Alteration	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The Findon Avenue Precinct comprises a row of detached double-storey brick residences of grand scale and prepossessing architectural form, occupying elevated sites on the east side of the street. They were erected over a period of three years following the 1938 auction of allotments on the *Cantala Estate*, created from the subdivision of the eponymous mansion, *Cantala*, former home of the Miller family, which occupied fourteen acres on Dandenong Road. The houses, all built by wealthy families (some of whom engaged leading architects such as Edward Billson, Frederick Morsby and the firm of Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson), express a range of fashionable architectural styles of the day including Moderne, Functionalist and Georgian Revival.

The following houses are deemed to be *contributory* elements in the precinct:

- Findon Avenue: Nos 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16

How is it significant?

The Findon Avenue Precinct satisfies the following criteria for inclusion on the heritage overlay schedule to the City of Glen Eira planning scheme:

- Criterion A: Importance to the course, or pattern, of Glen Eira's cultural history.
- Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics

Why is it significant?

The Findon Avenue Precinct is historically significant for associations with the creation and early development of the *Cantala Estate*, which was the largest, most ambitious and most prestigious inter-war residential subdivision in Caulfield. Created from a fourteen-acre property that had been held by the Miller family since 1895, the *Cantala Estate* (released in three stages in 1933, 1938 and 1939) attracted considerable attention from the press and potential buyers. While allotments on the estate were all highly desirable for their proximity to Dandenong Road (and the electric tram line thereon), it was the elevated land along the east side of Findon Avenue that proved to be the most sought-after. These sites, sold and developed within only three years of the 1938 auction, were snapped up by wealthy families who proceeded to build suitably grand dwellings (some designed by noted architects) to exploit the elevated position and bayside views. This continuous row of eight dwellings now remains as the most extant collection of original houses on the entire *Cantala Estate*. (Criterion A)

The Findon Avenue Precinct is aesthetically significant as a cohesive group of stylish and palatial residences of the late inter-war period. Erected by wealthy families who engaged the services of leading architects and builders, the houses exhibit notable consistency through their imposing scale, common setbacks, elevated siting, and various elements (such as expansive windows, balconies and sun decks) that were incorporated to take advantage of bayside views. The houses demonstrate the pervasive influence of the fashionable architectural styles of the period, including outstanding individual examples of the Georgian Revival (No 10), Streamlined Moderne (Nos 4, 12) and Functionalist (No 16), and others (Nos 2, 6, 8 and 14) displaying a confident melding of different styles. Collectively, the houses form a consistent and substantially intact streetscape of uncommonly grand dwellings from the late 1930s and early 1940s. (Criterion E)

History

Note: Identifying details of property owners and their families have been deleted as per Council direction

Findon Avenue was created in 1938 as part of the ongoing subdivision of *Cantala*, former estate of Septimus Miller. His huge property, bounded by Dandenong, Waiora and Alma Road, comprised fourteen acres “laid out in lawns, flower beds, shrubberies and beautiful trees” (Age, 20/05/1938:4) on which stood a two-storey mansion, built in 1895 to an eclectic design by architect William Salway. The MMBW plan, dated 1902 (Figure 1), shows that Miller’s vast estate included a monumental entrance gateway on Dandenong Road (with gate lodge at corner of Waiora Road), a network of curving pathways and driveways, a vast stable, two freestanding conservatories, sundry other outbuildings, a kitchen garden on Dandenong Road and cultivation paddock to Alma Road. After Miller died in 1925, his widow, Helen, resided at *Cantala* for a few years before relocating to new house she had built in St Georges Road, Toorak, also christened *Cantala*.

Subdivision of the original *Cantala* estate on Dandenong Road commenced in early 1933, when the western edge was carved up to create nine allotments on the east side of Waiora Road and two more fronting Alma Road. Auctioned on 27 May, all eleven lots were promptly snapped up (Age, 29/05/1933:11). Another five years went by, however, before a second phase of subdivision took place, creating 32 residential allotments with frontages to Dandenong Road, Waiora Road and a new north-south avenue linking Dandenong Road and Alma Road. This avenue was named after *Findon*, the palatial Kew mansion that had been occupied from 1871 by Septimus Miller’s father, the Hon Henry Miller (and which was demolished in the 1910s for a residential subdivision that similarly included a new street named Findon Avenue).



Figure 1: Composite of MMBW Plans 1413 & 1414 (1902) showing original extent of Septimus Miller’s vast *Cantala* property (outlined), bounded by Dandenong Road, Waiora Road and Alma Road
Source: Map Collection, State Library of Victoria

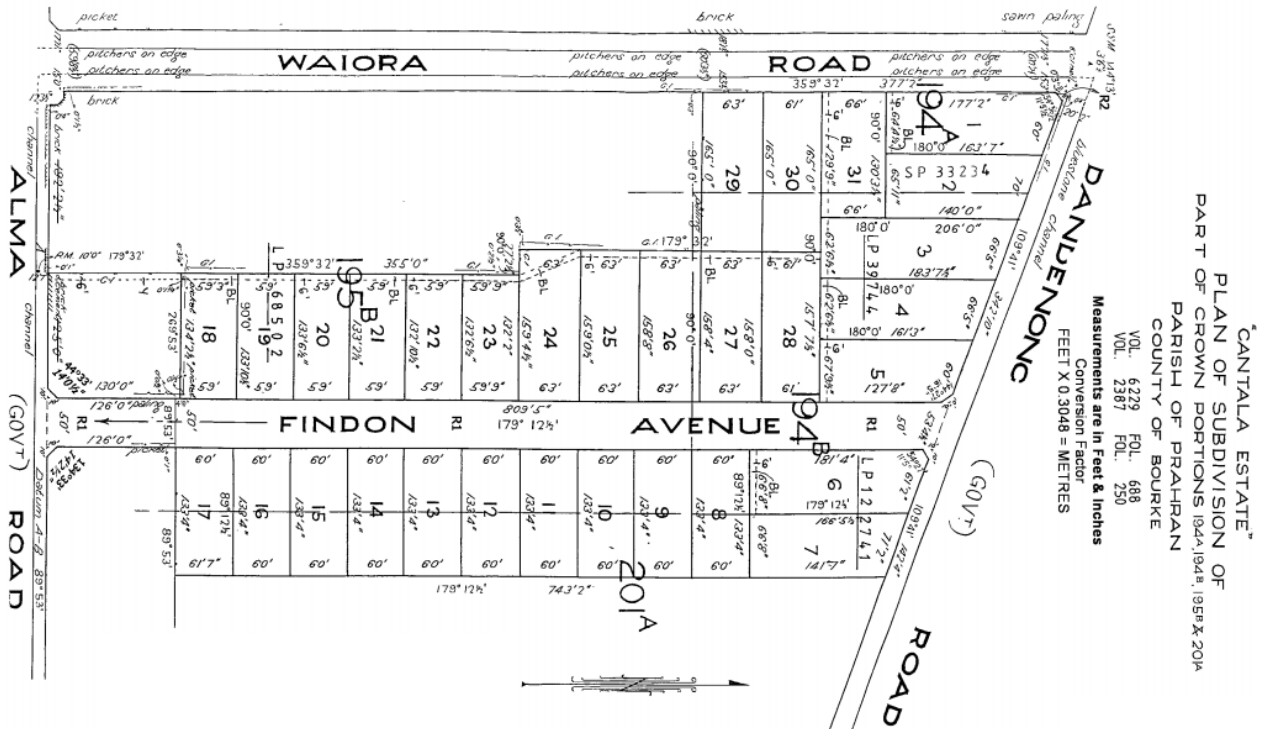


Figure 2: Subdivision plan LP14,813 (1938) showing second release of the Cantala Estate to create 31 allotments with frontages to Dandenong Road, Waiora Road and newly-created Findon Avenue
Source: www.landata.com.au

The second release of the *Cantala Estate* generated a certain degree of publicity, with the auction promoted as “one of the largest subdivisational sales for the year” (*Argus*, 20/05/1938:13), and an event “expected to attract a big attendance of buyers” (*Argus*, 22/04/1938:6). This proved far from overstatement: while the estate agents provided seating for five hundred on the day, the crowd of attendees was estimated to be almost three times that number. Bidding was reportedly “brisk, and remained animated until the last lot was disposed of” (*Age*, 23/05/1938:10). While seven prime blocks on Dandenong Road garnered the highest sale prices, it was noted that “there was strong competition from those fronting Findon Road”. Particularly sought-after were those blocks on the elevated east side of the avenue, praised for their “high position and glorious bay views”.

According to the title records, the first lots on the *Cantala Estate* were transferred to individual ownership during the last quarter of 1938, which included most of the blocks along Waiora Road and Dandenong Road, but only two in Findon Avenue: Lot 20 (west side; present-day No 5), and Lot 15 (east side; No 6). On 24 October, the title to the latter block was transferred to a man who had recently engaged architects H Vivian Taylor & Soilleux to design a house for the site. Although the original drawings for his house, dated July 1938, are preserved in the collection of the State Library of Victoria, the house itself was ultimately not built; the owner duly sold his still-vacant block and established himself elsewhere.

It was not until early the following year that the first house would be built on the elevated east site of Findon Avenue, at what is now No 18. The title to this site (Lot 8 of the original estate) was transferred to its new owner on 4 April 1939. Two weeks earlier, on 21 March, the City of Caulfield had issued a building permit for a house, described as a “brick residence, Findon Avenue” to be erected by Bastin & Richardson of Studley Street, Footscray. While the architect’s name was not recorded, the timing of the permit seems to coincide with a tender notice of 31 January, for a two-storey brick residence in Findon Avenue, designed by leading society architect Robert Hamilton & Associates in association with Marcus R Norris.



Figure 3: Perspective drawing of the house at 12 Findon Avenue (Edward Billson, 1939)
Source: *Herald*, 6 December 1939

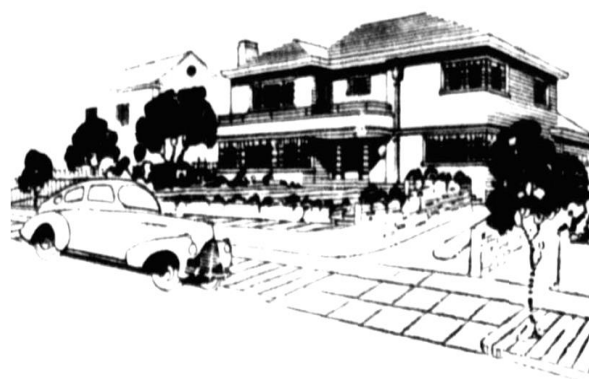


Figure 4: Perspective drawing of the house at 8 Findon Avenue (Frederick Morsby 1940)
Source: *Herald*, 2 April 1941

On 21 March, the same day that a building permit was issued for the new house at No 18, architect Edward Fielder Billson called tenders for another two-storey brick house in Findon Avenue. Commissioned by a leading manufacturer, and erected by builders A C & B Richardson & Son, this large house spread across a double-width block at what is now 12 Findon Avenue. As the site was formed by consolidation of Lot 11 with most of adjacent Lot 12, the land title would not be transferred to the owner's name until as late as 1944.

Land titles to the seven remaining vacant sites on the east side of Findon Avenue were transferred to individual owners over a period of about eighteen months, from June 1939 and January 1941. A flurry of house construction followed in parallel. In May 1939, the City of Caulfield issued a building permit for a "large brick villa and garage" in Findon Avenue, owned by a woman who was a member of a prominent and wealthy family that had made its fortune in meat exporting. Her new house at 10 Findon Avenue (Lot 13) was designed by sought-after society architects Yuncken Freeman Brothers & Griffiths, leading exponents of the fashionable Georgian Revival style, and erected by Pollard Brothers. In July 1939, a permit was issued for "large brick house" in Findon Avenue. Erected by builder J A Trencher, this was located at No 6 (Lot 15), the same site for which H Vivian Taylor & Soilleux had designed a house (unbuilt) back in 1938.

Thus, by the end of 1939, four new houses had already been completed on the east side of Findon Avenue, at Nos 6, 10, 12 and 18. In March 1940, architect Frederick Morsby called tenders for a two-storey brick house in Findon Avenue, commissioned by a manager. Erected by Carnegie builder C L McIntosh, this new house filled the vacant block at No 8 (Lot 14), between the recently-completed residences at Nos 6 and 10.

The four remaining vacant sites on the east side of Findon Avenue were all developed during 1941. The first half of that year saw building permits issued for new houses at No 2 (January 1941), Nos 4 and 14 (both April 1941), and No 16 (May 1941). The original owners of these houses were (respectively) a sales representative, a grocer and two manufacturers. While no architects have been conclusively linked with the four houses, those at Nos 2 and 4 are known to have both been erected by builder S H Hough of Malvern, No 14 was the work of local designer/builder J W Fairbanks & Sons, and the owner of No 16 was also credited as its builder (although he was evidently not a builder by trade).

Befitting the prestige of the *Cantala Estate*, the original residents along the east side of Findon Avenue were wealthy individuals. While the owner of No 10 hailed from old money, most of her neighbours either held esteemed positions in major firms, or were self-made businessmen. The owner of No 2, was the Victorian representative for northern Tasmania's pre-eminent daily newspaper, the *Launceston Examiner*, while the owner of No 4, was the proprietor of a venerable licensed grocery in High Street, St Kilda (*Age*, 25/02/1978:36). The owner of No 12 not only ran a successful hosiery mill in Brunswick under his own name, but also served as a co-director of a woollen mill in Abbotsford, with several other businessmen including his Findon Avenue neighbours at Nos 14 and 16. It remains unclear whether these three men knew each other before they purchased adjoining properties in the same street, or whether their professional association subsequently arose from living nearby.

With some of these earliest residents of Findon Avenue engaging leading architects of the day to design their new houses, press attention inevitably followed. The adjacent residences at Nos 10 and No 12 were both reported in the property column of *Herald* newspaper, lauded for the way in which they were designed to exploit their elevated sites. The former house ("situated on the highest part of the *Cantala Estate* and commanding an extensive view of the Bay") incorporated a sun deck with "simple white railings"; a "Colonial influence" was also evident in the "smooth white painted stucco", "roof of green shingle tiles" and "wrought iron grille at the entrance designed with classical feeling" (*Herald*, 17/01/1940:12). Although conceived in a sharply contrasting Streamlined Moderne style, the adjacent house at No 12 was similarly praised for the way it responded to its elevated site ("planned as a trap for the sun and to invite delightful bay views, this distinctive home has been erected on a picked block of the famous *Cantala Estate* in Findon Avenue, Caulfield").

During 1940, both houses would be published further afield, by Sydney-based journals. In February, the house at No 10 appeared in the architectural section of the venerable *Art in Australia*, in which it was described as "very much apropos of Colonial architecture", with specific praise for its "slender columned entry porch and gabled end with returned eaves and mock window, typical of Georgian architecture" (*Art in Australia*, 23/02/1940:83). In November, the house at No 12 was illustrated in *Building* magazine (which observed that "the nautical aspect of streamlining rather suggests itself in the lines of this residence") as well as a slender monograph, entitled *Fifty Modern Homes*, issued by the same publishers.



Figure 5: The house at 10 Findon Avenue
(Yuncken Freeman, 1939)

Source: *Art in Australia*, 23 February 1940



Figure 6: The house at 12 Findon Avenue
(Edward Billson, 1939)

Source: *Building*, 25 November 1940

The final architectural hurrah for Findon Avenue arrived in early 1941, when the recently-completed house at No 8 (“a distinctive suburban home”) appeared in the *Herald*. It was observed yet again that “situated on the highest part of the *Cantala Estate*, attention has been taken of a fine view across the bay”, in this case “by provision of large plate glass landscape windows to all front rooms” and “a roomy open balcony”.

Few of the original residents of these houses were destined to remain in Findon Avenue for a long time. The owner of No 18 died in 1944, followed a year later by the owner of No 4, although the latter’s widow would continue to live in the house for another three decades. The original residents of Nos 2, 8, 14 and 16 all moved elsewhere during the 1950s. The woman at No 10 remained there until her death in the mid-1970s; her longtime neighbor at No 12 died soon afterwards, as did the widowed resident of No 4. The last survivor of Findon Avenue’s original pre-war residents was the hosiery manufacturer’s widow at No 12, who remained there until her death in May 1984, aged 91 years. Four months later, her former home was offered for sale by auction, promoted as “an outstanding gentleman’s residence with tennis court, gas central heating and superb bay views” (*Age*, 30/08/1984:12). The house, seemingly unaltered at the time of the sale, was refurbished by a subsequent owner, whose changes include a new projecting balcony to the street facade. Aside from this, and the more recent loss of the relatively modest house at No 18 (demolished 2009), the original pre-war houses along the east side of Findon Avenue still appear substantially intact when seen from the street.

Historical summary of houses

<i>Address</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Designer</i>	<i>Builder</i>
2 Findon Ave	1941	Unconfirmed	S H Hough
4 Findon Ave	1941	Unconfirmed	S H Hough
6 Findon Ave	1939	Unconfirmed	J A Trencher
8 Findon Ave	1940	Frederick Morsby	C L McIntosh
10 Findon Ave	1939	Yuncken Freeman etc	Pollard Brothers
12 Findon Ave	1939	Edward F Billson	A C & B Richardson
14 Findon Ave	1941	J W Fairbanks & Son	J W Fairbanks & Son
16 Findon Ave	1941	Unconfirmed	Morris Pitt

Description

The Findon Avenue Precinct comprises a row of eight detached houses that are prominently sited on the elevated blocks along the east side of the street. These houses are not only consistent in their dates of construction (ie, erected in a relatively narrow timespan between 1938 and 1941) but for their scale, setback and overall form. All eight houses are large, double-storey residences of brick construction, with a generally grand character that hints at the wealth and social status of their original owners. All designed to take advantage of bayside views afforded by their elevated allotments, the houses variously incorporate sun decks (Nos 4, 6, 10, 12) and/or balconies (Nos 12, 14, 16) and uncommonly large windows (No 4, 6, 10, 12, 16).

Within this overall consistency, there are a few variations. While most of the houses are rendered, those at No 2 and 4 are of face brickwork, respectively in clinker and orange tones. All of the houses are double-storeyed, but that at No 2 is the only one where the second floor level is articulated as an attic storey. The large house at No 12, the only one to occupy a double-width block, consequently presents an uncommonly elongated façade to the street that contrasts with the other houses that are more conventionally double-fronted (No 6, 8, 12) or even triple-fronted (No 2, 4, 14). The larger house at No 12 is also the only one of the eight houses with an actual flat roof; most of the others have hipped roofs clad in terracotta tiles (in a few cases, partially concealed by parapets) while one house, at No 10, has a gabled roof with slate cladding.



Figure 7: 2 Findon Ave (1941)



Figure 8: 4 Findon Ave (1941)



Figure 9: 6 Findon Ave (1939)



Figure 10: 8 Findon Avenue
(Frederick Morsby, 1940)



Figure 11: 10 Findon Avenue
(Yuncken Freeman, 1939)



Figure 12: 16 Findon Avenue
(architect unknown, 1941)



Figure 13: 12 Findon Avenue
(Edward Billson, 1939)



Figure 14: 14 Findon Avenue
(J W Fairbanks & Son, 1941)

There also is a degree of stylistic variety amongst the houses, reflecting both progressive and conservative tastes in domestic architecture of the late 1930s and early 1940s. The simple articulation of the triple-fronted attic-storey clinker brick house at No 2 contrasts with the mannered character of the rendered Georgian Revival house at No 10, with multi-paned windows, louvred shutters and side portico. The streetscape is dominated by houses in the fashionable Moderne idiom, which incorporate such typical elements as corner windows, horizontal banding or stringcourses, and curved edges; a few have particularly striking features such as projecting half-round bays (No 6, 12 and 16), the last of which forms a stairwell with double-height multi-paned glazing.

Set well back from the street on their elevated sites, most of the houses have expansive front lawns or terraced gardens raised above a masonry retaining wall (or a series of walls), typically with formalised landscaping of clipped hedges, low shrubs or creepers. Some of the properties incorporate new garages on the street, but these not considered to be intrusive.

Comparisons

The subdivision of the fourteen-acre *Cantala* property, held by Miller family for over four decades, was a significant and high-profile undertaking during the 1930s. With a total of 64 residential allotments sold off in three stages (11 lots in 1933, 31 lots in 1938 and the final 21 lots in 1939), the *Cantala Estate* was one of the largest releases of residential land in Caulfield during a period when the grounds of many venerable local mansions were carved up for closer settlement. As such, the building stock along the east side of Findon Avenue can be compared with that on the east side (Nos 1-21), both sides of Cantala Avenue (Nos 1-3, 9-17, and Nos 2, 4, 10-12), the south side of Dandenong Road (Nos 424 -446), the north side of Alma Road (Nos 310 to 330), and the northern end of the east side of Waiora Road (Nos 14-18).

The north side of Alma Road, east of Waiora Road, is largely characterised by unprepossessing single-storey 1930s brick houses (eg Nos 322, 324, 330), with only one larger two-storey residence (No 328), in a grander Tudor Revival mode. The modestly-scaled and fairly generic dwellings are not only smaller and less architecturally distinguished than those on the east side of Findon Avenue but, interspersed with more recent development (eg houses at Nos 316 and 318, and a block of villa units at No 310), do not even form a consistent pre-war streetscape. This lack of cohesion becomes even more pronounced along the contiguous east side of Waiora Road, where none of the original pre-war houses appears to survive today.

Low cohesion is also evident in the other streetscapes within the boundaries of the *Cantala Estate*. It is worth noting that, while the blocks on the east side of Findon Avenue were amongst the first to be purchased and developed in the late 1930s, comparable development along the west side of Findon Avenue, and both sides of Cantala Avenue, was delayed by the increasing gravity of WW2 (and the consequent introduction of restrictions on private residential construction).

While all nine allotments on the east side of Findon Avenue had been built upon by 1942, only five houses had appeared on the corresponding west side: Nos 7 and 9 (both 1939), Nos 1 and 21 (1940) and No 17 (1941). Two have been confirmed as the work of noted architects: No 1 was designed by Reid & Pearson, and No 7 by Sydney, Smith & Ogg. With further development hampered by WW2, it was not until the late 1940s that house construction resumed in Findon Avenue, when two new dwellings were built at Nos 13 (erected by builder John Seccull for his own use) and 19. The street would not completely fill out until the early 1950s, with houses at Nos 3, 11 and 15. With three of the original pre-war houses (at Nos 1, 9 and 17) demolished in recent decades, the last two survivors (at Nos 7 and 21) now hardly form a cohesive streetscape amongst the subsequent layer of post-WW2 infill.

A similar pattern was evident in the parallel thoroughfare of Cantala Avenue, which was formed in 1939 as part of the third and final release of the *Cantala Estate*. By the early 1940s, eleven of the seventeen blocks fronting Cantala Avenue had been built upon: five new houses on the east side (Nos 2, 4, 6, 12 and 14) and six on the west side (Nos 1, 3, 9, 11, 15 and 17). One of these has been confirmed as the work of a noted architect: the Colonial-style brick residence at No 3, designed circa 1940 by Bates, Smart & McCutcheon (*Age*, 12/03/1960:42). But, as was the case with the west side of Findon Avenue, the remaining vacant sites in Cantala Avenue would not fill out until the 1950s, when new houses were built at Nos 5, 8, 10 and 16, followed by at least two more, at Nos 7 and 12, dating from the early 1960s. Quite a few of the pre-war dwellings in Cantala Avenue still stand, including the aforementioned Colonial-style house at No 3 (by Bates, Smart & McCutcheon), an even grander Georgian Revival house on a double-width block at No 15, and others in contrasting styles such as the Moderne (eg No 11) or Tudor Revival (eg No 6, 17). While these large brick residences may be broadly comparable, as individual specimens, to those on the east side of Findon Avenue, they do not combine to form a cohesive streetscape.

It is only along the Dandenong Road frontage of the *Cantala Estate* where a comparably cohesive pre-war streetscape remains: an uninterrupted row of large brick residences or blocks of flats between Waiora Road and Findon Avenue. Chief amongst these is a particularly prepossessing Moderne-style rendered house, designed by architect W H Merritt, on a double-width block at No 430-432 (*Herald*, 08/06/1940:22). However, even this streetscape consists of only four individual buildings, half of what survives in nearby Findon Avenue. Pre-war building stock along this part of Dandenong Road is otherwise represented by only a few isolated individual specimens, such as by the *Olgita* flats at Nos 440, and a large cream brick house at No 446, scattered amongst the later post-WW2 development.

References

Lodged Plan No 14,813, dated 7 October 1938.

"Modernist planning for home at Cantala Estate", *Herald*, 6 December 1939, p 19.

"Colonial influence in new home design", *Herald*, 17 January 1940, p 12.

"Glendalough, Findon Ave, Caulfield, Melbourne", *Art in Australia*, 23 February 1940, pp 82-83.

"A Streamlined Home", *Building*, 25 November 1940, p 23.

"Modern home built on Cantala Estate", *Herald*, 2 April 1941, p 14.

Identified by

Built Heritage Pty Ltd