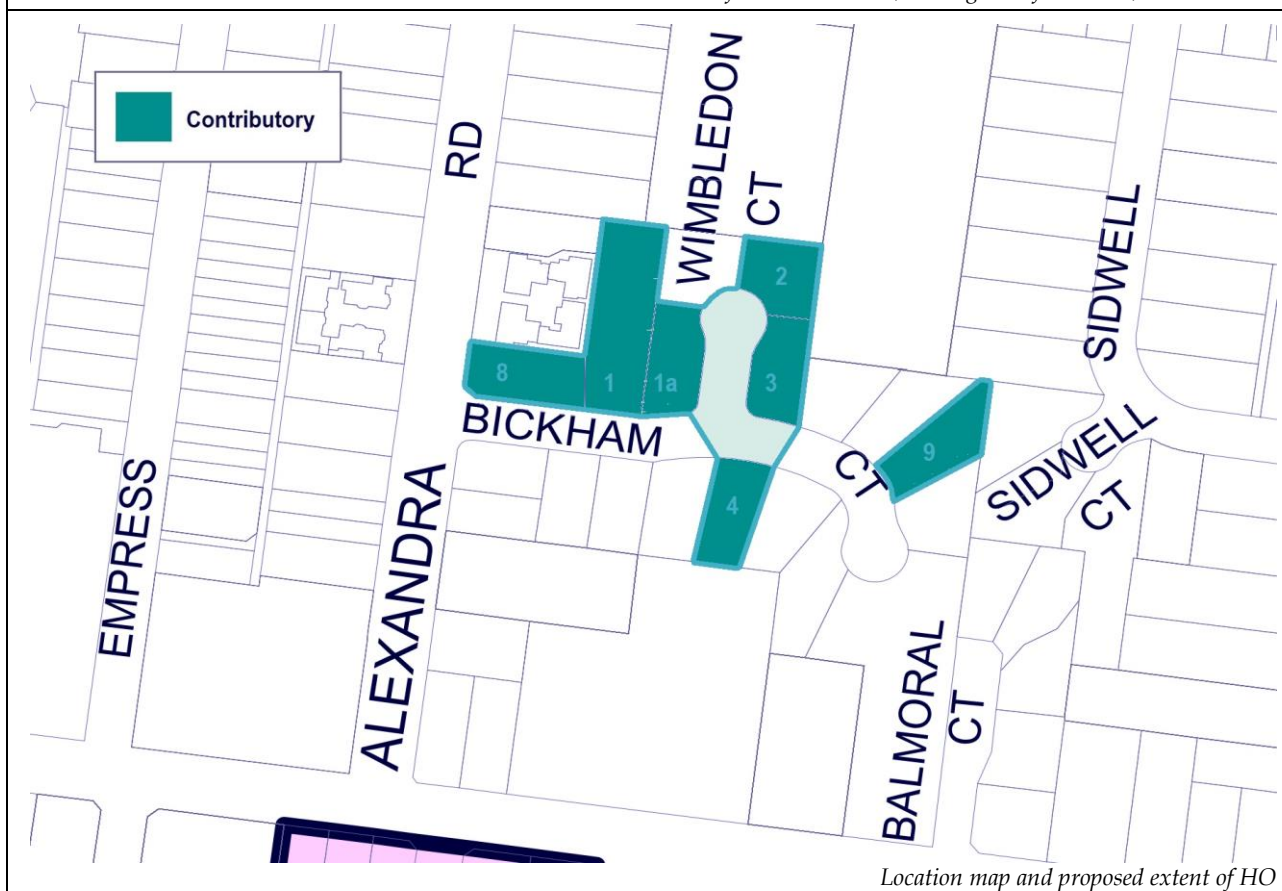


IDENTIFIER	WIMBLEDON ESTATE PRECINCT	Citation No	P02
Other name/s		Melway ref	58 H12
Address	Bickhams/Wimbledon Court ST KILDA EAST	Date/s	1960-1973



North side of Bickhams Court, looking west from No 3, 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 Wimbledon Estate Precinct comprises a group of post-WW2 houses in the cul-de-sacs of Bickhams Court and Wimbledon Court, and one adjacent block on Alexandra Street, built after the 1960 subdivision of what had been the Wimbledon Public Tennis Courts, established in 1923 by the eponymous Charles Bickham. With their stark rectilinear massing, flat roofs and large windows, the individual houses are all reflective of the prevailing modernist idiom of the time. Mostly completed during the 1960s (with a single slightly later example from 1972), the houses in the precinct were all designed for European émigré clients by architects of similar background.

The following houses (including any original garages, carports, front fences and hard landscaping where still extant) are deemed to be *contributory* elements in the precinct:

- Bickhams Court: Nos 1, 1a, 3, 4, 9
- Wimbledon Court: No 2
- Alexandra Street: Nos 1/8 and 2/8 (semi-detached pair on corner site)

How is it significant?

The Wimbledon Estate 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.
- Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or groups of persons, of importance in our history.

Why is it significant?

The Wimbledon Estate Precinct is significant as one of very few cul-de-sac residential subdivisions in the Caulfield area that were created and developed from scratch in the post-WW2 era. By the 1950s, most of the north-western part of the present-day City of Glen Eira was already densely settled, leaving only a few atypical pockets of land for further expansion. The Wimbledon Estate, laid out in 1960 on the site of public tennis courts operated by the Bickham family since 1923, thus provided one of the last opportunities for homebuilders to establish themselves on a new subdivision within a well-established suburb. Consequently, allotments were keenly sought-after and, without exception, would be developed by wealthy European émigré families to create a residential enclave that encapsulated Caulfield's post-WW2 migrant demographic. (*Criterion A*)

The Wimbledon Estate Precinct is significant as small but excellent collection of post-WW2 modernist houses. The earlier houses, erected between 1960 and 1967 and mostly designed by European-trained émigré architects, were all conceived in a consistent hard-edged modernist style, broadly characterised by bold rectilinear massing, flat roofs with broad eaves, and expansive windows. Within this dominant modernist idiom, most of the houses incorporated a degree of embellishment (such as feature walls of stone, slate or tile) that evoked the early '60s fad for applied ornament, famously dismissed by Robin Boyd as 'Featurism'. These contrast with the later house on the south side of Bickhams Court that, of monumental and expressionistic form, demonstrates a return to a purer and more unadorned approach. (*Criterion E*)

The Wimbledon Estate Precinct is significant for associations with a number of architects of Continental European background (including Holgar & Holgar, Robert Rosh, Erwin Kaldor and Harold Shafer) who, consequent to their strong personal and professional links to Caulfield's thriving post-WW2 Jewish émigré community, are known to have been notably active in this part of the present-day City of Glen Eira during the 1950s, '60s and '70s. (*Criterion H*)

History

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

Bickhams Court and Wimbledon Court were created in 1960 by the subdivision of land owned by the eponymous Charles Bickham, who had operated public tennis courts there for thirty-five years. Born in Fryerstown in Victoria's central goldfields region, Charles Albert Bickham (1880-1965) was a miner's son who initially followed that vocation but, by the time he married in 1912, embraced a different career as an engine driver. Towards the end of the decade, the entire Bickham family (Charles, his parents and two unmarried sisters) relocated to Melbourne and settled in Balaclava. Charles initially continued to work as engine driver but, following the early death of his wife in 1919, decided to embark upon a new venture as a proprietor of public tennis courts.

In early 1923, Bickham opened the L'Arona Public Courts in Tennyson Street, Elwood. An immediate success, it proved so popular that he promptly established a second set of courts off Alexandra Street in nearby St Kilda East. Known as the Wimbledon Public Courts, these opened in March 1923: a local newspaper reported that "the new courts are situated in good surroundings, and an up to date pavilion, fully equipped, is almost completed. The players may have the use of the courts at all times at moderate charges; refreshments will also be available" (*Prahran Telegraph*: 09/03/1923:2). Twelve months later, Bickham established a third venue, the Malvern Road Public Courts, near the corner of Malvern and Glenferrie Road, with an additional four tennis court that brought his total to twenty. By the end of the decade, during which time Charles' younger brother Harry established the Lynton Tennis Courts in Valley Parade, Glen Iris, the total had risen to 35. These four centres remained popular for many years, with the Wimbledon Public Courts often mentioned in the press as a venue for tennis parties, charity matches and open tournaments. Such was its success that, in 1933, the Bickham family (having previously lived beside their original Elwood courts), moved to St Kilda East to take up residence in a large Victorian villa at 34 Balaclava Road, abutting the south boundary of the Wimbledon Courts.

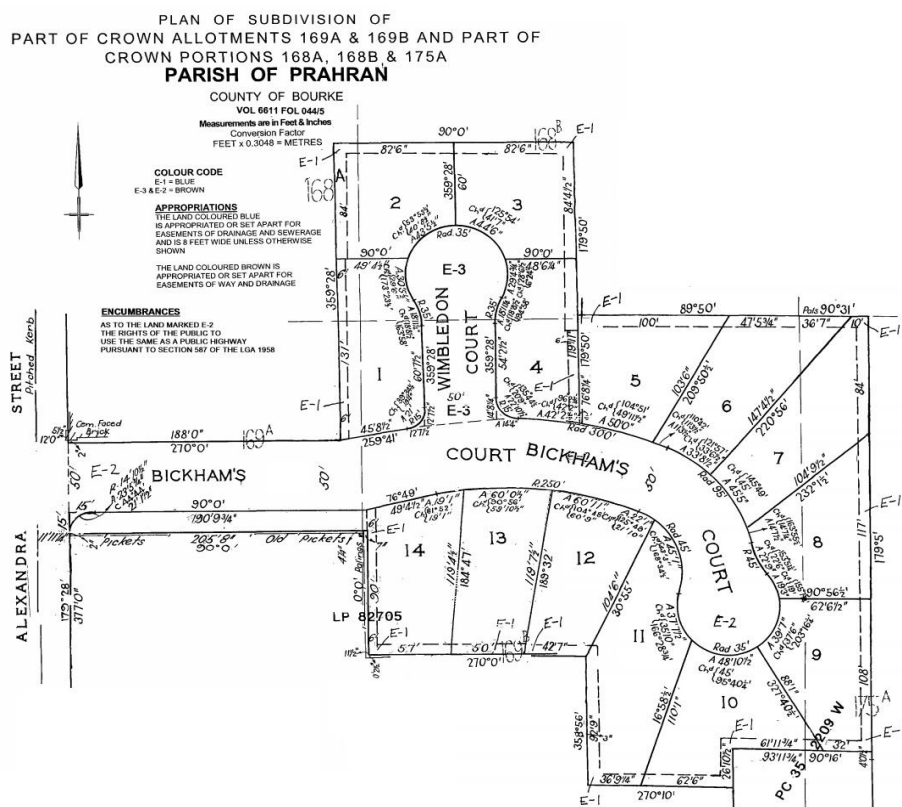


Figure 1: Lodged Plan No 51,982 (1960), showing original subdivision of the Wimbledon Estate

Source: www.landata.com.au

While the Bickham family's chain of suburban tennis court facilities were well patronised into the post-WW2 era, there was inevitable pressure as such expanses of undeveloped land become more valuable for other purposes. In the mid-1950s, the Lynton Tennis Courts in Glen Iris were sold to J A Tippet, who continued for just a few years before selling the land for residential development. In 1960, the Bickhams opted to follow suit and subdivide the Wimbledon Tennis Courts. The awkwardly T-shaped piece of land, with its narrow frontage to Alexandra Street, was duly carved up to create fourteen allotments with frontage to two new cul-de-sacs: Wimbledon Court (Lots 1-4) and Bickhams Court (Lots 5-14). The Bickham family's existing residence, at 34 Balaclava Road, was retained on a separate block, Lot 15.

The new subdivision, known as the *Wimbledon Estate*, was released for sale in March 1960, when the first "eight magnificent home sites" were offered for sale by auction (*Age*, 19/03/1960:45). All eight blocks were sold for prices between £5,000 and £5,900, realizing a grand total of £41,800; the reporter for the *Age* implying slight incredulity that such high prices would be generated by "eight irregular-shaped home sites without roads" (*Age*, 21/03/1960:11). The first residents of the new estates were a hosiery manufacturer and a builder, who respectively acquired Lots 1 and 4: the two choice corner blocks where Wimbledon Court and Bickhams Court intersected. The two men had much in common: of Polish origin, each had migrated to Australia in the late 1940s and, after humble beginnings, established successful business for themselves.

The hosiery manufacturer born in north-eastern Poland in the early 1930s (*Good Weekend*, 08/04/1989:55). When the region was taken over by the Soviets in 1939, his father was declared a capitalist and he and his mother were exiled to Siberia; he never saw his father again. Returning to Poland in 1945, he and his mother migrated to Australia four years later and settled in Carlton North, where he obtained work in a sock factory. When he and his mother commenced making stockings themselves, this formed the basis of what would become a phenomenally successful hosiery manufacture business.

During the 1950s, the hosiery manufacturer and his wife lived in Kew and later Glen Iris before buying a vacant block on the Wimbledon Estate at St Kilda East. To design their new house, the couple turned to Harry Ernest, a young Melbourne-born architect whom they probably knew through his Polish-born father, Aaron Ernest, proprietor of a well-known bakery in Carlton North. Harry, who graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1953 and promptly launched his own practice, acquired early fame for starkly modernist box-like house that he designed for his parents in Kew, which later appeared in Neil Clerehan's *Best Australian Houses* (1961). The house in Bickhams Court that Ernest designed for the hosiery manufacturer, for which working drawings are dated 8 September 1960, was very much in a similar vein: bold rectilinear massing with expansive full-height windows and a stone-clad feature wall.

The builder who became the other early resident of the *Wimbledon Estate* was Kalman Katz, who was born in the early 1920s in what is now Ukraine, but was residing in Prague at the time of his marriage in 1948. He and his new wife migrated promptly, arriving in Melbourne that October. Little is known of Katz's early activity as a builder, although he had worked with architects Ernest Fooks and Ben Alexander (both of European émigré background) by the time that he purchased land on the Wimbledon Estate in 1960. However, when it came to choosing someone to design his own house, he turned to Czech migrant Robert Rosh (1909-1982), who had been imprisoned in a labour camp during WW2 before migrating to Australia with his wife in 1947. Although qualified as an architect in Europe, Rosh was unable (or disinclined) to become registered as such in Victoria, but, from the early 1950s, fostered a thriving career as a building designer that included industrial, commercial and residential projects, invariably for clients who were fellow European émigrés. Rosh's drawings for the new Katz Residence in Bickhams Court, dated September 1961, proposed a large flat-roofed brick house in a lively Featurist mode, incorporating slate feature walls, an egg-crate pergola and vertical stripes to the boundary fence and garage door.

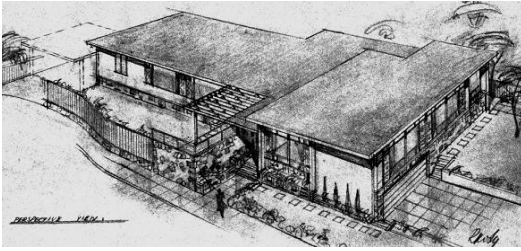


Figure 2: The house at
3 Bickhams Court (Robert Rosh, 1960)
Source: City of Glen Eira

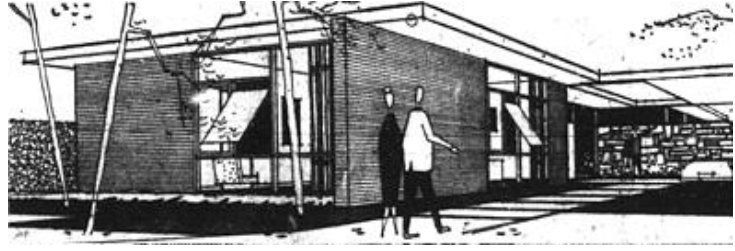


Figure 3: The house 9 Bickhams Court
(Harry Ernest, 1962)
Source: *Herald*, 5 July 1963

Such was the post-WW2 cultural milieu in East St Kilda East/Caulfield that the backgrounds of these two original Bickhams Court residents would resonate with those of the estate's subsequent residents. All of those who settled there over the next decade were European émigrés who migrated in the late 1940s, achieved success as self-made businessmen in the 1950s, and then engaged architects of similar background to design new houses on the Wimbledon Estate in the 1960s. After the aforementioned two families, the estate's next resident was a Polish-born clothing manufacturer who acquired Lot 7 (9 Bickhams Court). Born in Warsaw, he had migrated to Australia in 1949 and became involved in the booming Rag Trade. He and his wife resided in a block of flats in Glen Eira Road before electing to settle on the Wimbledon Estate, and, following the lead of their neighbour at No 1a, engaged Harry Ernest to design the new house. Ernest's drawings, dated January 1962, proposed a smaller but not less striking single-storey dwelling, in his trademark minimalist style.

Intriguingly, this wasn't the last time that the same architect would be commissioned by different residents on the *Wimbledon Estate*. In 1963, Hungarian-born architect Erwin Kaldor designed a house for Lot 8 (11 Bickhams Court) for a textile agent who migrated here in 1950 as a stateless refugee. The following year, Kaldor was retained by a Hungarian-born jeweller to design a house on Lot 3 (2 Wimbledon Court). The architectural firm of Holgar & Holgar, comprising Polish-born husband-and-wife John and Helen Holgar, was responsible for two houses on the Wimbledon Estate. The first of these, erected during 1963 on Lot 2 (1 Wimbledon Court), was commissioned by a Polish-born builder named Jack Berk. It was followed, three years later, by a house for a Polish-born manufacturer, built on a previously unsold allotment on Bickhams Court, west of the house that was erected in 1961 by the hosiery manufacturer. On completion, the newer house was designated as 1 Bickhams Court, prompting the neighbouring house, which originally had that address, to be renumbered as 1a.

The intervening years between the two Holgar & Holgar houses saw development of the prime block at the corner of Alexandra Street and Bickhams Court. This became occupied by a semi-detached pair of two-storey dwellings designed by Ermin Smrekar, an Italian-born emigre architect who had only recently commenced his own practice. Smrekar's drawings, dated May 1965, proposed two discrete but connected flat-roofed units that, while addressed to Alexandra Street (designated as Nos 1/8 and 2/8), had their principal frontages to Bickhams Court. Both were initially occupied by European émigré families.

Thus, by the end of the 1960s, all but one of the blocks on the north side of Bickhams Court (and all four in Wimbledon Court) had been developed. Aside from the fact that three architectural offices each designed two houses therein, at least two of the buildings are known to have been built by the same builder: another émigré, Polish-born Max Sachs (*ne* Makysimilian Sachs), who was then a frequent collaborator of Harry Ernest and later worked extensively with Sol Sapir.

Meanwhile, the seven blocks along the south side of Bickhams Court remained vacant. During 1972, an enthusiastic potential resident engaged yet another émigré architect, German-born Tom Jacobi to prepare plans for two different dwellings on adjacent Lot 12 (No 6) and Lot 13 (No 4). Neither of these, however, was built. The following year, the undeveloped Lot 13 was finally built upon by another émigré family, who engaged architect Harold Shafer (also of European descent) to design them a large house of unusual form. With a stark façade dominated by two squat cylindrical towers flanking a blank wall with painted symbol, the building would later be described in the daily press as the “space age” house (*Age* 04/06/1977:17).

The remaining undeveloped blocks on the southern half of the *Wimbledon Estate* would be built upon in the later 1970s and early 1980s. Ermin Smrekar, who designed the semi-detached dwellings at 8 Alexandra Street in 1965, returned to Bickhams Court a decade later to design a large residence on Lot 11 (No 8) for yet another émigré family. It was also during 1975 that the owner of the “space age house” at No 4, erected a smaller and much more conventional flat-roofed brick house on the adjacent site (2 Bickhams Court), while the hitherto unsold block on the south corner of Alexandra Street became the site for a small townhouse development by Polish-born architect Ben Alexander. One of the last additions to the cul-de-sac for many years was a house on Lot 12 (6 Bickhams Court), designed by architect John Saunders for the daughter and son-in-law of original resident Kalman Katz, still living across the road at No 3.

Aside from the Katzes, most of the other original residents of the *Wimbledon Estate* still lived there in the late 1980s, including those at 1 Bickhams Court, 1a Bickhams Court, 9 Bickhams Court, 11 Bickhams Court, 1 Wimbledon Court, 2 Wimbledon Court, and both families at 8 Alexandra Street. From the early 1990s, however, an increasing number of these houses would change ownership as original residents died or downsized. Kalman Katz, one of the first occupants of the *Wimbledon Estate*, fittingly became one of its last survivors: he remained at 3 Bickhams Court for nearly half a century until his death in 2008.

Since the 1990s, the streetscape of the cul-de-sac has been somewhat altered by the substantial alteration or enlargement of several houses, especially those at 2 Wimbledon Court and at 8 Bickhams Court, as well as the demolition of the house at 11 Bickhams Court. A new house now occupies the site.

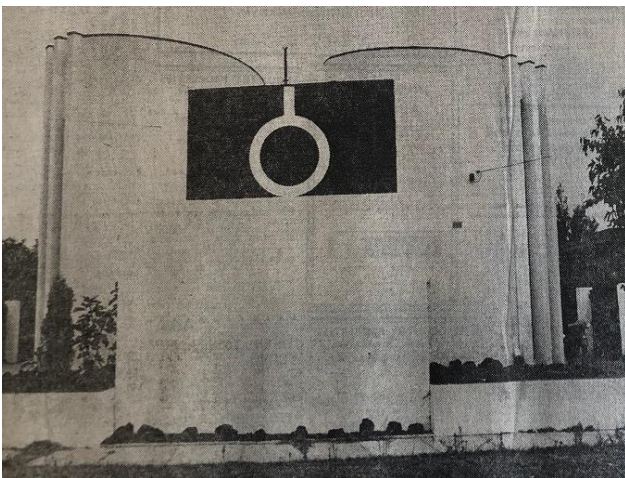


Figure 4: The house at
4 Bickhams Court (Harold Shafer, 1973)
Source: *Age*, 4 May 1977



Figure 5: The house at 11 Bickhams Court,
(Erwin Kaldor, 1963), photographed in 2006
Source: www.onthehouse.com.au

Historical summary of houses

<i>Address</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Designer</i>	<i>Builder</i>
8 Alexandra Street	1965	Ermin Smrekar	Unconfirmed
1 Bickhams Court	1967	Holgar & Holgar	Unconfirmed
1a Bickhams Court	1960	Harry Ernest	Max Sachs (attrib)
3 Bickhams Court	1961	Robert Rosh	Kalman Katz (attrib)
4 Bickhams Court	1973	Harold Shafer	Unconfirmed
9 Bickhams Court	1962	Harry Ernest	Max Sachs
2 Wimbledon Court	1964	Erwin Kaldor	Unconfirmed

These houses, originally also part of the cul-de-sac estate, have since been demolished

11 Bickhams Court	1963	Erwin Kaldor	Max Sachs
1 Wimbledon Court	1963	Holgar & Holgar	Jack Berk (attrib)

Description

The seven residential buildings included in the Wimbledon Estate Precinct, erected between 1961 and 1967 (plus a slightly later one from 1972), are unified not only by their close construction dates but also by a consistent Modernist expression typical of that period. With the exception of the duplex on the corner site (8 Alexandra Street), the houses are all detached single family residences. They vary in form: there are two single-storey houses on elongated plans (9 Bickhams Court; 2 Wimbledon Court), two split-level buildings with garages underneath (8 Alexandra Street; 3 Bickhams Court), one double-storey house with a projecting single-storey wing (1a Bickhams Court), and two fully double-storey houses (1a and 4 Bickhams Court).

The six houses from the 1960s, sited along the north side of Bickhams Court and into Wimbledon Court, are all expressed in a stark European Modernist vein. They exhibit bold rectilinear massing, comprising box-like volumes that interlock vertically and/or horizontally. Consequently, they have asymmetrical facades characterised by projecting and recessing planes that accommodate windows, front porches and (in the case of 1 Bickhams Court), a large balcony and double carport. All houses are of brick construction, with two rendered examples (1 and 1a Bickhams Court) and the others in bright orange-coloured face brickwork. Plain wall surfaces are often relieved by feature walls, variously of coursed or uncoursed stonework (1, 3, 9 Bickhams Court, 2 Wimbledon Court, 8 Alexandra Street) or textured mosaic tiling (2 Wimbledon Court). All of the houses have prominently-expressed flat roofs with broad eaves, most with timber lining boards, and expansive windows with multi-paned sashes, often in striking geometric patterns.



Figure 6: North side of Bickhams Court, looking west from No 1 (Holgar & Holgar, 1967)



Figure 7: East side of Wimbledon Court, looking north towards No 2 (Erwin Kaldor, 1964)



Figure 8: 8 Alexandra Street
(Ermin Smrekar, 1965)



Figure 9: 1a Bickhams Court
(Harry Ernest, 1960)



Figure 10: 3 Bickhams Court
(Robert Rosh, 1961)



Figure 11: 9 Bickhams Court
(Harry Ernest, 1962)



Figure 12: 2 Wimbledon Court
(Erwin Kaldor, 1964)



Figure 13: 4 Bickhams Court
(Harold Shafer, 1973)

Built relatively close to their street boundaries, the houses have compact front gardens. Most properties have small areas of lawn and garden beds; some have integrated planter boxes (3-5 Bickhams Court, 2 Wimbledon Court). Most properties have concrete driveways and paths, while some have terrazzo steps and terraces to front porches (8 Alexandra Street, 3 Bickhams Court, 2 Wimbledon Court). A few retain original dwarf walls along their property boundaries. The house at 3 Bickhams Court has an eye-catching vertically striped screen fence and a tall brick wall with tinted bottle-glass panels, enclosing a courtyard with an egg-crate pergola. This house also has a tennis court on the opposite site, occupying the other half of the double-width block.

Comparisons

While the City of Glen Eira (and particularly the former City of Caulfield) contains an unusually high proportion of fine architect-designed houses from the 1950s, '60s and '70s, these tend to be scattered across established streets in the suburbs of Caulfield, Caulfield North and Caulfield South. The *Wimbledon Estate*, by contrast, represents a more atypical phenomenon whereby the houses were associated with an entirely new subdivision created in the post-WW2 period.

The largest comparator identified to date is the *Matlock Estate* in Caulfield North. Subdivided in 1963, this comprised ten allotments around the curving cul-de-sac of Matlock Court, and three more on Dandenong Road. In much the same way as the *Wimbledon Estate*, sites sold quickly and soon developed with architect-designed residences in a progressive Modernist vein. In Matlock Court, those at Nos 3 (1963), 10 (1964) and 12 (1966) were designed respectively by Harry Ernest, Geoffrey Woodfall and Oscar Gimesy, while Ernest was also responsible for the corner house at 474 Dandenong Road (1964). Since the 1980s, the estate has undergone much redevelopment. Several original houses (including 474 Dandenong Road and 5 Matlock Court) have been razed, and those that remain have all been much altered (including rendering of the face brickwork to Nos 3, 10 and 12 Matlock Court). As such, it can no longer be considered as a potent evocation of post-WW2 residential modernism in the same way as the *Wimbledon Estate*.

Kier Court, off the east side of Kooyong Road in Caulfield North, also developed from the early 1960s. Half the size of Matlock Court, it comprises seven lots: five clustered around the cul-de-sac, and two more flanking the Kooyong Road junction. Its original building stock included two houses by Ernest Fooks, at Nos 1 (1961) and 3 (1963), and another by Harry Ernest on one of the corner sites at 117 Kooyong Road (1963). The streetscape has since been altered by the demolition of both houses fronting Kooyong Road, and also the one at 4 Kiers Court. The Fooks-designed house at No 1 has been altered by rendering and a second storey addition, leaving only the other Fooks house at No 3, a block of flats at No 5, and an elevated box-like house at No 5 (architect unconfirmed) as evidence of this 1960s cul-de-sac estate.

Rather more intact, albeit even smaller in scale, is Balmoral Court, off Balaclava Road in St Kilda East. Developed from 1960, this modest cul-de-sac estate (which abuts the east edge of Bickhams Court) comprises only five allotments, although each is occupied by a flat-roofed brick modernist house. These include one confirmed to have been designed by Kurt Popper (No 4, 1961) and another by Harry Ernest (No 2, 1963). While the four houses fronting Balmoral Court appear to remain substantially intact, the corner house (36 Balaclava Road) has been much altered with a hip-roofed second-storey addition.

References

Harry Ernest & Associates, "Two-storey brick residence for [redacted] at Lot 1, Wimbledon Court", working drawings, dated 8 September 1960. City of Caulfield Permit No 25,977.

Lodged Plan No 51,982, dated 19 September 1960.

R Rosh & Associates, "Brick residence & garage at Lot 4, Bickhams Court & Wimbledon Court, Caulfield, for Mr & Mrs [redacted]", working drawings, undated [c1961]. City of Caulfield Permit No 27,344.

Harry Ernest & Associates, "Brick residence for [redacted] at Lot 7, Bickhams Court, East St Kilda", working drawings dated 30 January 1962.

"Planned to suit an irregular block", *Herald*, 5 July 1963, p 22.

E Kaldor, "Proposed new brick residence at Lot No 8 Bickhams Court, Caulfield, for [redacted] working drawings, dated January 1964. City of Caulfield Permit No 30,666.

E Smrekar, "Two residential units at corner Alexandra Avenue and Bickhams Court, Caulfield", working drawings, dated May 1965. City of Caulfield Permit No 32,594.

"Designed for an odd-shaped block", *Herald*, 19 September 1965, p 28.

Holgar & Holgar, "proposed residence at Lot No 2 Bickhams Court, Caulfield, for [redacted] working drawings, not dated [c1967]. City of Caulfield Permit No 35,313.

"Harold D Shafer, "Brick residence for [redacted] at [Lot] 13 Bickhams Court, St Kilda", working drawings, dated April 1973. City of Caulfield Permit No 43,345.

"Space age house at St Kilda", *Age*, 4 June 1977, p 17.

"A grand tribute to tennis", *Age*, 14 April 1993, p 7 (property supplement)

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