Place name:	Brooke Residence (former)
Address:	1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore
Place typology:	Residential
Construction date range:	1946-48
Architectural style:	Post-War Modernist
Assessment:	Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022
Recommendation:	To be included in the schedule to the heritage overlay

Photos of place:



1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore. Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, is a single-storey, gable-roofed early post-war modernist cream brick house. It was erected in 1946-48 for Victor and Olga Brooke, to a design by architect and town planner Dr Ernest Fooks.

The significant features of the house include:

- The asymmetrical and unusually elongated triple-fronted street façade
- The front terrace, with curved form and metal railings
- The steel-framed windows that return at the corners
- The vertical rows of projecting pipes
- The low planter boxes along the street frontage
- The low brick fence, recently remodelled but using the same materials.

How is it significant?

1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, is of local architectural and associative significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, is significant as a fine and substantially intact example of an architect-designed modernist house of the mid-1940s. Designed and built at a time when wartime restrictions on private homebuilding were still enforced, with shortages of labour and materials, the house evokes an uncommonly high degree of architectural sophistication, combining the traditional tile-clad gabled roofline and face brickwork of the pre-war era with more progressive features such as the uncommonly elongated and tripartite street façade with large window bays (returning at the corners), low planter box and a partially curved sun terrace with low metal railing. (Criterion E).

1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, is significant as one of the first houses (and perhaps even the first house) to be designed in Melbourne by Dr Ernest Fooks, the eminent Czech-born and Austrian-trained modernist architect and town planner, who migrated to Australia in 1939 and worked for the Housing Commission of Victoria before commencing private practice in 1946. Although the Brooke Residence has previously been dated as 1950 (apparently based on its belated publication in the *Australian Home Beautiful* in 1951), the earliest working drawings are dated August 1946, confirming it as one of the architects' earliest private commissions. Predated only by a minor residential alteration that Fooks completed in Kew in 1941, while still working for the housing commission, the Brooke Residence retains important associations with the emerging career of this important post-war architect. (Criterion H)

Description:

The former Brooke Residence at 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore is a single-storey cream brick house with gabled roof clad in glazed terracotta tiles. Its elongated street frontage is dominated by a single longitudinal gable with two smaller gabled wings projecting to the north and the east, forming a stepping triple-fronted façade. The centrally-placed front entry, set into a recessed alcove, has a solid front door with sidelight and highlight windows, flanked by wall-mounted metal light-fittings of tall half-cylindrical form. The entry opens off a concrete paved terrace that extends along the entire right side of the facade, enclosed by a low brick wall with simple white-painted metal railing. At the far left end of the terrace, a matching brick planter box extends along the side of the projecting wing and then returns along the front.

The street facade has two expansive bays of steel-framed windows with fixed and casement sashes, highlights, and prominently splayed brick sills. One window bay extends the entire width of the projecting front wing, retuning at both corners, while the other extends along the terrace, returning at the far corner and incorporating a glazed door. The gable end of the front bay, and the wall to the left side of the front door, are both enlivened by vents in the form of vertical rows of projecting white-painted concrete pipes.

The street boundary is marked by a dwarf wall in matching cream brick, with brick-on-edge capping and piers delineating two entrances to a concrete-paved return driveway. The return driveway was created in the 2010s, necessitating the widening of the original driveway entry at the south end of the street frontage, and the narrower pedestrian gateway at the opposite end. Three of the four original brick piers were rebuilt in virtually identical form, with one of them re-using the glazed terracotta letterbox and newspaper pipe. The mild steel gates were also removed at that time.

History:

Contextual History

City of Moonee Valley occupies part of the Traditional lands of the Wurundjeri-willam clan of the Woi-wurrung people. Many sites in the area now known as City of Moonee Valley show evidence of Woi-wurrung activities and spiritual connections. Fish were trapped in the rivers and creeks, stone was quarried from the river edges, murnong daisy was collected and kangaroos hunted across grassland areas, and bark was harvested from trees in the river valleys. This relationship between the Woi-wurrung and the land, water, animals and plants, continues to this day (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.29).

The first Europeans to explore the area known as Moonee Valley was a surveyor, Charles Grimes in 1803. In 1836, settlers moving from Van Diemen's Land crossed the area in the hope of finding empty, cheap and plentiful land for sheep. By 1842, surveyors had created the first map of the Parish of Doutta Galla and then Woi-wurrung lands were offered for sale by the British Crown to Europeans (noting that the land was never ceded). The Wurundjeri were moved off their land which had a profound impact on their culture, health and language. By 1860, the entire parish was sold (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.32-33).

Early development of the area began with the goldrush period of the 1850s which saw Mount Alexander Road used as a thoroughfare to the diggings with over 30,000 people estimated as moving along the dirt road each week. Businesses and shops sprang up providing sustenance, transport and accommodation to service the passing gold rush trade. Some very early wayside hotels and shops still survive from this period (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p. 51-54). After the heady days of the goldrush, the 1860s saw Essendon, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Flemington develop into permanent townships. The development of railways by private companies gave huge impetus to suburban development of the area with the opening of the Essendon railway in 1860. The government purchased the line in 1868. Suburban trains terminated at Essendon and it wasn't until 1889 that Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Newmarket stations were completed. By 1893 stations opened at Strathmore and Pascoe Vale and in 1922 Glenbervie Station opened. The railways provided an enormous boost to residential development along the line and those who had previously moved to areas without trains, now clamoured for them (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.59).

By the 1880s Essendon had become a Borough and by 1891 had a population of 14,411. Many subdivisions occurred during the land boom of the 1880s and many failed to eventuate due to the depression of the 1890s. In the interwar period a boom in subdivision and residential infill occurred in Travancore, Essendon, Ascot Vale, Strathmore and Moonee Ponds, which was focused on new transport routes along the tram lines, first established to Essendon in 1905. In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed and lines were extended and improved. The tram lines saw development occur either side of Maribyrnong Road, further along Mt Alexander Road, Buckley Street and Keilor Road (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.65-68, p.115).

Education was an important consideration in the development of the municipality, with schools having been established in Essendon and Flemington in the 1850s. The development of State schools in the area reflects the major phases of education and includes a number of 'firsts'; the first non-denominational school in Victoria was set up in Essendon in 1850, the first purpose-built infants school in the state was set up in 1902, and Essendon High School was the first purpose-built high school in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Denominational schools were also set up in the area in the early 1850s, with more private schools established during the boom period of the 1880s. Residents wanted a better life than the one most had left behind in Britain, including a good education for their children (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.157-161).

In the three decades after the Second World War, Melbourne's suburbs ballooned outward to cater for post-war migration, the baby boom, an increasing need for new housing, and a more car-centred economy. Areas to the north of

Essendon had been open paddocks in 1945, but by 1950 the Shire of Keilor found themselves with a developing suburb with no name. It was later called Niddrie. Similarly, Airport West was developing quickly with houses being built before the roads. By 1964 it was claimed that Airport West had the cheapest cream brick veneers in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.120-121). Many houses in these post-war areas were austere weatherboard or brick veneer bungalows, with a few scattered architect-designed or project homes on new blocks, particularly along the Boulevard in Aberfeldie. These post-war housing areas were car-centred communities located close to industry along Keilor Road, Matthews Avenue around Essendon Airport and East Keilor. By 1960 Airport West had its first hotel, the famous Skyways Hotel and then in the 1970s the first shopping centre, owned by Westfield, was begun (heritage ALLIANCE, G*ap Heritage Study*, 2005: p.28-30).

Post-war housing pressure also saw a huge investment by the Housing Commission of Victoria who developed 150 bungalows in concrete, weatherboard and brick in Aberfeldie. They then began an ambitious estate of houses and flats on a 77 acre site at Ascot Vale in 1949. These low-rise walk-up flats eventually gave rise to the high-rise flats of Flemington which opened in June 1965 (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.123).

Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the Moonee Valley community which today is one of the most diverse and vibrant in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.124).

Place history

The house at 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, was erected in 1946-48 for Victor and Olga Brooke, to a design by architect and town planner Dr Ernest Fooks.

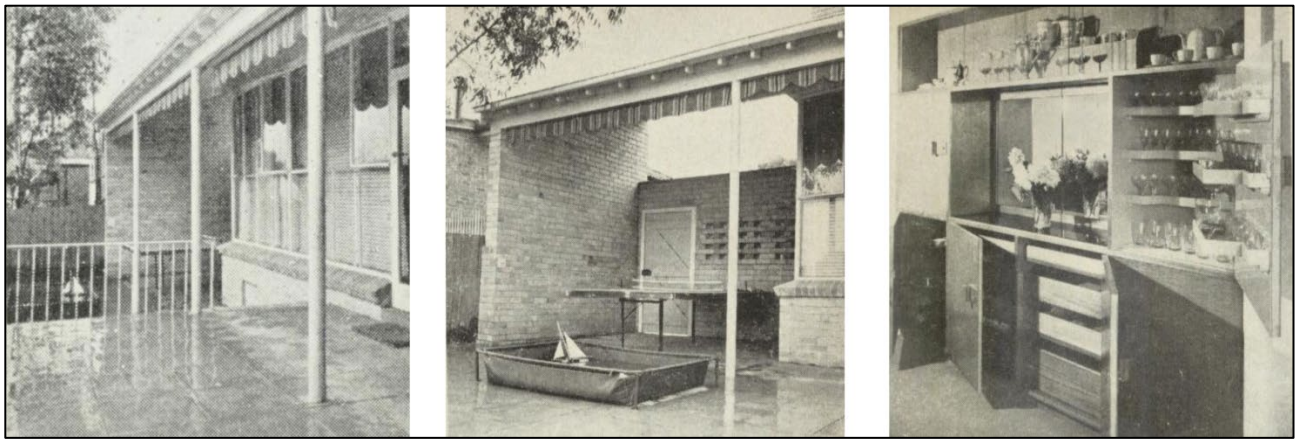
Of Polish ancestry, Victor Brooke (1907-1989) was born in New York but had settled in Melbourne by the late 1930s (*Sydney Jewish News* 20 October 1939, p.7). By 1942, Brooke had started business as a ladies' draper, operating from 101 Puckle Street, Moonee Ponds. In February of that year, he married Viennese-born Olga Mayer (1916-2017), who had migrated with her family three years earlier (*Australian Jewish News*, 22 January 1942, p.8). While Brooke continued to maintain his business in Moonee Ponds, he and Olga lived in St Kilda, where her parents had settled. During the Second World War, Brooke briefly served with the RAAF, attached to the No 1 Stores Depot. Resuming civilian life as a draper, Brooke relocated his retail outlet to larger premises at 114 Puckle Street. During this period, he and his wife continued to live in St Kilda. They were still there when both became naturalised citizens in June 1946, but soon relocated to Essendon North, moving into a modest clinker-brick villa at 30 Greville Street. The couple acquired vacant land in Noble Avenue, Strathmore, on which they intended to erect a new residence for themselves. To design it, they turned to Dr Ernest Fooks, a Czech-born and Austrian-trained migrant architect who had only recently commenced his private practice.

Dr Ernest Fooks (*ne* Fuchs; 1905-1986) was born in Bratislava but his family soon moved to nearby Vienna, where he studied architecture at the *Technische Hochschule* and then completed a doctorate in town planning. After further professional experience (including a reputed stint with renowned architrect Le Corbusier), he commenced private practice in Vienna in 1932. Migrating to Australia via Canada (where he married his wife Noemi), Fuchs arrived in Melbourne in 1939 and, on the strength of his town planning credentials, secured a position with the Housing Commission of Victoria. In 1946, Fooks left to open his own office. From the onset, Fooks principally drew his clientele from Melbourne's thriving post-war European émigré community, and this would become an enduring and significant association for the remainder of his career. He not only designed numerous houses for Continental compatriots, but also retail fitouts, factories and a number of major projects for the Jewish community including schools, kindergarten and synagogues.

The house that Ernest Fooks designed for Victor and Olga Brooke is comprehensively documented by drawings and other material in the Fooks Collection now held by the RMIT Design Archives. The earliest set of working drawings, dated August 1946, depict a large single-storey gable-roofed brick dwelling on stepped triple-fronted plan, with three bedrooms, a living room opening onto a rear terrace, a compact service core (with kitchen, bathroom and "nook") and a detached "future garage" to the rear. A revised drawing, dated October 1946, show little change aside from the omission of the garage, but a later amendment, dated 12 December, involved re-instatement of the garage and re-configuration of

the house plan, merging the two rear bedrooms and living space to form two larger areas, designated as a bedroom and "bed-living room", with a wide opening between. Typically for the late 1940s, when wartime restrictions on labour and materials were applied (and would not be fully rescinded until the early 1950s), further progress was delayed. A building contract was not signed until 28 August 1947. Subsequent documentation included a set of elevations (dated September 1947) and sheets of details (dated October/November 1947) for fireplace, kitchen cupboards and built-in timber furniture including a liquor cabinet with mirrored sliding doors and black glass counter. One of the last drawings prepared for the original house, dated June 1948, documented ornate wrought-iron railing to the terrace and matching front gates.

The house was completed by 1949, when a handwritten note to that year's electoral roll recorded that Victor and Olga Brooke had relocated from 30 Greville Street, Essendon North, to 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore.



Contemporary photographs of the house, including two exterior rear views, and the built-in liquor cabinet (far right)
Source: Australian Home Beautiful, May 1951.

In May 1951, the Brookes' house was profiled in the *Australian Home Beautiful*. Particular attention was drawn to its "courageous" interior colour scheme, which included apricot-coloured ceilings and walls of grey-blue, peach and "a delicate green called absinthe". The exterior was "of pale buff brick, highlighted quietly and effectively by slender round iron pillars and railings in white and daffodil yellow, by a bigger patch of daffodil in a painted wooden door, and by high white lattice fences on the western elevation. Behind the lattice, out of sight of the yellow door, are two garage doors of azure blue". Later that year, the Brookes returned to Fooks to design a small extension at the north end of the house. Designated as a "den", this elongated narrow room was to contain built-in furniture including a fold-down bed and storage for LP records. Six years later, Victor Brooke turned to Fooks once again, this time for alterations to his drapery shop at 114 Puckle Street, Moonee Ponds. Brooke, who carried on drapery business into the 1970s, remained living in Noble Avenue with his wife Olga and their only child, daughter Libby, until the later 1970s, when the family relocated to Caulfield North.

In 1992, the house was enlarged with an elongated two-storey wing projecting from the kitchen, containing four small bedrooms, a bathroom and a storeroom, as well as a new carport added to the rear of the existing garage. In the 2010s, the original brick wall along the street boundary was slightly altered, with the two existing openings widened (and the mild steel gates removed) to provide improved vehicular access for a new return driveway.

Sources:

Primary Sources

Ernest Fooks, "Brick residence for Mr and Mrs V Brooke at Noble Avenue, Strathmore", working drawings datedAugust 1946 to June 1948. Fooks Collection (Accession No 0018.2011), RMIT Design Archives, Melbourne.
Ernest Fooks, "Brick veneer addition to residence, V Brooke, esq, 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore", working drawings datedAugust 1951. Fooks Collection (Accession No 0018.2011), RMIT Design Archives, Melbourne.
Joan Leyster, "Colour to a plan", *Australian Home Beautiful,* May 1951, pp.36-37, 39.
Ubaldo Comley, "Proposed addition and renovation at No 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, for Mr & Mrs Shenoy", working drawings, dated March 1992. City of Moonee Valley.

Secondary Sources

Harriet Edquist, *Ernest Fooks: Architect* (Melbourne: RMIT, 2001).

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

6. Building towns, cities and the garden state

6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Comparative Analysis:

The following are some early modernist houses in the City of Moonee Valley from 1946 to 1953, which are either confirmed or strongly suspected to have been architect-designed:

- Brooke Residence, 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore (Ernest Fooks, 1946-48) – *included in this study*
- Harrison Residence, 16 Nairn Avenue, Ascot Vale (designer unknown, 1947) – *included in this study*
- Residence, Langs Road, Ascot Vale (Plaisted, Warner & Brendel, 1947) – *unlocated; presumed demolished*
- Stuckey Residence, 40 Carnarvon Road, Strathmore (Bain-Jackson & Associates, 1947) – *demolished*
- Harrison Residence, 142 The Boulevard, Aberfeldie (designer unknown, 1952-53) – *identified in previous study*
- Residence, 5 Langs Road, Ascot Vale (Walter Mason, 1953) – *demolished*
- Residence, 15 Valencia Street, Essendon West (McPherson, Longmore & Associates,1953) – *extant; no HO*

It is noted that none of these examples is currently protected by the heritage overlay (HO).

Consequent to the impact of the Second World War, and specifically the government restrictions imposed on private construction (which were not lifted until the early 1950s) coupled with shortages of building materials and labour, there are few pertinent comparators of architect-designed houses from the late 1940s. Of the four examples listed above, those at Langs Road (apparently demolished) and Nairn Avenue (still standing) were relatively simple brick dwellings with triple-fronted facades and curved corners that hark back to the Streamlined Moderne idiom of the later 1930s. The former had a conventional hipped roof while the latter was, unusually for the time, has a flat roof with projecting eaves. The house in Carnarvon Road (demolished), with its elongated stepped plan, recessed entry porch and low gabled roof with integrated pergolas, was rather more progressive in style, comparable to the ground-breaking work being done at the time by Robin Boyd and others. This would only become more widespread from the early 1950s, typified by the example on The Boulevard, with its C-shaped plan, skillion roof, tall windows, egg-crate pergola and slate feature walls. The two other early 1950s houses listed above, at 5 Langs Road (demolished) and 15 Valencia Street (extant) are both more comparable to the subject building in their semi-traditional expression, combining a conventional gabled roofline with more progressive features such as large windows, integrated sun terraces and open planning. The demolished example at Langs Road, with its triple-fronted facade, cream brickwork and recessed sun terrace with glazed gallery, is particularly evocative of subject buildings, which pre-dates it by at least three years.

Other local examples of the work of Dr Ernest Fooks

While notably prolific in Melbourne's inner south-eastern suburbs, Ernest Fooks undertook relatively few projects within what is now the City of Moonee Valley, of which some were minor (eg alterations to Victor Brooke's shop in Puckle Street) and others have not yet been conclusively identified (eg a house in Glenbervie from 1978).

Considered more broadly as a 1940s house designed by a European-trained migrant architect, the Brooke Residence is rare at the local level. In this regard, its only local comparator to date is the former Halik Residence at 81-83 Mooltan Street, Travancore, designed in 1941 by Hungarian-born Lazslo Guttman (1902-1967), who arrived in Melbourne in 1939 and designed this house for a fellow émigré while employed in the office of Stephenson & Turner. This important house, which was an elevated flat-roofed rendered building with stone feature wall and porthole window, has since been considerably altered. It is not individually listed, but is as a contributory building within heritage precinct HO23.

Goddard Residence, 49 Clydebank Road, Essendon (1957) By the mid-1950s, Fooks had fully embraced a sophisticated modernist style characterised by bold rectilinear massing, low-pitched roofs, large windows and sun terraces. This example in Essendon, however, is rather more conservative in mode, harking back to the architect's earliest work of the late 1940s. Belying its date, it recalls the subject building in its cream brickwork, gabled roofline and tripartite façade with central recessed entry porch, albeit in a less refined manner.	 *Source: Google StreetView, October 2018*
Block of villa units 24 Leslie Road, Essendon (circa 1969) This block of six units is included in the catalogue of Fooks projects in Harriet Edquist's slender monograph. They date from the late phase of the architect's career, when he began to more frequently embrace speculative projects that perhaps offered less opportunity for architectural expression. With their orange brickwork, tile-clad hipped roofs and conventional form and fenestration, the dwellings are of little architectural interest in their own right, and cannot be considered as an especially notable example of Fooks' work.	 *Source: Google StreetView, January 2021*

Recommendation:

That the whole of 1 Noble Avenue, Strathmore, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Solar Energy Controls	Yes
Fences and Outbuildings	Yes (brick fence)
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No