
Place name:	White Residence (former)
Address:	5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds
Place typology:	Residential
Construction date range:	1923
Architectural style:	Inter-War Chicagoesque
Assessment:	Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022
Recommendation:	To be included in the schedule to the heritage overlay

Photos of place:



5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds. Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, is a single-storey gabled-roofed timber house in the Prairie School style associated with the office of Walter Burley Griffin. It was erected in 1923 for Frederick and Daisy White, to a design by architect Henry Pynor, then a member of Griffin's office.

The significant features of the house include:

- The modular planning generated by a 2'8" (1.1 metre) square module
- The half-timbered elevational expression, with infill of roughcast render and stained weatherboarding
- The broad gabled roofline with distinctive raked eaves and slatted lining
- The tripartite gable vent

How is it significant?

5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, is of local architectural and associative significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, is significant as an excellent and intact example of a pre-war house in the Prairie School style mostly associated with the work of Walter Burley Griffin and his circle. Designed by an architect who was working in the Griffin office at the time, the house is strongly evocative of the Griffins' style in its modular planning, broad gabled roof with characteristic raked eaves, and carefully-composed half-timbered elevational treatment with alternating infill of roughcast render and stained weatherboarding and corner windows with casement sashes. Pre-war houses in this highly distinctive style, whether designed by Griffin or his staff, are relatively uncommon across the metropolitan area and this stands as a unique example in the City of Moonee Valley. (Criterion B & E)

The house is also significant for associations with Henry Pynor, a highly regarded member of the Griffin office whose family had a long association with Moonee Ponds. His father Samuel Pynor, also an architect, was professionally active in the study area for many years and was well-known also as a local councillor and one-time mayor. This house, which is one of Pynor's few recorded independent architectural commissions (and his only known commission in the City of Moonee Valley) has an additional layer of associative resonance in that it was commissioned by his half-sister, Daisy White, whose family would occupy the house for more than forty years. (Criterion H)

Description:

The house at 5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, is a single-storey timber and roughcast rendered dwelling with a pitched roof clad in terracotta tiles. The house is designed in the distinctive Prairie School style that, in Australia, is mostly associated with Walter Burley Griffin, his wife Marion, and various local architects who were employed in their private practice. Wholly characteristic of that idiom, the house has a broad gabled roofline with raked eaves and timber slat lining, and external walls that combines areas of dark-stained weatherboard cladding contrasted with a roughcast finish in carefully defined panels.

The street facade, which is balanced but not precisely symmetrical, is dominated by a central bay of three roughcast panels that rise to the gable end (the central one with a distinctive stepped vent at the apex) and two smaller roughcast spandrels at the outer edges. Below, two horizontal timber members extend across the facade, defining the window lintel and sill lines. Fenestration is asymmetrical but otherwise responds to the vertical delineation of the facade, with small casement sashes at each end, another casement sash below the first of the three central bays, a doorway aligning with the third bay, and a wide picture window alongside.

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 Dousta 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, *Gap 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).

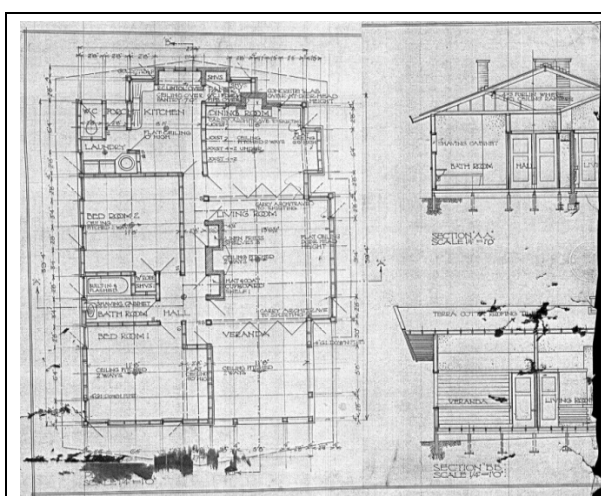
Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the 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

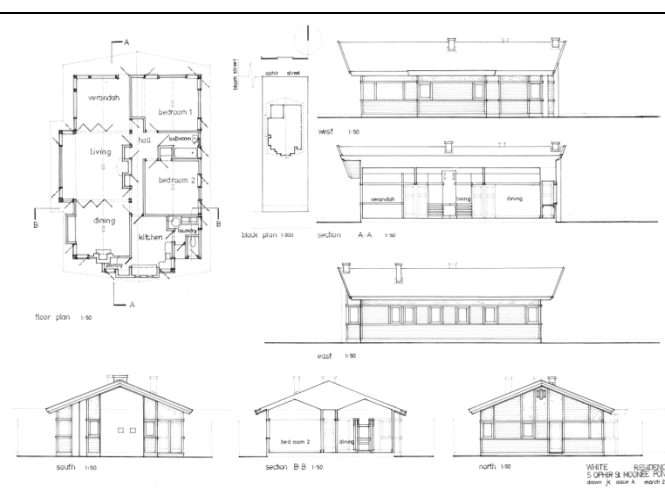
The house at 5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, was erected in 1923 for Frederick and Daisy White, to a design by architect Henry Pynor.

The son of a railway guard, Frederick William White (1890-1973) was born in Richmond but grew up in Flemington and Kensington, where he worked as a coach trimmer (later, a motor trimmer). In December 1916, he married Daisy Gertrude Pynor (1890-1963), the fourth of seven children of the thrice-married Samuel Pynor (1863-1942), a leading Moonee Ponds architect who was also locally prominent as a Councillor and one-time Mayor of Essendon. After they married, Frederick and Daisy White initially resided in Salisbury Street, Moonee Ponds. In March 1921, the couple became parents to twin sons, Kenneth and Lindsay. Their growing family may have hastened the desire to build a new family home, for which Frederick acquired vacant land in Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, in November 1922 (Certificate of Title, 4679/583).

To design their new house, the Whites turned not to Daisy's architect father, Samuel, but instead to her much younger half-brother, Henry Pynor (1901-1946), who had followed in the same profession. The younger Pynor studied at the University of Melbourne and, upon completing his Diploma of Architecture in 1920, entered the Melbourne office of Walter & Marion Griffin. One of several young local architects to join the couple's private practice at that time, Pynor soon rose to become what Walter himself later described as "our right hand man". After stints in the Griffin offices in both Melbourne and Sydney, Pynor headed overseas in June 1924. He spent two years in the USA, during which time he met up with the Griffins on their own visit to Chicago, and was engaged to supervise construction of a house in Louisiana that they had designed two decades earlier. Pynor then travelled to Europe, spending time in London and the Continent more broadly, before returning to Sydney in 1928, where he worked for several firms. After further overseas travel (including a much-reported stint in Russia), he returned to Australia in 1935 and announced his intent to start private practice in his native Melbourne. Instead, he remained in Sydney and became a partner in the firm of Herbert, Wilson & Pynor. Following wartime service in the US Army Corps of Engineer, Pynor accepted a senior teaching position at Sydney Technical College before his sudden death in June 1946, aged only 45 years.



Excerpt of original working drawings, circa 1923
Source: Courtesy John Kenny



Measured drawing by John Kenny, 2011
Source: Courtesy John Kenny

In private practice in Australia, the Griffins maintained the unusual regime of allowing staff to work on their own private commissions during office time, provided that profits were shared equally amongst everyone. This allowed employees such as Pynor (and young colleagues such as Edward Billson, Eric Nicholls and Fred Ballantyne) to complete projects under their own names while working for the Griffins. It was in this capacity that Pynor was commissioned by his half-sister and her husband to design their new house in Moonee Ponds (at the same time, Pynor also designed a house at St Kilda for his half-brother, Archibald). Working drawings for the Ophir Street house depict a gabled timber dwelling on a compact modular plan, with two bedrooms and a large semi-enclosed verandah or sunroom to the street. The Whites would reside there for over forty years. After Daisy's death in 1963, her husband Frederick continued to live there for a few more years before selling the property and moving in with his son, Kenneth, whose family occupied a large Victorian villa in nearby Athol Street. The new owners of the Ophir Street house were bank officer George Williams and his wife Jannys, who lived there for many years. In 1973, they added a detached timber-framed shed to the rear.

It was also during the 1970s that the small but distinctive house in Ophir Street became known to Melbourne's emerging band of Griffin scholars, although, at that time, its designer remained tantalisingly unconfirmed. In Donald Leslie Johnson's 1977 monograph, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin*, an appendix of the architect's known works was followed by a brief discussion of other local buildings in the Prairie School idiom. The house in Ophir Street was included, with Johnson speculating that it may have been designed by Roy Lippincott (Griffin's brother-in-law, who was attached to the Melbourne office from 1913 to 1921) or Henry Pynor. A copy of the original working drawings was subsequently located by architect and Griffin scholar John Kenny, albeit in a damaged state with the all-important title block missing. The Pynor attribution was finally confirmed in 2011 by Simon Reeves, who established the crucial link that the house was in fact commissioned by Pynor's half-sister.

Sources:

Primary Sources

Certificate of Title, Volume 4679. Folio 583, created November 2022. <www.landata.vic.gov.au>

Secondary Sources

Donald Leslie Johnson, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1977).
 Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "Henry Pynor", *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, <www.builtheritage.com.au>
 Emails from John Kenny, April 2011 and March 2022.

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

- 6.0 Building towns, cities and the garden state
- 6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Comparative Analysis:

The following is a select list of inter-war bungalows in the City of Moonee Valley that date from the early 1920s:

- Residence (*Dinzulu*), 11 Ardmillan Road, Moonee Ponds (1920-21) – *individually listed as HO4514*
- Residence (*Les Colannes*), 2 Aberdeen Crescent, Essendon (1922-23) – *individually listed as HO479*
- Residence (*Kelvin*), 16 Ballater Street, Essendon (1923) – *individually listed as HO482*
- Residence, 25 Ballater Street, Essendon (1923-24) – *individually listed as HO484*
- Residence (*Creeand*), 89 Holmes Road, Moonee Ponds (1924) – *individually listed as HO518*

These houses are all representative of the prevailing bungalow style of the period, exhibiting such typical characteristics as bay windows, bracketed eaves, shingled cladding and projecting porches. They have little in common with the

distinctive Prairie School style of the Griffins and their circle, aside from the broad transverse gabled rooflines in some examples, and the occasional use of half-timbering, eaves brackets and squat masonry piers (albeit in a different way in which the Griffins tended to use such motifs). Ultimately, the house at 5 Ophir Street can only be pertinently compared with other examples of work that is evocative, to a greater or lesser degree, of the Prairie School.

Other local examples of the pre-war Prairie School style

The Griffins themselves are known to have undertaken only a few projects in what is now the City of Moonee Valley. None of these, in any case, was an individual dwelling that might be a useful comparator.

- Knitlock demonstration display, RAS Showground, Ascot Vale (1922) – *temporary structure; dismantled*
- Ascot Theatre, 199-201 Union Road, Ascot Vale (1923) – *project only; not built to the Griffins' design*
- *Milleara Estate*, off Milleara Road, Keilor East (1927-28) – *residential subdivision only*
- *Station Estate*, off Milleara Road, Keilor East (1928) – *residential subdivision only*

Henry Pynor is not known to have designed any other buildings in what is now the City of Moonee Valley. His only other known private commission in Melbourne, namely the contemporaneous house designed for his half-brother Archibald at 38 Marine Parade, St Kilda, has long since been demolished and no images have been located. Several other members of Pynor's family are known to have resided in Moonee Ponds and environs. A search of directory listings indicates that some of them changed residential address in the early 1920s, although it has not been possible to verify if they moved into houses that he designed for them. Pynor's younger sister Elsie (Mrs John Curlett) briefly resided at 34 Shuter Street (c1924), and his eldest half-brother, Samuel Ernest Pynor, at 19 Locke Street (c1921-26). The former house has been demolished, while the latter is a fairly conventional inter-war brick villa, devoid of any Prairie School influences. Two other former members of the Griffins' office are known to have designed buildings in the study area. In addition, a house with apparent Prairie School characteristics has been identified, albeit designed by an architect who was neither a former member of the Griffins' office nor had any known connection with them.

Former Essendon City Incinerator (now Incinerator Gallery)
180 Holmes Road, Moonee Ponds (Eric Nicholls, 1929) (HO57)

This is often attributed to the Griffins, but the working drawings bear Nicholls's own title block, confirming that he received the commission under his own name while running the Griffins' Melbourne office. It was praised at the time for the way in which it responded to its residential context with an enveloping gabled roofline, plain rendered walls, decorated chimney and human-scaled fenestration. The building is somewhat evocative of 5 Ophir Street in its dominant gabled roofline, reflected in the diagonal geometry of the facade.



Source: Wille Collection, State Library of Victoria

Perry Residence
15 Park Crescent, Aberfeldie (Esmond Dorney circa 1940) (HO469)

Esmond Dorney worked for the Griffins in the 1920s, during which time he designed a few buildings under his own name that were at least partially in the Griffin style. In sole practice in the 1930s, he gradually rejected that aesthetic in favour of fashionable modes such as the Streamlined Moderne and Tudor Revival. This house in Park Crescent is a fine example of the latter style. As such, it has nothing in common with 5 Ophir Street.



Source: City of Moonee Valley, 2018

Residence
 2 Kingston Avenue, Ascot Vale (Eric Ziebell, circa 1936) (HO20)
 Published in the *Australian Home Beautiful* in January 1937, this timber-framed house is somewhat evocative of the Prairie School style, most clearly in its treatment of the projecting gabled bay window, with its returning bargeboard and central chimney flanked by corner windows with weatherboard spandrels. The house has been much altered since, including addition of a second storey level.



Source: *Australian Home Beautiful*, Jan 1937

Recommendation:

That the whole of 5 Ophir Street, Moonee Ponds, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

Schedule:

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