

## MINTA FARM HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

### Myer House, Minta Farm, 2-106 Soldiers Road, Berwick



Figure 1. Myer House, Minta Farm, 2-106 Soldiers Road, Berwick (Source: Context 2017).

### History

#### **HISTORY OF MINTA FARM**

The pastoral development of the City of Casey commenced in the late 1830s when this area formed part of the Westernport District of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. Early pastoralists selected large areas of land that had a frontage to the Cardinia Creek. In the 1850s these were broken up into smaller farms and the area that later became 'Minta' was taken up by J. Murray and R. Dowling (Berwick parish plan).

The areas of Berwick and Beaconsfield were part of the former City of Berwick, which was initially established as a road district in 1862 and elevated to the Shire of Berwick in 1868. Settlement was scattered until the construction of the Gippsland Road in the mid-1860s and the arrival of the railway in the 1870s, which encouraged the development of the area. As well as pastoral properties, there were smaller mixed farms, dairying and fruit-growing.

Located within easy reach of Melbourne, the Berwick district provided attractive pastoral country for Melbourne's establishment. The area had links with the Melbourne Hunt Club, established in 1840, which would meet at the Berwick Inn. A number of notable settlers established properties in the Berwick area, including pastoralist and horse stud owner Richard Grice, who acquired 'Eyrecourt', Berwick, in the early 1900s and Andrew Chirnside who had 'Edrington'. In the late 1940s prominent members of Melbourne 'Society', Richard and Maie Casey, known as Lord and Lady Casey, acquired 'Edrington', Berwick. Lord Casey was appointed Governor-General of Australia in 1965, sealing Berwick's standing as a favoured district for the Establishment. M.L. Baillieu would have been connected with these families through social and business networks in Melbourne.

The property known as 'Minta', occupying 616 acres (249 hectares) on portions 31B and 32 in the Parish of Berwick, was purchased by Francis Officer in 1910. The property was bounded

on the east by the Cardinia Creek, providing a reliable water supply for stock. The address for property at that time was generally given as Beaconsfield rather than Berwick. Francis Officer had married Lillian Anstey in 1908 and their daughter was born at Berwick in 1913. In addition to the 10-roomed weatherboard homestead built on the property in c.1913, there was also a 'Man's weatherboard Cottage containing 4 rooms', which may have been earlier. This building was noted in the Inventory of Assets prepared for Probate on the death of Francis Officer in 1924 (Officer, F. Allan, Gentleman, Probate Papers, 1924-25, VPRS 28/P3 unit 1520, item 200/654, PROV). Following Francis Officer's death the property was acquired by James Boag (in the name of his wife Florence Emma Boag), who was connected to the Melbourne Hunt Club and is believed to have acquired the property for the specific needs of the Hunt Club, which had recently moved from their base in Oakleigh. In the mid-1920s and through the 1930s the Melbourne Hunt Club met at the 'Minta gate' and incorporated Minta as part of the course (Tardis Enterprises 2011).

The origin of the name 'Minta' is unclear. The name was also used in the mid-1920s by the Minta Sand Company, which was a short-lived and seemingly unsuccessful enterprise that sought to extract sand from a sand-pit at the north-east corner of lot 31B, close to the Cardinia Creek (Tardis Enterprises 2011).

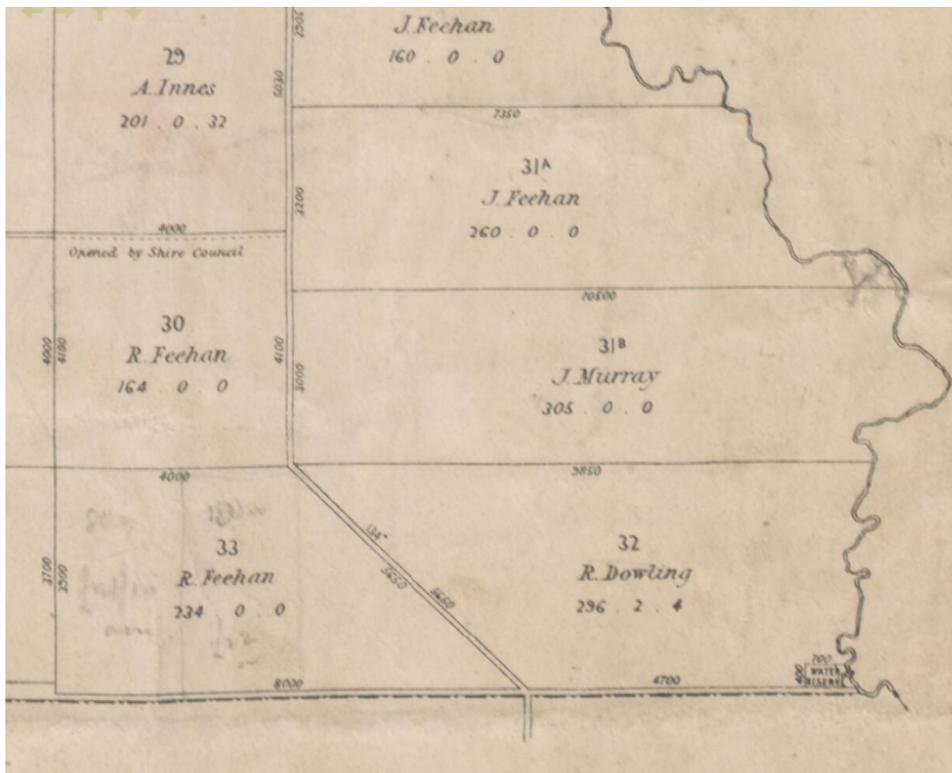


Figure 2. Extract from Parish plan of Berwick, showing lots 31B and 32 which became 'Minta'. Note the small water reserve in the extreme south-east corner of lot 32 (source: National Library of Australia).

The property was acquired by prominent Melbourne businessman Marshall Lawrence Baillieu (d.1985) in 1931, a year after his marriage to Nancy Wills-Allen. M.L. Baillieu, born in 1902, was the son of sharebroker Richard Percy Clive ('Joe') Baillieu. Members of the Baillieu family, one of Melbourne's most wealthy and well-established families, were at the centre of Melbourne Society. M.L. Baillieu's purchase of 'Minta', located in what was then Beaconsfield, was made at the peak of the Depression when farm properties could be obtained at undervalued prices. In the late 1930s, and into the 1940s and 1950s, Marshall and Nancy Baillieu and their children continued to reside in Toorak and South Yarra. They would have employed a resident farm manager at Minta, and presumably also would have employed seasonal labour.

Both the Myer House and the L-shaped workers' quarters at 'Minta' date to the late 1940s. No shortage of private wealth enabled M.L. Baillieu to make necessary improvements to the property in the years of unprecedented growth and prosperity after World War II. Australian producers across a number of primary industries were doing well in overseas markets; there was full employment and local manufacturing was booming. In the 1960s, M.L. Baillieu, whose business address was the prestigious Collins House, was a director of one of Australia's most successful companies, the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd (based in Melbourne), which prospered greatly during the long boom (1946-1973). Primarily a Melbourne businessman, Baillieu aptly fitted the type of the 'Collins Street farmer'. Minta was his alternative residence and his retreat from the city, but here he also worked hard to improve the property and to develop the stock quality. He registered the 'Minta' flock, a British breed of sheep, in 1954. He also bred race horses at Minta (*Pastoral Review* 1970). The Baillieu family also improved the property with tree-planting. The family planted a number of English Oaks (*Quercus robur*) that were brought from England, and several Pin Oaks (*Quercus palustris*) that were planted as seed from America (J. Baillieu, 2010. personal communication, 9 June 2010, cited in Tardis Enterprises 2011).

M.L. Baillieu's aunt Marjorie Merlyn Baillieu had married the prominent Melbourne retailer and philanthropist Sir Sidney Myer, who was the founder and owner of the Myer Emporium. It was the Baillieu family's links to Sidney Myer, and hence to his son Norman Myer who succeeded his father as the head of the Myer Emporium, that presumably led to the erection of a 'Myer House', a single-storey timber residence, at Minta Farm in c.1947 (GJM 2017).

Other family members had also moved to the Berwick district.



Figure 3. Aerial photo of 'Minta', Berwick, taken in 1945 (left) compared with a more recent aerial image (right), showing that the Myer House was not extant in 1945 (Source: Planning Maps Online & RAAF 1939, 'Aerial Survey of Victoria: Cranbourne B3'.)

The Myer House was most likely erected at Minta Farm as permanent accommodation for a farm manager. In addition to the general period of prosperity of the late 1940s, this period may have been a time that Marshall Baillieu took on a larger and more permanent workforce at Minta. It seems likely that this was a period that he expanded farming operations and the need for permanent labour at Minta. He also invested, with his brother J.M. Baillieu, in additional grazing land at 'Eynesbury' (VHR H0362) in Melton, which he purchased in 1947. Here they erected three Myer Houses, two of which survive.

The L-shaped timber workers' quarters, which appear to date to the same period (c.1946-48), were most likely erected around the same time as the Myer House as the choice of design was in sympathy with the Myer House design.



Figure 4 *Australian Women's Weekly*, 29 March 1947, p. 36

Whilst Melbourne grew considerably through the 1950s and 1960s, the area that is now the City of Casey continued to be an important agricultural and pastoral district. Minta continued to operate as a working farm into the 1970s and 1980s. On the death of Marshall Lawrence Baillieu in 1985, the property passed to his son Ian Marshall Baillieu, who continued to run the property.

#### **MYER PREFABRICATED HOUSES**

The prefabricated Myer House was introduced in 1945 as an initiative of Norman Myer of the Myer Emporium, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation Pty Ltd (CAC) based in Fishermans Bend, which was actively seeking new manufacturing enterprises following the end of World War II and the slowdown in aircraft building. Norman Myer had succeeded his father Sir Sidney Myer as the head of the Myer Emporium.

It is not certain how many Myer Houses were built across Victoria, but some known examples were built for various Norman Myer and Baillieu relatives for their rural properties, and have HO listings – see appendices. Other examples of the Myer House may exist in the Melbourne metropolitan area that have not yet been identified. It has not been established how intact any of these examples are compared with the example at Minta.

The Myer House at Minta Farm has a conservative design with modernised neo-Georgian influences, designed to suit a more aspirational and conservative clientele than the prefabricated Beaufort house, and was to be supplied furnished by the Myer Emporium. The Conite walls with rough cast render provided the appearance of rendered brickwork, and may have been used as a means of overcoming local government 'brick area' restrictions.

Aspects of the design may have been influenced by the domestic architecture of Yuncken, Freeman, Freeman and Griffith. They were architects for various residential projects for the Myer family, including the redesign of 'Cranlana', the family home in Toorak.

The Myer House was designed to conform to the postwar housing restrictions. These required a maximum 11–12.5 squares until about 1952. This often restricted houses to two-bed bedrooms, but in this case three bedrooms were supplied by restricting room sizes and the area and width of passages. Three bedrooms were often required so that children of different genders did not have to share rooms.

The rival Beaufort House, which was developed by the Chifley Labor government and the Housing Commission of Victoria as an affordable postwar housing option, used external aluminium cladding and was also based on aircraft production methodologies. The Beaufort House was first built as a display home in the Fitzroy Gardens and had a simpler external design. In 1947 the change of State government in Victoria led to the 'socialist' pre-fabrication housing program being abandoned by the Victorian government.

These houses reflect an interesting aspect of modern approaches to housing construction and foreshadowed many current practices for prefabrication that are widely adopted today. The small size reflects the postwar housing shortage and restriction on house sizes. The establishment of the Age Small Homes Service, directed by Robin Boyd and Neil Clerehan, was another manifestation of this.

**Extract from report by Tardis Enterprises, 2011:**

In particular, Myer Houses (also labelled 'lifetime homes') were created as a response to a housing shortage following World War II. In 1945, Norman Myer, of the famous Myer retail store family, first introduced the prefabricated steel homes to 60 Melbourne businessmen and politicians on Friday 7 September, 1945 at the Ansett Airways factory, Essendon as an answer to 'the housing problem' (*Argus*, 8 September 1945: 9 & 16 January 1947: 12).

The houses were available 'in six designs, each capable of carrying an additional room if required. All the normal fittings are built-in, and the home, because of its design, will require much less furnishings and furniture than normal'. Their design, while in an American Colonial style, consisted of an entrance hall, lounge, dining room, two bedrooms (with built-in cupboards & bunks in the second bedroom), kitchen (streamlined & cherry red & white), bathroom, and laundry (with hot-water service) and wall to wall carpeting in green. The Myer House used only one-third of the normal manpower, timber, and cement in its construction, and was one-third lighter to allow for transportation (*Argus*, 16 January 1947: 12 & *Argus*, 13 February 1947: 13).

The Myer Homes went into commercial production off an assembly line at Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation's works at Fishermen's Bend on Wednesday 17 January 1947 under the supervision of Wing-commander L.J. Wackett. "J.C. Taylor and Sons P/L, who had built many of the city's main buildings, would erect the houses at a cost of around £1,500 fully furnished, including delivery. It was claimed that the houses were 'capable of erection and occupancy within 15 days of leaving the line' (*Argus*, 16 January 1947: 12).

The *Argus* reported that Norman Myer claimed the homes were:

'the cheapest home of its type ever built. Minimum use had been made of materials which would deteriorate. There was no exposed woodwork, and very little wood was used in the interior. The house had an all-cement foundation, an iron frame, thick cement and plaster walls, and zinc anneal tiles, which would neither move nor break' (*Argus*, 16 January 1947: 12).

The first Myer House was constructed in Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, and was open for public inspection, for which tickets were required, on Wednesday 12 February, 1947 by then Victorian Premier Mr Cain. A large crowd attended the opening (*Argus*, 13 February 1947: 13).

## **Description and analysis**

### **EXTERIOR**

The Myer House at Minta Farm, Berwick, has a simple building form with a rectangular plan. It is sited east-west to provide sunlight to the living room, dining and kitchen. It has a relatively high-pitched roof for the post war era, with main gable and secondary gables for the small projections at the east end for the main bedroom, and at the west for the second bedroom. A galvanised corrugated iron roof was fixed many years ago over the original red pressed metal tiles, apparently due to corrosion and leaking. The gable ends have pressed metal shingle pattern cladding, with the original light green colour showing though peeling white over-painting.

The conite walls have a base applied over a backing board with woven galvanised wire mesh reinforcing equivalent to rabbit / chicken wire, with a rough cast rendered finish. This provided the appearance of rendered brickwork, and may have been used as a means of

overcoming conservative brick areas. A tapered smooth rendered brick chimney contrasts with the rough cast concrete walls.

A concrete strip footing is visible with two courses of red brick above providing a plinth or a base wall. For some reason the kitchen section had an exposed timber base with stumps and timber studs. It is assumed that the wall frames were all timber framed despite newspaper references to them being 'iron'. The kitchen had a slightly lower ceiling as well. External vertical movement joints appear to show that the walls were prefabricated panels factory constructed off site. The roof framing is entirely fabricated with steel trusses however.

The timber windows are matching double hung pairs for the dining room and all bedrooms, with two single and one triple for the living room. Individually designed windows were provided for the kitchen and bathroom. The windows have a unique opening system with metal ratchets and pins to select opening width.

The house is basically intact externally, other than for the galvanised iron roof fitted over the original tiles, painted walls and gable ends, and the laundry addition off the kitchen. This was added or altered to provide a protected entrance to the kitchen.

### **INTERIOR**

Internally the house has a very simple and functional plan. The living room, dining room and kitchen are on one side with a passage behind serving the bedrooms and bathroom at the rear. The surviving details, lounge room fire place, doors and the plaster ceiling cornices also reflect the conservative architectural expression of the exterior. Internally, the only changes are the new kitchen and opening to the dining room, and built-in wardrobes

### **SETTING**

The house is located in a fenced parcel of land with hedgerows and heavy planting. This provides a contained curtilage that allows clear views of sides.



Figure 5. Looking south to the façade of the residence (Source: Context 2017).



Figure 6. East elevation with small projection (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 7. Concrete strip with two courses of red brick for providing base wall (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 8. Fire place in lounge room (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 9. Chimney with smooth finish contrasted with the rough cast Conite walls (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 10. South view with original timber windows (Source: Context 2017)

### Comparative analysis

This is a rare building type across Victoria and there are no other known surviving examples of a Myer House within the City of Casey.

Known examples of surviving Myer Houses in Victoria that are outside the City of Casey include the following: one example in the grounds of 'Norman Lodge', Mt Eliza (Mornington Peninsula, HO321); two examples at 'Eynesbury', Melton (VHR H362); where two identical prefabricated Myer houses were erected by M.L. and J.M. Baillieu after their purchase of the property in 1947; and one (now demolished) example at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (VHR H1002) at St Kilda Road, Melbourne.

The development of the prefabricated house in Victoria arose in response to critical housing shortages in the immediate post World War Two period, made evident by the lack of suitable housing for returning soldiers.

The first two types of pre-fabricated housing, which could be constructed and erected quickly and cheaply were the Beaufort and Myer houses. The Beaufort Houses were developed by the Victorian Housing Commission. The Myer House was an initiative of Norman Myer, who succeeded Sidney Myer, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Aircraft corporation. It is not certain how many were built, but known examples were built for Norman Myer and Baillieu relatives for their rural properties, and at least two are included on the Victorian Heritage Register at the State level, at Eynesbury Homestead, Eynesbury Road (VHR H0362). The Myer house which was formerly included in the State listing for the Institute of the Blind (VHR H1002) has since been demolished. One Myer house (a relatively rare surviving suburban example) otherwise unrelated to Baillieu or Myer is included on the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Moreland Planning Scheme (HO120) at 659 Moreland Rd, Pascoe Vale South.

The Myer house at Minta has a conservative design with modernised neo-Georgian influences, designed to suit a more aspirational and conservative clientele than the Beaufort house, and was to be supplied furnished by the Myer Emporium. The concrete walls with rough cast render provided the appearance of rendered brickwork, and may have been used as a means of overcoming local government brick area restrictions.

Aspects of the design may have been influenced by the domestic architecture of Yuncken, Freeman, Freeman and Griffith. They were architects for various residential projects for the Myer family, including the redesign of 'Cranlana', the family home in Toorak.

The Myer house was designed to conform to the post war housing restrictions. These required a maximum 11 – 12.5 squares until about 1952. This often restricted houses to two bed bedrooms, but in this case three were supplied by restricting room sizes and the area and width of passages. Three bedrooms were often required so that children of different genders did not have to share rooms.

The rival Beaufort House developed by the Chifley government with external aluminium cladding was also based on aircraft production methodologies. This was built as a display home in the Fitzroy Gardens and had a simpler external design. In 1947 the change of state government led to the pre-fabrication housing programme abandoned by the state government.

These houses reflect an interesting aspect of modern approaches to housing construction and foreshadowed many current practices for prefabrication that are widely adopted today. The small size reflects the post war housing shortage and restriction on house sizes. The establishment of the Age Small Homes Service directed by Robin Boyd and Neil Clerehan was another manifestation of this.

The example at Minta Farm, Berwick, is a highly intact example of this rare building type.

## Statement of Significance

### **What is significant?**

The Myer House at Minta Farm, Berwick, to the extent of the exterior fabric, the adjacent Oak Tree and Hawthorn Hedge is significant. The single-storey prefabricated dwelling was built in c.1947-48 by owner Marshall Lawrence Baillieu, grazier and businessman, probably as permanent accommodation for a farm manager at Minta Farm.

### **How is it significant?**

The Myer House at Minta Farm, Berwick, is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

### **Why is it significant?**

Architecturally, the Myer House building at Minta Farm, Berwick, which dates to c.1947-48, is a highly intact and rare surviving example of its type in the City of Casey. There are only a few known comparable examples which survive with a high degree of integrity of the prefabricated Myer House, which were constructed by the CAC and marketed by the Myer Emporium, that survive in Victoria. **(Criterion B)**

Historically, the Myer House at Minta Farm, Berwick, is an example of the measures taken to alleviate the housing shortage in Victoria immediately following World War II. The Myer House was an affordable and easily constructed dwelling that was designed in response to this need. The mature Oak Tree at the front of the residence, and Hawthorn hedge at the rear contribute to the setting and demonstrate the residential nature of this buildings intent. **(Criterion A)**

Historically, the Myer House at Minta Farm, Berwick, through its use as a farm manager's house, is evidence of the prosperous period of the wool industry in Victoria in the postwar era and the general prosperity of graziers in the district during that period.

Historically, the Myer House at Minta Farm, Berwick, is associated with the various successful enterprises, including grazing, pursued by members of the Baillieu family, who were one of the wealthiest and most prominent families in Victoria. **(Criterion H)**

## Planning Control Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Casey Planning Scheme as an individually Significant place *and* on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Casey Planning Scheme:

<b>External Paint Colours</b> Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?	No
<b>Internal Alteration Controls</b> Is a permit required for internal alterations?	No
<b>Tree Controls</b> Is a permit required to remove a tree?	Yes – English Oak and Hawthorn Hedge
<b>Victorian Heritage Register</b> Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?	No

<b>Incorporated Plan</b> Does an Incorporated Plan apply to the site?	No
<b>Outbuildings and fences exemptions</b> Are there outbuildings and fences which are not exempt from notice and review?	No
<b>Prohibited uses may be permitted</b> Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?	Yes
<b>Aboriginal Heritage Place</b> Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?	No

### Recommended HO curtilage



*Recommended curtilage for the Myer House at Minta Farm shown in purple line. Distance from the structure to the proposed curtilage shown in text boxes.*

### References

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