

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** WILLAROO

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Nareen-Coleraine Road NAREEN

**STUDY NUMBER:** 048

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**PRECINCT:** outside

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** pt 2A **SECTION:** 18 **PARISH:** PARISH OF BRIM BRIM

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 387 E 12; VicRoads 54 B9; on the west side of the Nareen-Coleraine Road, at its intersection with the Tulse Hill-Carapook Road and Moore Road, about eight kms south-south-east of Nareen

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Willaroo, Nareen - Coleraine Road, Nareen.

**Image Date:** 09/01/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the exterior of the house and all of the garden, the approach and the drive, all of the mature plantings, including all of the land from the Coleraine Road to the end of the garden. This includes all of the land fifty metres on either side of the whole driveway and all of the land within an 80metre radius from any edge of the house.

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## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Willaroo is a large single storey rendered brick house situated in an extensive landscaped garden. The house is approached by a long winding drive, which crosses Corea Creek, and rises gently to a white painted gateway, which marks the start of the formal garden. The house is effectively screened from the surrounding farmland by perimeter plantings, including *Populus nigra* 'Italica'. The house is approached by a circular driveway, which curves through a formal landscape of lawns, border plantings, and mature specimen trees.

Designed in 1936 by the prestigious Melbourne architectural firm Yuncken Freeman, the house is positioned so that the main rooms take advantage of the views over the garden. To the left of the entrance hall, the sitting room has been designed on a grand scale, with large windows and a door providing access to the garden. The dining room also provides a vista to another aspect of the garden via a covered porch. The main bedrooms are located to the right of the entrance hall, and all have an outlook to the front garden. Additional bedrooms, bathrooms and storage spaces look to a rear courtyard, which has been landscaped in the 1980s with a formal rose garden. The large service wing at the rear, including the kitchen and laundry, have been remodelled in the 1990s. The rear garden is screened from a series of sheds beyond by a tall hedge.

Claude and Shirley Austin originally established the extensive formal garden at Willaroo in the late 1930s. In 1937 Edna Walling was commissioned to design the garden, but the extent to which her plans were implemented is limited. The garden composition is distinctive for its use of sweeping curved driveways, which intersect with broad lawns, formal and informal bed, and clusters of trees to create a series of appealing vistas.

A tennis court is located to the north west of the homestead. It is believed that the tennis court may be one of the only features of Edna Walling's 1937 plan to be implemented.

The collection of ornamental and native botanical specimens at Willaroo is extensive, with fine examples of ornamental tree plantings including: Iowa crab (*Malus ionesis*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Heterophylla') and Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea'), all located around the central lawn. More unusual plantings include Snow berry (*Amelanchier Canadensis*), a small tree highly favoured by Edna Walling in her 1930s designs, Washington Thorn (*Crataegus phanenopyrum*), Darwin Barbery (*Berberis darwinii*) and *Berberis x stenopylla*.

Two substantial specimens of Spotted Gum (*Eucalyptus maculata*) stand on either side of the entrance gates to the garden, and a substantial Giant Redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) defines the point of the teardrop shaped lawn.

A substantial and diverse rose garden is located in to the south of the house, which has long been admired for its variety of different types of *Rosa* species.

The garden retains a fair degree of integrity to the 1930s period, although some substantial changes have been made in the past ten years, particularly to the areas adjacent to the house. The garden is in very good condition, although some of the earlier specimen trees are diseased.

## HISTORY:

The land on which the house and garden, Willaroo were established was purchased from the Crown by A. C. Cameron in 1868. Alexander Cameron (1810-1881) was a substantial land holder owning the leases and, later freehold, of many runs in this and adjacent districts. Arriving in Port Phillip in 1839, he was amongst the earliest of the pioneers (B&K, 38; de Serville, 463). It is possible that the land which would become Willaroo was incorporated into the Satimer pastoral run in the later 19th century (Black, pers comm. 2003).

By the early 20th century, the property was owned by Jim Constable, who was related by marriage to the neighbouring Koch family of Wando Dale. At that time, the house was a simple 2 roomed building. In 1936 Constable sold Willaroo to Claude and Shirley Austin, under whose tenure the house and garden were

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substantially enhanced (Black, pers comm, 2003).

The Austins undertook a major extension and renovation to the house, employing the influential Melbourne architectural firm of Yuncken Freeman, notable for its prestigious clientele, to design the plans. The builder was Mr Dickinson, of Hamilton.

In 1937, the Austins engaged the services of Edna Walling to design a new garden, which would complement the new house. Walling's concept sketches for Willaroo are preserved in the Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Drawing No. LTAD 86 H97.270/35 is a pencil and watercolour drawing entitled ROUGH SKETCH OF GARDEN FOR MRS CLAUDE AUSTIN AT 'WILLAROO' COLERAINE. The drawing has been altered, probably on two occasions, in response to the owner's suggestions. The sketch identifies the existing structures, and a small number of existing trees or shrubs. It includes proposals for the construction of a tennis court, rockery and serpentine driveway. The margins of the drawing contain several suggestions written in pencil by the owner Mrs Austin to Walling regarding changes to the draft plan. These comments refer several times to a plantation located at the rear of the house block.

Drawing No. LTAD 86 H97.270/138 is untitled and is a very rough sketch in ink and pencil of the Willaroo garden, with almost no annotation. Some fruit trees are named, but it is not clear if they are existing or planned.

The extent to which Walling's designs were implemented is not clear, but the existing garden bears little resemblance to her drawings. It is believed that one bed on the north side of the central lawn may be her work, although her influence can be seen throughout the garden by the plants selected for use (Open Garden Scheme, 106). Claude and Shirley's daughter, Carole, and her husband continued to farm at Willaroo until the 1990s, and undertook major works to the garden during their tenure. The Holmes family owned Willaroo from 1998 to 2000, when the property was acquired by a timber corporation. A portion of allotment 2A of about 2 hectares with the homestead was subdivided and sold in 2002 to the present owners.

Claude Austin was well known and highly regarded as a naturalist and early conservationist. He had particular expertise in ornithology, and advocated the preservation of natural habitat for birds and other fauna. He was the president of the Western Victorian Conservation Committee for some years (HHC file). A reserve adjacent to Rocklands Reservoir at Balmoral is named for him.

## **THEMATIC CONTEXT:**

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

Theme 5: Working

5.8 Working on the land

## **CONDITION:**

The house is in excellent condition, while the garden is in good condition.

## **INTEGRITY:**

High degree of integrity to the house. The garden has undergone many changes, and its integrity is reasonable.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

### What is significant?

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### How is it significant?

Willaroo is of architectural, historical and aesthetic significance to the Shire of Southern Grampians.

### Why is it significant?

It is of architectural and landscape significance as a fine early example of architectural firm Yuncken Freeman, and for the possible Edna Walling garden design which has been incorporated into an earlier garden. It is of historical significance for its association with Claude and Shirley Austin, who as well as being highly influential members of the local community, were also passionate naturalists, as well as amateur horticulturalists. Of further historical importance is the property's early links to the great pastoral properties of nearby Satimer and Wando Dale, of which the original two roomed cottage was potentially an

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outstation. The garden is one of the finest inter-war gardens in the whole of the Shire, including fine plantings of native and exotic trees, shrubs, grasses and bulbs. The whole of the complex is situated on a rise above Corea creek and has an important aesthetic impact on the otherwise relatively de-vegetated landscape.

**ASSESSED BY:** AEN

**ASSESSMENT DATE:** 30/09/2005

**EXISTING LISTINGS:**

**HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Include in VHR**  **Include in RNE**  **Include in Local Planning Scheme**

**No Recommendations for Inclusions**

**REFERENCES:**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Page</b>
	Australian Open Garden Scheme		p. 106
Black, Ian	Personal communication, February 2003	2003	
Paul de Serville	Pounds and Pedigrees	1991	p. 463
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	p. 38