

2 Irving Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 2 Irving Road, Toorak.

History and Historical Context

Thematic Context

The following is drawn from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006).

The End of an Era – Mansion Estates Subdivision in the Early Twentieth Century

Toorak has been described as ‘*the only suburb to acquire and keep a name which was synonymous in the public mind with wealth, extravagance and display*’.¹ The suburb’s climb to fashionable pre-eminence was due to its pleasing topographic features and the presence of the Governor’s residence from 1854 (Toorak House, after which the suburb is named). Toorak and the higher parts of South Yarra were settled by pastoralists, army officers, high-ranking professionals, and ‘self made’ merchants and traders. Their wealth was manifested in the construction of a suitably impressive mansion, usually set within expansive grounds. As Victoria’s land boom progressed into the late 1880s, the mansions became more elaborate, one of the best surviving examples being *Illawarra* (1 Illawarra Crescent), built by land-boomer Charles Henry James in 1891.

After the collapse of the land boom, many mansions were put to other uses, subdivided or demolished. The subdivision of the old estates of Toorak began to increase after World War I when the cost of maintaining these large properties became prohibitive. This process of subdivision created a unique pattern of development which can still be understood and interpreted today. Although new subdivisions imposed new road patterns within the original grids, in many cases new estates and streets bore the name of the old properties, while the original houses were sometimes retained within a reduced garden. Toorak nonetheless retained its appeal as a wealthy enclave.

¹ Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-1880*, p.147.

Creating Australia's most designed suburb

Toorak is notable for the strong culture of patronage between architects and their wealthy clients, which existed from the earliest times of settlement. This has resulted in a much higher than average ratio of architect designed houses. In Albany Road alone, 47 of the 61 houses built since 1872 have been attributed to architects. The consequence of this is one of the strongest concentrations of high quality residential architecture in Australia, which provides an important record of all major architectural styles and movements since the earliest days of settlement.

Architects were particularly busy in Toorak in the boom years of the 1880s when mansions and grands villas were built for newly prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators. A great many examples of nineteenth century domestic architecture in the Municipality were lost through demolition, however many of these demolitions created opportunities for twentieth century architects.

After the turn of the century, architects continued to have a major influence on the wealthy suburbs in present day Stonnington. Walter Butler, Robert Hamilton, Marcus Martin and Rodney Alsop were among the notable architects whose work is well represented in Toorak. These architects built predominately in the fashionable architecture styles of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Georgian and Old English modes, although some stepped outside the dictates of fashion to explore ideas and innovation in design and construction. As a result, Toorak contains houses that are amongst the earliest or purest form of particular architectural styles that were later diluted or even changed outright when they gained wider acceptance and usage. Other architects explored stylistic innovation that pushed the boundaries beyond the restrained detailing found on most contemporary houses. One such architect was Harold Desbrowe Ansell, whose Georgian revival design for Katanga at 372 Glenferrie Road (1933) was described as 'functional, somewhat eccentric and essentially theatrical.'

Place History

The land at 2 Irving Road once formed part of the Devorgilla mansion estate. The twenty-roomed mansion was built in 1874 on an eleven acre site at the corner of Irving and Malvern Roads.² In 1886 the estate was subdivided into nineteen allotments, retaining the mansion on the north side of newly created Devorgilla Avenue. The mansion at this time had a sweeping carriage way, tennis court, fernery, ornamental lake, rockery, grotto, fountain, and summerhouse.³ A 1901 MMBW Detail Plan shows the Devorigilla subdivision sparsely developed with only four residences at the corner of Kooyong and Malvern Roads and a single residence on Irving Road (present day 4 Irving Road).⁴ The mansion, renamed Larundel, remained on a large allotment on the north side of Devorgilla Avenue.

The 1922 Sands and McDougall directory lists a 'house being built' at 2 Irving Road (at that time unnumbered).⁵ A 1921 MMBW Plan of Drainage for the house names architects Sydney Smith & Ogg as the 'agent' (the agent commonly being the building's designer).⁶ The first owner was Enoch Benton, a successful pastry and cake manufacturer, who had a store in Swanston Street and a factory in Commercial Road, Prahran, supplying numerous retail outlets.⁷

Enoch Benton lived at 2 Irving Road until his death in August 1940.⁸ His son Herbert resided at 2 Irving Road until at least 1970.⁹

² Stonnington Local History Catalogue, Registration No: PH 23553.

³ *Argus*, 15 May 1886, p.2.

⁴ MMBW Detail Plan No. 976. State Library of Victoria.

⁵ Sand and McDougall Directory, 1922.

⁶ MMBW Plan of Drainage No. 119302. South East Water.

⁷ *The Cyclopaedia of Victoria (illustrated): An Historical and Commercial Review*. p.225.

⁸ *Argus*, 9 August, 1940. p.4

Sydney Smith & Ogg

Architect Sydney Wigham Smith (1868-1933) formed a partnership with Charles Alfred Ogg (1867-1932) in 1889. In 1921, the firm became Sydney Smith, Ogg & Serpell after C.E. Serpell joined as partner. The firm was prolific through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, designing a diverse range of houses, commercial buildings, hotels, breweries and several branches of the State Savings Bank. Early in their career Smith and Ogg drew on the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau styles of England. Of particular note are two private hospitals - Eastbourne Terrace, East Melbourne and Milton House, Flinders Lane. Architect Robert Haddon is credited with playing a significant role in both as a design consultant to the firm. From c1911 to 1914 Sydney Smith & Ogg produced a series of innovative hotel designs, including the Bendigo Hotel, Collingwood (1911). From the 1920s, Sydney Smith, Ogg & Serpell designed some of Melbourne's largest commercial buildings, most notably the imposing Beaux Arts inspired Port of Melbourne Authority Building, Market Street (1929-31). Sydney Smith and Charles Ogg both died in the early 1930s.

Description

The property at 2 Irving Road, Toorak is occupied by a boldly modelled, double-storey house with unpainted rendered walls and a hipped terracotta tiled roof. Stylistically, the house presents as a distinctive hybrid of the interwar stripped classical and bungalow idioms. The house's projecting front bay is conceived as a symmetrical double-storey verandah with curved first floor balconies supported on simple console brackets. Wreath motifs under the eaves reinforce the house's classical character. The corner wall adjacent to the verandah has timber-framed sash windows on both levels with timber shingle panels. Chimneys have interesting stylised detailing.

The façade is substantially intact apart from the enclosure of the first floor verandah with windows detailed to reflect the house's original multi-pane sashes. Rear additions constructed c2011 to designs by Trethowan Architecture¹⁰ are visually low-key and have not diminished the integrity of the original design. The imposing rendered masonry front fence was rebuilt c2008 but may have replicated an existing (possibly early) fence that is partly visible in a 1992 photograph of the site.¹¹

Comparative Analysis

2 Irving Road is a distinctive hybrid of a stripped classical expression with Craftsman bungalow elements. It reflects the prevailing eclecticism of architecture in Melbourne at the time but no directly comparable examples have been identified in the context of interwar houses in the City Stonnington. The monumentality of the design and the use of classical motifs such as the wreath ornament are unusual in a domestic sphere and give the building a character more akin to a civic or commercial building. 2 Irving Road points to the emergence of 'revival' styles in the 1920s that gradually overshadowed the bungalow idiom. As described by John Clare, bungalow styles had started to lose favour among architects and their wealthy clients in the early 1920s, when solidity and stylistic displays became valued above the comfortable informality of the bungalow style.¹²

The design for 2 Irving Road also seems to be influenced by 'Chicago School' architecture. Clare uses this term to indicate a broad stylistic grouping of Chicago domestic architecture of

⁹ Sand and McDougall Directories, 1950/1960/1970.

¹⁰ City of Stonnington Building File BL1567/20100132/2

¹¹ City of Prahran Conservation Study Building Identification Form.

¹² John Clare, *The Post Federation House in Melbourne: Bungalow and Vernacular Revival Styles 1900-1930*, p. 30.

the early twentieth century, which covers a spectrum from Craftsmen and vernacular revivals to the Prairie style of Wright and Griffin.¹³ Australian architects would have been aware of these developments through publications such as Hermann Van Holst's *Modern American Homes* (Chicago, 1913). As well as houses by Wright and Griffin, images of less radical designs with a vernacular revival character were published. In these examples, the Chicago School's largely undecorated cuboid forms and clear vertical and horizontal articulation were tempered by straightforward Craftsman-like gable roofs with shingle infill. Projecting porches or porte cocheres supported by stumpy columns were characteristic. As described by Clare, Chicago School influences are apparent in several of the general stylistic characteristics emerging in Melbourne's post-Federation buildings.¹⁴ There was a general increase in visual weight, square masonry columns were used instead of light timber posts, and balcony and porch openings became squared off penetrations in masonry walls – all these characteristics being on display at 2 Irving Road.

Thematic Context

The house at 2 Irving Road, Toorak illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006):

8.1.3 The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

Assessment Against Criteria

Assessment of the place was undertaken in accordance with the HERCON criteria and the processes outlined in the Australian ICOMOS (Burra) Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Significance.

Statement of Significance

Note that the relevant HERCON criteria and themes from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (TEH) are shown in brackets.

What is Significant?

The house at 2 Irving Road, Toorak is a large rendered masonry double-storey building constructed in 1922 to designs by the noted architectural firm Sydney Smith and Ogg. The house was built on land subdivided from the Victorian mansion estate 'Devorgilla' (later Larundel).

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The original external form, materials and detailing
- The high level of external intactness.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The legibility of the original built form from the public realm.

Modern elements, including the rear additions and verandah infill glazing, are not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 2 Irving Road, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

¹³ Ibid, p. 118.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 32.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as an imposing, distinctive and largely intact interwar house combining the stripped classical idiom with bungalow overtones (Criterion E).

The house is of some historical interest as evidence of the major change that took place in the 1920s and 1930s when many of Toorak's grand nineteenth century mansion estates were subdivided and redeveloped to create prestigious residential enclaves (TEH 8.1.3 The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century, Criterion A). It also illustrates the role of large architect designed houses as symbols of wealth, status and taste for Melbourne's upper classes of the interwar period (TEH 8.4.1 - Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion).

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries as shown in figure 2 below. External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended. It is further recommended that the building retain its current A2 grading.

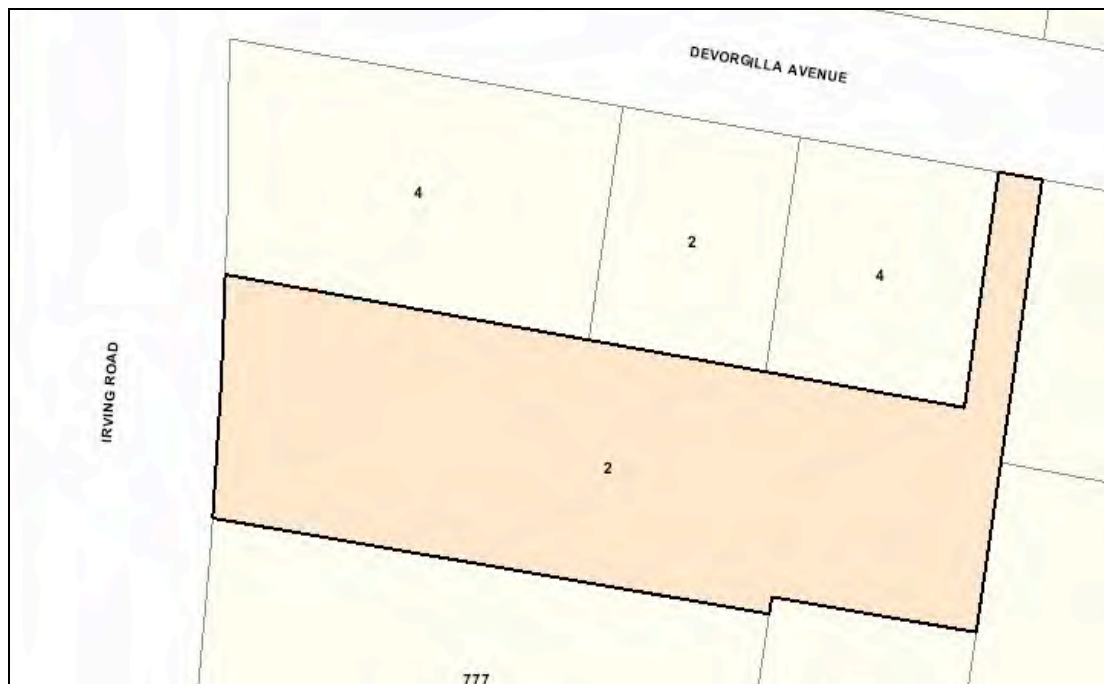


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay at 2 Irving Road, Toorak.