

2 Ledbury Court, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 2 Ledbury Court, 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

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

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.

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 newly prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators built mansions and grand villas that would stand as testament to their wealth, status and fashionable taste. 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 that make up 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 revival and Old English modes.

Place History

In 1853, English barrister Charles Skinner purchased around 84 acres of land, bounded by present day Malvern, Glenferrie and Toorak (formerly Gardiner's Creek) Roads and Denham Place. Skinner planned a village to be named Ledbury after the market town in the Malvern Hills, England, where his forebears had lived. Skinner's Malvern Hill Estate was mostly divided into small allotments. As an inducement to purchasers, Skinner built the Malvern Hill Hotel on the corner of present day Glenferrie Road and Malvern Road. However, Skinner's vision of an English style village, complete with church and school, did not succeed and much of the land eventually reverted to pasture.²

From 1865, five acres of land fronting the west side of Glenferrie Road between Bruce (later Benson) and Russell Streets formed part of the estate of solicitor David Braham. Braham's home 'The Elms' was a substantial brick villa sited in extensive gardens with a tennis court, croquet lawn, conservatories, a fernery, fountains and a lodge house at the Glenferrie Road entrance. By 1911, The Elms was rated as a mansion of twenty-three rooms and re-named 'Buncrana' and then 'Medindie'. It became the home of Dr Rupert and Mrs Emma Hornabrook. In 1932, Medindie Estate was sold and Medindie (later Ledbury) Court was created. The mansion was subsequently demolished.³

² Di Foster and Steve Stefanopoulos, *Walk into History 1: Six More Great Walks in Stonnington*, p.5.

³ Stonnington Local History Catalogue. MH 14377.

In February 1933, architect Charles Hollinshed prepared plans for a 'Residence Medindie Court Toorak for O Michaelis Esq.'⁴ A garden design was also prepared for the property by influential landscape designer Edna Walling.⁵ Sands and McDougall directories first list 'O [Orwell] Michaelis' at Medindie Court in 1934. The following year the street had been renamed Ledbury Court.

The house's first owner Orwell Michaelis was a relative of Moritz Michaelis, who co-founded the successful Footscray tannery Michaelis Hallenstein & Co in 1864. By the 1950s, Orwell had become the firm's chairman and managing director.

Plans for alterations to the Michaelis residence were drawn up by Charles Hollinshed in March 1938.⁶ This involved a modest gable roofed addition to a ground floor sitting room and first floor dressing room on the rear (east) elevation, and a small single-storey addition to a nursery on the side (south) elevation.

Orwell Michaelis resided at 2 Ledbury Court until c1954.⁷

In 1960, a permit was issued for a rear sunroom addition, replacing a terrace and skillion roofed verandah.⁸ More recently, a single-storey addition was built on the south side of the house and some ground floor rooms were internally refurbished (c2008).⁹

C Neville Hollinshed

Architect Charles Neville Hollinshed (1899-1993) was born in London and immigrated to Queensland with his family.¹⁰ He enlisted in the AIF in 1917 and served with the Flying Corps in 1918, attaining the rank of Air Mechanic (Second Class). On conclusion of the war, Hollinshed along with contemporaries such as Arthur (later Sir Arthur) Stephenson, Leighton Irwin, Percy Meldrum, and Roy Stevenson spent a period of study at the Architectural Association in London.

Hollinshed returned to Australia in August 1919 and went on to complete the newly introduced architecture degree at the University of Sydney. After graduation in 1922, Hollinshed moved to Melbourne where he joined the office of Stephenson & Meldrum. He remained there until at least June 1923, when he was granted registration as an architect in Victoria.

In 1924 Hollinshed travelled to England to gain further professional experience. He moved onto New York in 1925, where he worked for a time in the office of Thomas W Lamb, a leading cinema and theatre architect. By April 1927, Hollinshed had returned to Melbourne and established his own practice. In December of that year he married Janet Evelyn Tait, daughter of film and theatrical entrepreneur John Henty Tait. Hollinshed went on to design numerous theatres for the Tait family business in Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and New Zealand. Hollinshed also designed a broad range of commercial, industrial and residential buildings. According to Peter Cuffley, Hollinshed '*possessed an eye for picturesque detail and a talent for romantic designs*'.¹¹

In December 1984, upon ceasing his registration as an architect, Hollinshed was paid the following tribute by the Architect's Registration Board:

⁴ Stonnington History Centre Malvern Building Plan 11451.

⁵ Edna Walling Collection, State Library of Victoria.

⁶ Stonnington History Centre Malvern Building Plan 1790.

⁷ Sands and McDougall Directories, 1954-1955.

⁸ Stonnington History Centre Malvern Building Plan C17 D1.

⁹ City of Stonnington Building File BL1091/2008022/0.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, biographical information is drawn from Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "C Neville Hollinshed", *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, www.builtheritage.com.au.

¹¹ Peter Cuffley, *Australian Houses of the '20s and '30s*, p. 128.

*I congratulate you on a long and distinguished career as an architect. Your outstanding work over the years has improved the quality of life in our cities and towns and your work within the profession will be an inspiration to architects for many years to come. On behalf of the Board, I extend to you sincere thanks for the benefits you have brought to the people of Australia and for the honour you have brought to the profession.*¹²

Description

The site at 2 Ledbury Court, Toorak is occupied by an imposing double-storey English Domestic Revival style house with cream clinker brick walls and a gabled terracotta tiled roof. The asymmetrical street elevation has strongly modelled gable ends visually anchored by a wide corbelled brick chimney at the northern end. Windows typically have steel framed multi-paned casements. Ornamental detailing is concentrated around the main entry, above which is a jettied half timbered gable end with herringbone brick infill. A garage wing abutting the front elevation has a half-timbered dormer. The exterior is otherwise sparsely detailed but achieves architectural interest through the powerful roof forms and massing.

The house remains substantially intact in terms of its streetscape presentation apart from a modest addition to the west side of the garage, the replacement of the garage door and repainting of the joinery and steel window frames in white (these elements are shaded brown on both the original architect's drawings and an early hand coloured photograph).¹³ A small, curved brick fence on the north side of the driveway has been rebuilt with a pedestrian gate. The brick fences and rusticated piers with orb finials found at the south side of the driveway entrance and at the north side of the rebuilt fence appear to be original. Various alterations and additions to the rear and side elevations have not diminished the integrity of the house as originally designed.

Aerial photographs of the site suggest that the garden layout is much changed from the original Edna Walling design.

Comparative Analysis

English Domestic Revival Styles

Sometimes referred to as Tudor, interwar Old English was an offshoot of the Arts and Crafts medievalism of the late nineteenth century, and shared that movement's values in terms of dark, natural colourings, a predominance of brickwork, the use of half timbering and a love of wrought iron and leadlight windows. Old English architecture was typified by the use of red or clinker brick, brick nogging and/or half timbering in gables or upper storeys, boldly modelled brick chimneys and terracotta tile roofs.

Steeply pitched roofs with gables rather than hips were a typical characteristic of the larger, two storey examples, though small suburban houses often had a combination of hips and gables. Walls were usually sheer rather than textured and ended flush with the gable of the roof. Sometimes manganese bricks or tiles or tapestry bricks were used to highlight openings and to decorate walls. Picturesque asymmetry was attained through double or triple fronts to the facade, arched porch entries, large, prominent chimneys and, in larger examples, oriel windows and towers.

Porches were generally small, and the traditional Australian verandah was not included except in some hybrid examples. Windows were of the sash or casement types, and often featured twelve panes or diamond pattern leadlight. Muted colours were appropriate to this

¹² Built Heritage Pty Ltd, "C Neville Hollinshed", *Dictionary of Unsung Architects*, www.builtheritage.com.au.

¹³ Stonnington Local History Catalogue Reg. No. MP 57239

style. Cream, off-white, buff, stone, terracotta and dark brown were most popular. Dark stained timber and red brick were the dominant materials, and cast iron painted black or a dark chocolate brown was also common.

A number of new economies in materials facilitated the rise of the English Domestic revival. The increasingly availability of seasoned hardwoods made possible the use of brick nogging and half-timbering, even in the most modest house. Added to this was the introduction of terracotta shingle tiles, manufactured by the Eureka tile company in their Ballarat kilns.

By the late 1920s, the inclusion of imitation half timbering in the black and white tradition declined although buildings continued to achieve medieval associations through picturesque massing of gabled and hipped roofs and through the application of elements such as leadlight windows. Architects also looked to the vernacular of Normandy for inspiration.

Architect Robert Hamilton was recognised as the foremost practitioner in this style, designing large and impeccably detailed houses and luxury flats. Other architects strongly associated with Old English/Tudor Revival include Philip Hudson, Eric Beedham and Arthur Plaisted.

The use of an external expression drawing heavily from medieval precedents became a means of expressing the solidity and longevity of British traditions. Old English or Tudor styled houses were associated with a profound Empire consciousness. Larger houses of the type exploited the associations of the manor to convey wealth and social status. A large Tudor house, no matter how new, somehow conveyed a sense that wealth, even recently achieved, was permanent. So common was the use of this idiom within the nouveau riche enclaves of Toorak and South Yarra that the essentially British term 'Stockbroker Tudor' gained popular usage.

Design in a true Old English mode runs right through the 1920s but it gained much greater momentum from the early 1930s as the bungalow and Spanish Mission began to wane in popularity. From this time it was taken up by a far greater proportion of the architectural profession, and began to appear as a builder's expression. Some of the more progressive designers in this mode, such as Edward Billson and Osborn McCutcheon, incorporated modern planning with careful zoning of spaces according to function. Few houses designed by either architects or builders took the opportunity to break away from revivalism in Old English design other than through the process of progressive simplification, the hallmark of late 1930s stylism. As the decade drew to a close the sentimentality and strong British associations of the academically detailed Old English were replaced by an expression which drew ever closer to the post-war multi-fronted multi-hipped and unadorned Australian suburban vernacular.

A substantial number of residences drawing inspiration from English Domestic revival were built in the well-heeled suburbs of Stonnington during the interwar period. Examples with individual heritage overlay controls currently include: 3 Hopetoun Road, Toorak (HO327), 429 Glenferrie Road, Malvern (HO313), 3 Illawara Crescent, Toorak (HO62), 8 Monaro Road, Kooyong (HO277) and 4 Struan Street, Toorak (HO168). 2 Ledbury Court compares favourably with these examples as a skillful interpretation of the Old English mode with a high level of external integrity. It is a distinctive and imposing design, notable for its use of traditional half-timbering to articulate the entry, in contrast to the bold simplicity of its principal gables. In this respect the 2 Ledbury Court demonstrates the trend towards simplification in domestic architecture of the 1930s.

Thematic Context

The house at 2 Ledbury Court, 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

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 Ledbury Court, Toorak is a large, double-storey Old English style residence designed by architect Charles Neville Hollinshed. It was built c1933 on land subdivided from the nineteenth century mansion estate Medindie (formerly 'The Elms').

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

- The original external form, materials and detailing of the building.
- The high level of external intactness.
- The unpainted state of face brick and terracotta elements.
- The legibility of the original form from the public domain.
- Original portions of the brick front fence.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The absence of visible on-site vehicle accommodation other than the original garage.

Modern alterations and additions do not contribute to the significance of the place.

How is it significant?

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

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as an impressive and largely intact Old English style residence (Criterion D). The imposing street façade is noteworthy for its strong gables and austere brick surfaces with a more elaborate half-timbered gable accentuating the entry (Criterion E). The house's modest front setback further contributes to its strong streetscape presence.

The house is of some historical interest as evidence of a major phase of development that took place in the 1920s and 1930s when many of Toorak's grand nineteenth century mansion estates were subdivided 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 houses generally, and Old English style houses in particular, 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 shown in figure 2. External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended. An A2 grading should be assigned to this building.

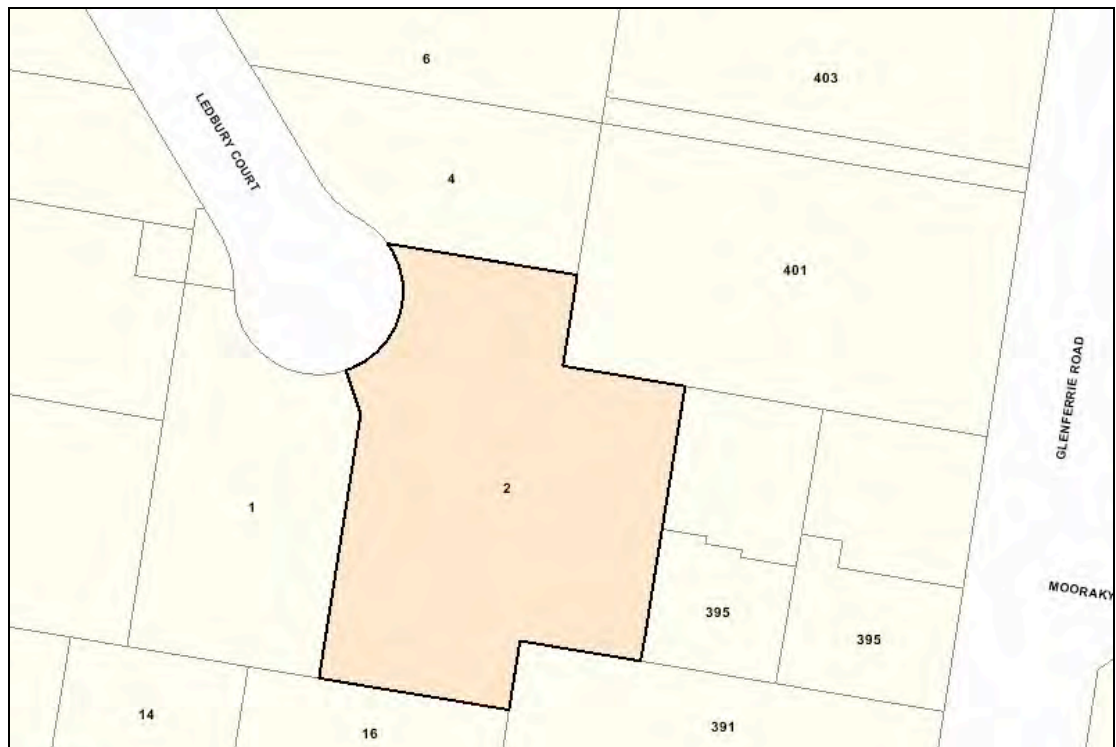


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay at 2 Ledbury Court, Toorak.