

13 Myamyn Street, Armadale Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 13 Myamyn Street, Armadale.

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

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

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 ever more prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators sought to create houses 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 within present day Stonnington. Walter Butler, Robert Bell 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

Crown portion 22(a), consisting of more than five acres of land at the north west corner of present day Glenferrie Road and High Street, was sold at the Crown land sales in February 1854. The allotment was purchased by publican George Smith, who became the licensee of the nearby Malvern Hill Hotel. In September 1868, Smith sold the land to solicitor Edward Charsley.²

By 1882, merchant George Stevenson had purchased Portion 22a and part 23a. The following year Stevenson built a two-storey 23 room mansion named Myamyn. The Myamyn estate was subdivided in 1887, creating residential allotments on Mercer Street and the western half of Myamyn Street, and business sites on High Street.³

In 1921, Myamyn was sold to property developer Mary Williams. The estate was then subdivided into fifteen allotments, including eight commercial sites on Glenferrie Road and residential lots on the north side of Myamyn Street.⁴ The subdivision left the Myamyn mansion standing on the south side of Myamyn Street (it was eventually demolished c1960).

In 1925, architect Robert Bell Hamilton submitted plans for a brick residence at Myamyn Street for A P Onians.⁵ Onians had earlier commissioned architect J F W Ballantyne to design his seaside home 'Stokesay' at Seaford, which was built in 1922 using Walter Burley Griffin's Knitlock construction method.

² Stonnington Local History Catalogue MH 12412.

³ Myamyn Estate, Malvern. State Library of Victoria.

⁴ Stonnington Local History Catalogue MH 14383

⁵ Stonnington Local History Catalogue MB 3487

Sands and McDougall directories first show Arthur P Onians at 13 Myamyn Street in 1927. The Onians named the house 'Fixby'⁶ and resided there until c1964.⁷

Robert Bell Hamilton

Robert Bell Hamilton was born in 1892 and educated at Scotch College. He served in the 14th Battalion of the AIF during WW1. After the armistice he studied in London to become an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

After his graduation, Hamilton remained in London where he designed a housing scheme for the Slough City Council before securing a position as the assistant to the government architect in Bombay, India in 1920. Two years later on his return to Melbourne, Hamilton formed a partnership with F L Klingender. The partnership with Klingender lasted until 1925 when Hamilton established his own practice. He was active in Melbourne until WWII and worked alone and in partnership with other architects such as Marcus Norris.

Initially, Hamilton had positioned himself within the Arts and Crafts vernacular and bungalow vocabulary, but in the subsequent years, he gradually eradicated the American influence from his work and by the late 1920s had become the foremost exponent of Old English styling in Melbourne. The August 1934 edition of *Art in Australia* observed the following of Hamilton's work:

*To those who seek the particular type of English domestic architecture that suggests comfort and romance, the age of the craftsman as William Morris knew it, the hundred and one charms and delights of old word cottages and the atmosphere of scented gardens, Mr Robert Hamilton's outlook should appeal. Every detail is a matter of consideration, carefully selected and hand-made whenever possible...*⁸

According to Peter Cuffley, Hamilton possessed a deep affection for romantic styles in architecture but was capable of working in a range of styles.⁹ Nonetheless, Hamilton is best remembered for his impeccably detailed Old English style flats and commercial buildings, including the highly regarded Denby Dale flats at 422-426 Glenferrie Road, Kooyong [an A1 graded building in the Kooyong heritage precinct (HO181)].

Hamilton served as a Prahran City Councillor and was later elected Member of the Legislative Assembly for Toorak in November 1945. He was both a parliamentarian and a Mornington Shire Councillor when he died on 15 May 1948.

While perhaps not a key architect in Melbourne in terms of leading the profession in any new directions, he was of considerable influence as a leading protagonist working in the revival styles important to the interwar era, producing a large number of impressive representative houses and commercial premises. Peter Cuffley provides a good summary of Hamilton's achievements:

*'... whether it was a small holiday bungalow, a country cottage, a Toorak mansion or a block of flats, Robert Bell Hamilton approached each work with equal concern for its integrity and with a great deal of artistry.'*¹⁰

⁶ *Argus*, 9 November 1937, p.7 & 26 May, 1942, p.5

⁷ Sands and McDougall directories.

⁸ Quoted from Peter Cuffley, *Australian Houses of the '20s and '30s*, p.116.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.117.

Description

13 Myamyn Street is an English Domestic Revival style attic storey residence with a compact plan form and strongly expressed intersecting gables. The roof is clad in terracotta shingles and punctuated by tall, simply detailed chimneys. Darker terracotta shingles are used for gable infill, which sit on bracketed eaves above attic storey windows. Clinker brick is used for the walls, relieved by thin bricks or tiles framing the attic storey windows. A shallow skillion roof runs across the façade sheltering the entry porch and adjacent windows. The entry porch has timber Old English style posts and brackets. The double-hung timber framed windows with diamond pattern leadlight glazing are also characteristic of the Old English mode.

The house is virtually intact in so far as it presents to the street apart from an apparently non-original window frame in the lower west gable end. The original architectural drawings show a different round arched entry porch design, which was presumably not built.

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 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.

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.

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 were built in the English Domestic revival style in the well-heeled suburbs of Stonnington during the interwar period. Houses in this mode with individual heritage controls currently include: 3 Hopetoun Road, Toorak (HO327), 429 Glenferrie Road, Malvern (HO313), 3 Illawara Crescent, Toorak (HO62), 48-50 Irving Road, Toorak (HO158), Grenfell, 9 Mernda Road, Kooyong (HO244), 8 Monaro Road, Kooyong (HO277) and Robert Bell Hamilton's 4 Struan Street, Toorak (HO168). While 13 Myamyn Street is not as grandly proportioned as most of these houses, it is a strong and distinctive design combining some reasonably common Old English style characteristics with elements drawn from the East Coast American Shingle style. In particular, the house is unusual in avoiding the local characteristic of Old English half-timbering in favour of gable ends with terracotta shingle infill evocative of the Shingle style. The Shingle style occurs far less frequently in Melbourne than in Sydney where its influence is keenly felt in the work of Canadian émigré architect John Horbury Hunt and later architects such as B J Waterhouse. Waterhouse's own residence 'The Gables' in the Sydney suburb of Neutral Bay (1919) is strikingly similar to 13 Myamyn Street and could well have been the model for Hamilton's design.

Thematic Context

The house at 13 Myamyn Street, Armadale 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 13 Myamyn Street, Armadale is an attic storey English Domestic Revival style building with Shingle style overtones. It was built c1926 to designs by the noted interwar

architect Robert Bell Hamilton. The house site was created through a subdivision of the nineteenth century Myamyn mansion estate.

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 unpainted state of the brick and terracotta elements.
- The highly intact condition of the exterior.
- The legibility of the original built form in views from the public realm.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The low height of the brick front fence.
- The visually unobtrusive character and siting of the garage.

How is it significant?

The house at 13 Myamyn Street, Armadale is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as an impressive and highly intact interwar English Domestic Revival style house by renowned architect Robert Bell Hamilton (Criterion D). It is notable for its strongly composed gable roof form, evoking the East Coast American Shingle style (Criterion E).

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 Stonnington'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 English Domestic Revival style houses in particular, as symbols of wealth, status and taste for Melbourne's middle and 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 an A2 grading be assigned to the building.

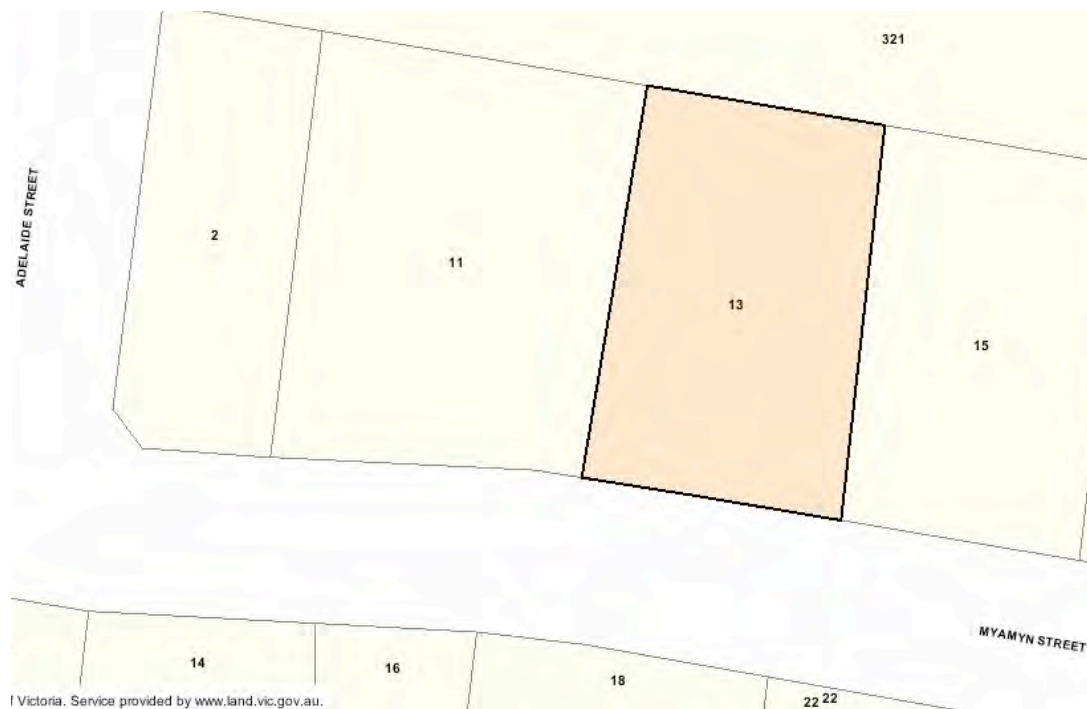


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay at 13 Myamyn Street, Armadale.