

## Winster, 17 Tintern Avenue, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 17 Tintern Avenue, 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*’.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 Hamilton, Marcus Martin and Rodney Alsop were among the notable architects whose work is well represented in Toorak. Not surprisingly, a number of these successful 'society' architects designed and built their own houses among those of their wealthy clients.

### Place History

At the auction of Crown Land in June 1849, Thomas Colclough purchased lots 31 and 32, bounded by the present day Toorak, Williams, Malvern and Canterbury Roads. Colclough subdivided lot 32 into large estates with frontages to Williams Road. He erected a comfortable home for himself at the north corner of the lot, named Tintern, after Tintern Abbey, Ireland. In 1855, Colclough's original house was replaced by a more ornate prefabricated iron dwelling manufactured in Glasgow. The ten roomed dwelling was erected on twelve acres of land for William Westgarth, eminent pioneer colonist, author, merchant and radical politician.<sup>2</sup>

James Kearney's map of 1855 shows Tintern's well-wooded allotment at the corner of Gardiners Creek Road (now Toorak Road) and Williams Road. Also shown is a substantial villa on cleared land to the south of Tintern. The house, was owned by William Henry Dodd and occupied by James Ainsley. Around 1873-4, chemist William Bowen purchased the property. Bowen's house was named Woodside and by 1882 had increased to 14 rooms. In 1885-6, Bowen subdivided the Woodside Estate into 19 allotments and created Woodside Crescent. The house was retained on 2 acres of land. In 1886, the estate, including the house with its new entrance from Woodside Crescent, was sold to solicitor George Skinner. Most of the allotments in Woodside Crescent were immediately sold.<sup>3</sup>

The 1895 MMBW plan shows Woodside at the time of Skinner's ownership, with its formal garden, summer houses, gravelled carriage drive, fernery and fruit garden, at the end of Woodside Crescent. Houses lined both sides of the street and the creek running along Woodside's southern boundary had been barrelled drained.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Stonnington Local History Catalogue Reg. No. PH9398

<sup>3</sup> Stonnington Local History Catalogue Reg. No. PH9392

<sup>4</sup> MMBW Detail Plan No. 972. State Library of Victoria

Tintern's grounds were subdivided in 1902 and Tintern Avenue was created. Further subdivision of Woodside appears to have occurred in the interwar period.

In 1927, architect Rodney Alsop had a house built for himself on the south side of Tintern Avenue, adjacent to the old Woodside residence. A newspaper article in March 1927 describes Alsop's house as 'nearing completion'.<sup>5</sup> Named 'Winster', the house was featured in *Australian Home Beautiful* February 1928 as the first in a series on notable Australian homes.<sup>6</sup> Under the heading '*A Spanish House that is True to Type*' the reviewer was critical of the increasingly superficial character of Spanish style suburban house design, in contrast to Alsop's carefully considered approach to the idiom:

*'... there is no term so overworked or misapplied in the Australian architectural vocabulary as "Spanish" ... Take any building which is rough dashed and bears two or three ill-proportioned arches at its entrance, cordova tiles on its roof, and possibly an iron grille at the hall door, you will find its designer dubbing it 'Spanish architecture' ... if you are sufficiently courageous to enter through the arches you will find the illusion ends in a sudden manner for you will find yourself walking into what is nothing more than a suburban villa.'*<sup>7</sup>

The review found the interior of Alsop's house to be as satisfying as the exterior, praising the '*extreme refinement of detail, the exquisite delicacy of the design, the good proportions and the restrained use of colour*'.<sup>8</sup> The *Australian Home Beautiful* article also emphasises the suitability of the Mediterranean style to Australian conditions, a popular theme in contemporary architectural journals, and Alsop's first had knowledge of the style gained through his European travels:

*If we are going to build Spanish houses in Australia, and it must be acknowledged that the conditions in many of our States are particularly suited to this style of architecture architects who have intimate personal knowledge of the country whose architecture we wish to emulate...*

*... the house for the climate like ours, in which a semi-outdoor life can be led, may well be adapted from those of the South of Europe – and this Mr Rodney Alsop, the well known Australian Architect, who is Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, has most successfully achieved in his own house in Tintern Avenue, Toorak, Victoria ...*

*There is nothing forced or artificial looking in its appearance. The house suits the climate, the position, and the requirements of the owners.*<sup>9</sup>

Not long after the construction of his new Tintern Avenue house, Alsop and architect Conrad Sayce won an international competition for the design of the Hackett Memorial Buildings at the University of Western Australia. Alsop and his wife subsequently divided their time between Melbourne and Perth, renting Winster to Mr and Mrs J Sargood in 1928.<sup>10</sup> Alsop later returned to Winster, where he died unexpectedly on 26 October, 1932.<sup>11</sup>

### Rodney Alsop

Architect Rodney Howard Alsop (1881-1932) was born on 22 December 1881 at Kew, Melbourne. He showed great gifts as a child in both drawing and model-making, skills encouraged by his poor health which kept him in passive convalescence. While still at school

<sup>5</sup> *Table Talk*, 31 March 1927, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Australian Home Beautiful*, 1 February 1928, pp. 13-19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Australasian*, 7 April 1928, p.13.

<sup>11</sup> *Argus*, 27 October, 1932, p.6.

he worked on Saturday mornings for the architects Hyndman and Bates, to whom he was articulated in 1901. After admission to the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1906, Alsop entered partnership with Frederick Louis Klingender, an older, well-established architect. This practice produced some of the finest Arts and Crafts style houses in the country, including Glyn, 224 Kooyong Road, Toorak (Victorian Heritage Register No. H735). Alsop was reputedly the designer, and Klingender the practical partner.

Alsop was a foundation member of the Victorian Arts and Crafts Society and a respected designer of furniture. He also shared a skill in landscape design with his wife Dorothy Hope whom he had married in June 1912. Their only child died in 1915.

After World War I, Alsop turned towards an arcaded Italian Renaissance mode, which, by the 1920s, after travel to Spain, developed into the popular Mediterranean style. Alsop promoted the cause of Mediterranean design through various articles appearing in the *Australian Home Beautiful* of 1926. In these articles he described the buildings of Spain and Italy and promoted the synthesis of Mediterranean idioms with an acceptably British style such as Georgian or Colonial to create a uniquely Australian hybrid.

In his mature years, Alsop was a fellow of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. He was an active member of its board of architectural education, and in 1919 was appointed first director of the University of Melbourne's architectural atelier. Alsop and his assistant at the atelier, Leighton Irwin, were the single most powerful influence on students of design in the period, and it is no doubt largely due to their interest in Mediterranean idioms that these were to come so strongly to the fore in the following years.

In 1927, Alsop and Conrad Sayce won first place in a limited international competition for the design of the Hackett Memorial Buildings at the University of Western Australia. Built in 1931 in an early Renaissance style with the towered Winthrop Hall at its centerpiece, the design is considered Alsop's crowning achievement.

Rodney Alsop died suddenly of bronchitis and asthma on 26 October 1932, not long after having been awarded the 1932 bronze medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects for Winthrop Hall. Survived by his wife, he was buried in Brighton cemetery.

## Description

Winstar at 17 Tintern Avenue, Toorak is a double-storey whitewashed brick residence, sited towards the rear of a long rectangular block with the main garden to the front. The property is entered through an elaborate wrought iron gate opening onto a narrow path screened from the main garden by a high brick fence. An arched gate attached to the north east corner of the house provides access to the main garden. The house brings elements of Mediterranean architecture into an austere symmetrical Georgian revival format. The refined, sparsely detailed façade has an arcaded ground floor loggia with Tuscan order columns. The first floor has three multi-paned steel-framed windows opening onto shallow balconies with elegant wrought iron railings.

The front loggia has been partly enclosed in a broadly sympathetic fashion with multi-pane windows. Early photographs of the house show a continuous first floor window hood or awning with three small ovoid elements above (possibly wall penetrations). These features are no longer evident. Despite this, the façade remains clearly legible to its 1920s form. At the rear of the house, a garage opening onto Woodside Crescent was enlarged c1989.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>City of Stonnington Property File B36600-879.

## Comparative Analysis

### *Interwar Mediterranean*

Alongside the revivalist neo-Georgian and Colonial idioms there developed a strong Mediterranean movement that was to have a significant impact on not only the architecture of the 1920s but also the development of modernism in Melbourne in the 1930s. The rise of the Mediterranean idiom gained its impetus from two major sources - the influence of American publications advertising their interest in the Mediterranean and the Californian Spanish Colonial Revival, and the example set by those Melbourne architects and educators who, either through academic publications on the vernacular idioms of the different Mediterranean regions or through travel itself, realised the suitability of such idioms for coping with the light and climates of the major Australian suburban centres. The underlying theme of all contemporary writings on the style is its potential as the basis for the creation of a national style, climatically congenial and appropriately modern.

In 1920 architects Leighton Irwin and Roy Stevenson returned from Europe, where they had become interested in the simply planned houses of Italy, Spain and southern France. In a published 1922 design they combined plain stuccoed walls, a hipped roof with generous eaves, French windows with Georgian fanlights and a columned loggia surmounted by a balcony. At the same time architect W A M Blackett was also urging architects to look toward the Mediterranean and experiment with combinations of the locally approved Georgian with elements taken from southern Europe.

By the mid-1920s the various Mediterranean/Spanish idioms had taken a vigorous hold on the domestic work of many of the more prominent architects in Melbourne. Beside the houses of Irwin & Stevenson, Gawler & Drummond and Rodney Alsop one finds examples by Marcus Martin, Arthur Plaisted, Barlow & Hawkins and F L & R Klingender.

It is apparent from contemporary advertisements of speculative building companies that the mode had spread to domestic projects in which architects were to have little or no direct involvement. Such examples saw Spanish detailing such as parged stucco and arched porches merged with what was basically Californian bungalow form. Other examples took a more thorough approach to the style, with multi-angular Cordova tiled hipped roofs, above a Spanish porch with baroque parapet and twisted columns. The walls buildings of such buildings commonly had roughcast or rough trowelled render to provide a pattern or texture. Baroque parapets, twisted columns of precast concrete, cartouches, medallions and coats of arms were also common on the facade. Windows were usually double hung, often with twelve panes, and often had an arched panel above, *in lieu* of, or to suggest an arched opening. Wrought iron was sometimes used around windows or doors, usually in the form of a decorative grille.

Spanish styles were in full stride by the end of the 1920s, but began to lose favour with architects in the early '30s. The idiom continued to be used, but most examples were the work of builders. A continuing tradition of design in hybrid Mediterranean/Georgian modes, was, however, to become a hallmark of domestic architecture in Melbourne's elite suburbs in the 1930s. Newly imported Moderne and International idioms were absorbed into these house designs, clearly illustrating the sympathy of aesthetic between historicist and modern styles. Stripped of decorative detail by the more progressive architects, their simple forms became the basis for the emergence of a local modern vernacular, best exemplified in the seaside houses or rural work of Grounds, Mewton and Seabrook.

In the context of the City of Stonnington, 17 Tintern Avenue bears close comparison with Marcus Martin's polite Mediterranean style houses, particularly his own 1926 residence at 6 Glyndebourne Avenue, Toorak (HO264). The Mediterranean style is usually more flamboyantly expressed in other houses in the municipality with individual heritage overlays, such as 762 Orrong Road (HO90) and 719 Toorak Road, Toorak (HO344).

### **Thematic Context**

Winstler at 17 Tintern Avenue, 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
- 8.4.3 - Architects and their houses

### **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?*

Winstler at 17 Tintern Avenue, Toorak is a 1927 double-storey interwar Mediterranean style house with white-painted brick walls. It was built for and designed by important Melbourne architect Rodney Alsop.

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 relatively high level of integrity, despite modern alterations.
- The domestic garden setting, including aspects of the original garden design by Alsop, such as the brick wall along the side path and the curved concrete pond (if it survives).
- The front fence and wrought iron gate.
- The absence of modern vehicle accommodation in the house's front and side setbacks.

Modern elements, including the loggia infill glazing, do not contribute to the significance of the place.

#### *How is it significant?*

Winstler is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

#### *Why is it significant?*

Winstler is architecturally significant as a fine and largely intact interwar Mediterranean style house (Criterion D). It demonstrates architect Rodney Alsop's concern for developing a national, climatically appropriate style of architecture through a fusion of the Spanish vernacular idiom and British Georgian revival formality. The house's plain, largely unadorned wall surfaces, the low unobtrusive roof form and the simple massing point to the emergence of a modern design aesthetic in the 1930s.

Winstler derives some additional significance from its association with architect Rodney Alsop, an early and influential advocate of Mediterranean style architecture (8.4.3 - Architects and their houses, Criterion H).

Winstler is also 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).

### 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. The place should retain its current A2 grading.

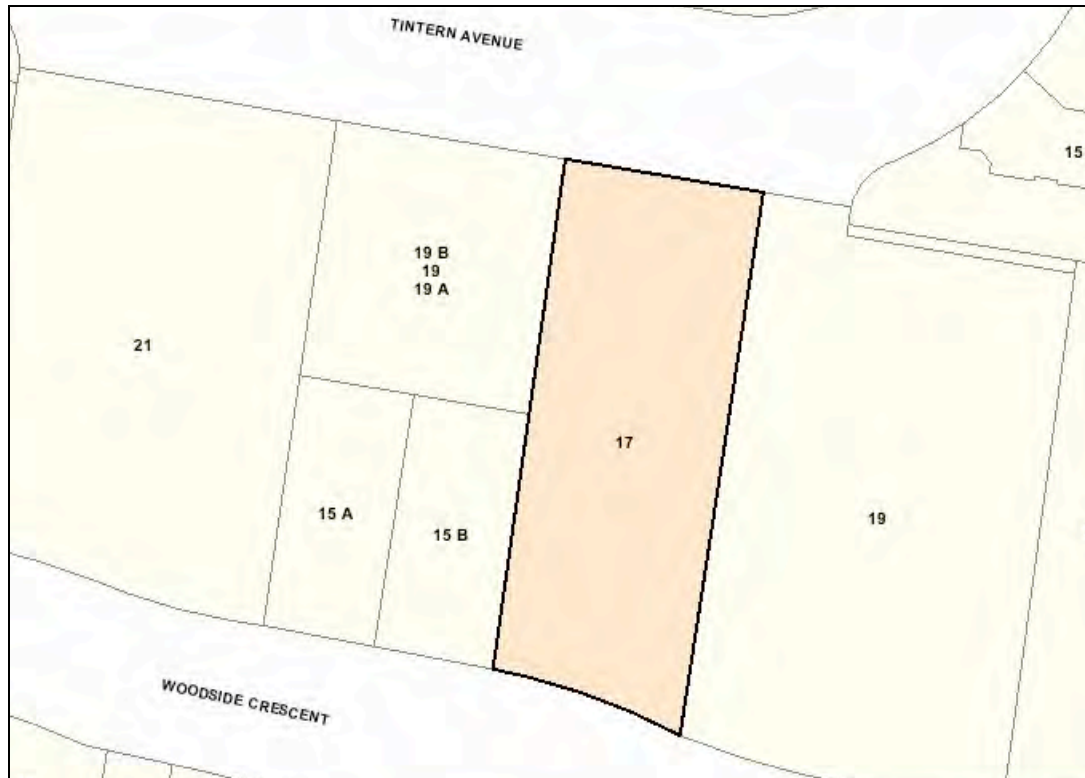


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 17 Tintern Avenue, Toorak.