

20 Heyington Place, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 2 20 Heyington Place, 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

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 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

By the end of the nineteenth century Heyington Place was well established as a prestigious residential enclave of mansions on large estates. A 1905 MMBW plan shows three mansions on the east side of the Heyington Place – Corry, Dalmeny and Tyalla – each with rear boundaries to Kooyong Road.² Dalmeny was built c1891 for W H Glen, an importer of musical instruments.³ By the early 1900s, it was the town residence of Charles Mills, owner of the Uardry sheep station near Hay, New South Wales.⁴

In May 1931, Dalmeny was subdivided and five 'magnificent' allotments were offered for sale.⁵ The mansion was retained on a reduced curtilage with one new allotment to its south fronting Heyington Place (i.e. 20 Heyington Place) and four allotments to its rear fronting Kooyong Road.

The 1933 Sands and McDougall directory describe a 'house being built' on present day 20 Heyington Place. The house was built for manufacturer and grazier Henry Esmond Spry. Spry's wife Violet is named as the owner on the first MMBW property service plan of 1932.⁶ The architect was A Mortimer McMillan, a skilled practitioner in the Old English style.⁷

²MMBW Detail Plan Nos. 930 & 931.State Library of Victoria.

³*Australasian*, 11 October, p.44.

⁴Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area Seven*, p.21.

⁵*Argus*, 30 May 1931, p.2.

⁶ MMBW Property Service Plan No 190006.

⁷Photocopy of original plans by McMillan, held in City of Stonnington Property File 6875.520BL. McMillan is also named as the agent on MMBW Plan of Drainage No 190006.

Contemporary newspaper articles refer to the Spry house as 'Devenescire'.⁸ It was listed as 16 Heyington Place until 1956 when it was renumbered 20. Sands and McDougall directories continue to show Henry Spry at this address until the mid 1960s.

Description

The site at 20 Heyington Place, Toorak is occupied by a large, skilfully designed double-storey interwar Old English style house. It has clinker brick walls and a varied hipped and gabled terracotta shingle roof punctuated by tall brick chimneys. Windows typically have timber sash frames with diamond pattern leadlight glazing characteristic of the Old English mode. The front elevation is dominated by an imposing asymmetrical gable end, supporting a broad chimney. The principal hipped roof sweeps down over the centre of the façade to cover a recessed entry porch. A projecting double-storey bay on the south side of the porch has a faceted ground floor window and half-timbered first floor. Further architectural interest is created by varied brick detailing, including the herringbone gable infill and the lozenge pattern diaper work on the front chimney. Arches over a select number of windows are expressed by projecting brick stretchers. Chimneys have finely detailed shafts with arched recessed panels. The front boundary is enclosed by a low clinker brick fence with battered gate piers supporting wrought iron gates and carriage lamps.

The exterior of the house is virtually unchanged from McMillan's original plans apart from a modest extension to the front of the garage, built c1993.⁹ The metal palisade on top of the front fence also appears to be a modern addition. The brick component of the fence is sympathetic to the house and may be an original or early item.

Comparative Analysis

English Domestic Revival Styles

Commonly referred to as Tudor or Old English, the English Domestic revival 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

⁸Argus, 18 March, 1935, p.4&Australasian, 23 March, 1935, p.12.

⁹City of Stonnington Property File 6875.520BL

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 sources were built in the well-heeled suburbs of Stonnington during the interwar period. Examples in this mode with individual heritage 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). 20 Heyington Road compares favourably as one of the largest, most intact and most sophisticated design within this group. The dynamic façade articulation and attention to detail set it apart from the more conventional examples at 3 Hopetoun Road, 3 Illawara Crescent and 8 Monaro Road. 20 Heyington Road also has an imposing scale, rivalling 429 Glenferrie Road and 4 Struan Street.

Thematic Context

The house at 20 Heyington Place, 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 large double-storey Old English style house at 20 Heyington Place, Toorak was constructed in 1933 to designs by architect A Mortimer McMillan. It was built on land subdivided from the grounds of the nineteenth century mansion Dalmeny.

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

- The original external form, materials and detailing.
- The virtually intact exterior.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The legibility of the original form in views from the public realm.
- The understated presence of on-site vehicle accommodation
- The low clinker brick front fence.

Modern fabric, including the garage extension, is not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 20 Heyington Place, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as one of the most impressive Old English style residences in the municipality (Criterion D). It has a strong but carefully articulated façade with intricate detailing demonstrating architect A Mortimer McMillan's talent for design in this mode.

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 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 20 Heyington Place, Toorak.