

22 Hopetoun Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 22 Hopetoun 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

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

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 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 revival and Old English modes.

Place History

Crown Portion 25 included 84 acres of elevated land, bounded by present day Toorak, Glenferrie and Malvern Roads and the line of Denham Place. It was purchased for £151 at the second sale of Crown land in 1849 by John Sullivan, assistant to the Colonial surgeon for the Port Phillip District. Land prices spiralled out of control after the discovery gold, such that English barrister Charles Skinner paid £10,972 for Sullivan's land when it was sold in 1853.

On Lot 25 Skinner planed a village to be named 'Ledbury' after the quaint market town on the slopes of the Malvern Hills in England, where his forebears had lived. Skinner's Malvern Hill Estate was mainly divided into small allotments, bisected by Malvern Hill Road (renamed Hopetoun Road in 1901 in honour of Australia's first Governor General). Without public transport or local industry to sustain it, Skinner's vision of an English style village, complete with church and school, did not succeed and much of the land reverted to pasture. As the scattered cottages of Skinner's village gradually disappeared, many small allotments were consolidated and the vacant land began to attract wealthier purchasers. Malvern Hill Road became the site of several grand residences built for prosperous merchants and professionals.

One newly rich Melbourne citizen who was attracted to the elevated land in Malvern Hill Road was ironmonger Peter Langwill. In 1890, Langwill built 'Kola', an elaborate mansion of fifteen rooms on the corner of School Street (now Stonnington Place).² The mansion with its distinctive corner turret and timber verandahs, included reception, dining and smoke rooms, four bedrooms, dressing room, morning room, two maids' rooms, sewing room and maids hall. Prior to his death in 1905, Langwill renamed the house 'Narveno'.

² Stonnington Local History Catalogue MP 5011.

In 1928, the property was subdivided into '10 magnificent residential sites', retaining the mansion. Lot 3 of the Narveno estate (fronting Hopetoun Road) was sold to R Williams Thompson for £25. Three years later, Thompson sold the vacant allotment to Mrs Muriel Rodd.³

In 1932, plans were submitted for a 'New brick residence Hopetoun Road for Mrs Rodd' [by] Blackett and Forster architects.⁴ As indicated on the MMBW drainage plan, the house was completed that year. The Malvern Rate books list Mrs Muriel Rodd as the owner/occupier of a brick house on lot 3 in Hopetoun Road in 1933. The house was later renumbered 22 Hopetoun Road. The Narveno mansion was demolished in 1966, the site now being occupied by houses.

In 1958, Malvern Council building records show alterations and additions to the rear of 22 Hopetoun Road, both at the ground floor of the living room and also at first floor directly above.⁵ Building permits were issued in 1984 for alterations, mainly confined to the interior but also including some modifications to window and door openings on the rear and concealed south (side) elevations.⁶ A permit was issued in 1991 for works to the garage area.⁷ More recently, a permit was issued in 2006 for alterations and additions, including a glazed carport roof and modest single-storey addition to the south side of the rear wing.⁸

Blackett and Forster

William Arthur Mordey Blackett (1873-1962), architect and educator, studied in Melbourne before spending time working in Western Australia. Soon after his return to Melbourne, he was in a short but prolific partnership with Thomas Herbert Power Rankin between 1900-03, and the following decade practised under his own name. During this time Blackett's cousin, William Blackett Forster (1886-1947), served articles with the firm and joined him as partner in 1914, as Blackett & Forster. Forster enlisted in 1915 and served on the western front where he lost an arm. When he returned to work as an architect he used a special drafting machine supplied by the repatriation department. The early work of the practice maintained Blackett's focus on residential work, and they are remembered as one of a small number of local firms to draw directly upon aspects of the American Craftsman idiom, including houses at 312 Glenferrie Road, Malvern (c1913) and Road's End, Berwick (c1921). Mediterranean influences became predominant in work of the later 1920s, with a large house at 9 Gordon Grove South Yarra being a particularly fine example of Spanish Mission revivalism. The firm was engaged to produce designs at various locations throughout Melbourne's wealthier suburbs, including Kew, Toorak, Canterbury and Malvern, and was particularly active in the Brighton area. Throughout the 1920s, Blackett & Forster began to receive larger commissions, with several city buildings in a restrained Georgian expression. In 1929, the firm received the inaugural RVIA Street Architecture medal for Francis House, Collins Street. Blackett's association with Forster dissolved c1932, although Blackett continued to practice alone (Forster apparently ceased practising). Much of Blackett's energy was devoted to professional and community matters, including his membership in, and various presidencies of the RVIA and RAIA, and his articles for Australian Home Beautiful and the RVIA Journal. In 1952 Blackett was awarded a life fellowship of the RAIA.

³ City of Malvern rate book, North Ward, 1931-32, no.846

⁴ Malvern Building Plan 1046004900.

⁵ Stonnington Local History Centre, Malvern Building Plan 1046004900

⁶ City of Malvern Property File 1641/Part 1

⁷ City of Malvern Property File 1641/Part 1

⁸ City of Stonnington Property File BL1283-2006-0097-0.

Description

The house at 22 Hopetoun Road, Toorak is an elegant carefully designed and detailed Georgian Revival style residence also drawing on Mediterranean antecedents. It has a hipped terracotta shingle roof, slightly belled out at the eaves. A small projecting bay creates an entrance with an elegant swan neck pediment. Apart from the decorative face brickwork to the chimneys and the fence, the house has a textured rendered finish. Fenestration is simple multi-paned windows with shutters. The projecting bay and the garage to the side are linked to the house by a sweeping parapet, creating a pleasantly informal asymmetry. The house incorporates some elements characteristic of the Mediterranean style, such as wrought iron work and a cantilevered balcony supported on paired console brackets. There is a decorative grille on a small stair window below the balcony and a decorative screen door in the entry porch and front gates.

The house and landscape were carefully integrated in the original design. The rear lawn is enclosed on the south side by single-storey outbuildings of a picturesque design and a concave garden wall containing a pond and formal paving.

The house appears to be essentially intact as it presents to the street. Various changes to the rear and side elevations are effectively concealed from view and have not diminished the integrity of the building as originally designed.

Comparative Analysis

Interwar Georgian and Mediterranean Revival

Georgian architecture is understood as the style developed in England during the reigns of the first three Georges. In general terms it is seen to have grown out of an re-examination of the work of Andrea Palladio, the noted architect of the late Italian renaissance. The foundations of English Georgian architecture were laid by Sir Christopher Wren and others towards the end of the seventeenth century and developed over the following century into an accepted mode for both public and domestic buildings.

During the 1920s, buildings in the Georgian and Regency revival styles constructed in the United States and to a lesser degree the work of English revivalists, such as Edwin Lutyens, promoted a resurgence of interest in these modes amongst local architects. The interest in Georgian architecture also resulted from a continued desire for the creation of a national idiom through a search for a local vernacular, which in Australia was equated with Colonial Georgian buildings of the early nineteenth century.

In Melbourne, architects Marcus Martin, Harold Desbrowe Annear, Rodney Alsop and Walter Butler all incorporated aspects of the Georgian style along with Californian and Mediterranean influences into their domestic projects. 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.

Among Melbourne architects, W A M Blackett was an early advocate of climatically appropriate design based on a synthesis of the Georgian and Mediterranean modes. In his 1922 article in Desbrowe Annear's *For Every Man His Home* Blackett urged architects to look toward the Mediterranean and experiment with combination of the locally approved Georgian

with elements taken from Southern Europe.⁹ He included a design to demonstrate these principles, which has some similarities with 22 Hopetoun Road. Other houses in Stonnington that exemplify this approach include Marcus Martin's residence at 8 Glyndebourne Avenue, Toorak (HO265) and 14 St Georges Road, Toorak (also recommended for an individual heritage overlay). The house at 22 Hopetoun Road compares favourably with these examples in terms of its architectural quality and intactness. It clearly represents the preferences of architect W A M Blackett for a national style derived from Georgian and Mediterranean idioms. It is not an especially large house by Toorak standards but is noteworthy for its meticulous detailing and high integrity.

Thematic Context

The house at 22 Hopetoun 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 22 Hopetoun Road, Toorak is a double-storey interwar Georgian Revival style residence with Mediterranean influences. It was built in 1932 to the design of architects Blackett and Forster, on land subdivided from the Victorian mansion estate 'Narveno'.

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 legibility of the original built form from the public realm.
- The domestic garden setting including the tiled driveway and entry path.
- The absence of modern vehicle accommodation in views from the street.
- The brick front fence and wrought iron gates.

Modern additions and alterations to the rear and side elevations are not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 22 Hopetoun Road, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as a refined, meticulously detailed and highly intact interwar Georgian Revival residence with Mediterranean elements, typifying the restrained

⁹ Bryce Raworth, *A Question of Style: Inter-war Domestic Architecture*, Master of Architecture Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993, p. 78.

Toorak architecture of this period (Criterion D). It is an excellent example of the work of the distinguished architectural practice of Blackett and Forster.

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 refined Georgian/Mediterranean revival 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 building should be assigned an A2 grading.

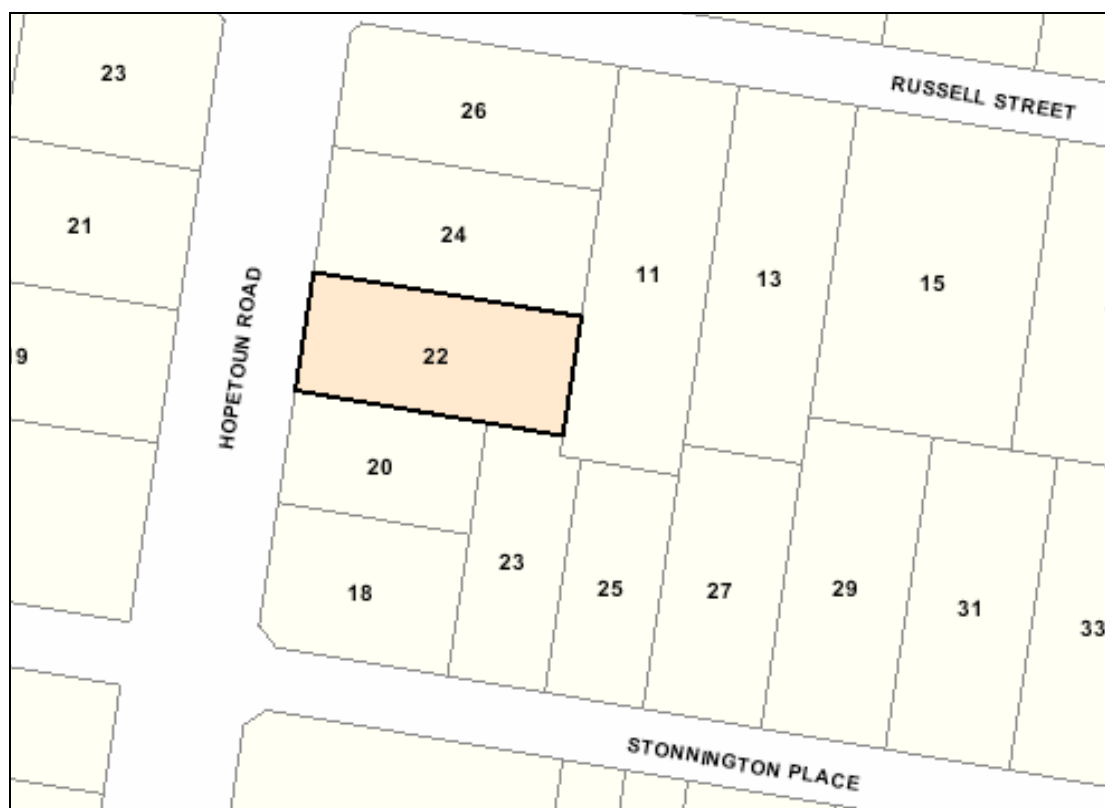


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 22 Hopetoun Road, Toorak.