

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Whernside (formerly named Belcroft)

Address: 2A Whernside Avenue, Toorak

Designer: Harold Desbrowe Annear

Builder: Unknown

HO Reference: HO117

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 25 October 2023

Year of Construction: 1876



Photograph of Whernside (source: Collins, J. (1976). Toorak. 'Whernside' [picture]).



Location map and extent of HO117.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings

Heritage Type: Mansion

Key Theme: Buildings Suburbs

Key Sub-theme: Creating Australia's most 'prestigious' suburbs – seats of the mighty – mansions estates in the 19th century

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as an individually significant place on the HO; tree controls recommended in relation to the mature palm trees (*arecaceae*).

Controls:	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input type="checkbox"/> Internal alterations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tree controls
	<input type="checkbox"/> Victorian Heritage Register	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporated Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Prohibited uses may be permitted	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 2A Whernside Avenue, Toorak, (otherwise known as Whernside, and formerly known as Belcroft) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the substantial 1876 mansion and the mature palm trees (*arecaceae*) are of local heritage significance. The front fence, pool, tennis courts and remaining landscaping are not significant.

How is it significant?

Whernside is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington, and is architecturally rare as a late Victorian mansion that has been extensively altered with Arts and Crafts characteristics.

Why is it significant?

Whernside is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of late Victorian mansions on estates within Toorak during the late 19th century. Originally the residence of politician Sir James Lorimer, the mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the southeastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the mid to late 19th century period. The palm trees are historical significance as early plantings associated with the former estate. (Criterion A)

Whernside possesses rare architectural qualities, as a late Victorian mansion that has been extensively altered with Arts and Crafts characteristics. There are few recorded sites of such scale within the City of Stonnington that possess these qualities or characteristics. (Criterion B)

Whernside has aesthetic significance as a high-quality example of a late Victorian mansion that has been extensively altered with Arts and Crafts extensions and decorations. The Victorian characteristics include the use of stucco render, polygonal bays, scale, decorative dental bracketing, arched windows, and hipped slate roofing. The Arts and Crafts characteristics include the use of roughcast render, timber cladding on window boxes, unadorned chimneys, and elliptical windows reflective of Harold Desbrowe-Anneer's design. Although it is not highly visible, the building is a landmark residence in Toorak owing to the scale, deep setback and architectural interest. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Whernside demonstrates the development of late Victorian mansions within the suburb during the late 19 th century. Originally the residence of politician Sir James Lorimer, the mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development associated with Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the mid to late 19th century. The palm trees are historical significance as early plantings associated with the former estate.
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<i>B</i>	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	Whernside possesses rare architectural qualities, as a late Victorian mansion that has been extensively altered with Arts and Crafts characteristics. There are few recorded sites of such scale within the City of Stonnington that possess these qualities or characteristics.
<i>C</i>	<i>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>D</i>	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Whernside has aesthetic significance as a high-quality example of a late Victorian mansion that has been extensively altered with Arts and Crafts extensions and decorations. The Victorian characteristics include the use of stucco render, polygonal bays, scale, decorative dental bracketing, arched windows, and hipped slate roofing. The Arts and Crafts characteristics include the use of roughcast render, timber cladding on window boxes, unadorned chimneys, and elliptical windows reflective of Harold Desbrowe-Anneer's design. Although it is not highly visible, the building is a landmark residence in Toorak owing to the scale, deep setback and architectural interest.
<i>F</i>	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>G</i>	<i>Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>H</i>	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

- Physical Analysis

Visibility of this property was poor when Extent Heritage undertook the physical inspection. Desktop based resources have been primarily used to understand the physical setting of the place.

Whernside is a large two-storey mansion originally built in a Victorian Italianate style but with later Arts and Crafts alterations. The mansion has undergone several remodels and extensions and its present form comprises three distinct wings in the form of the main centre original house, a large southern wing, and a smaller northern wing.

The centre wing presents an asymmetrical façade with a gable roof projection to the left typical of the Italianate style. The main entrance is centred and raised up a flight of steps to reach the covered entrance porch. The entrance porch is framed by a wide arch. Above the entrance porch is a covered balcony with a Serlian or Palladian window opening. Arched double hung timber sash windows punctuate the façade of the wings. The floors in the centre wing are characterised by string courses featuring feathered mouldings. Bracketed cornice eaves cap the first storey and feature leaf mouldings under the brackets and flower shaped mouldings between the brackets. The rear of the centre wing overlooking the backyard and swimming pool feature a simpler façade with a centred covered porch and verandah with the same Serlian window façade profile. There is a small single storey conservatory between the centre and south wing. The front of the centre wing features a double hipped roof and the back terminating in a flat roof. The roofs have metal ridge capping. There are seven chimneys extending from the roof featuring three different heights. The highly detailed stuccoed chimneys feature sunk mouldings, paired brackets and an arched cap in a typical Italianate form.

The single storey south wing is the larger of the two extending wings of the mansion. It has three distinct sections comprising two larger sections flanking a smaller center section with a distinct clerestory window with a hipped roof. The front section of the south wing overlooking the front driveway has a hipped roof and a large open verandah. It has similar arched windows and three short chimneys with a turbine chimney cap. The back of the south section overlooking the swimming pool has large three pane arched full length doors set over four bays. The single hipped roof has two stuccoed white chimneys similar to that of the main centre wing.

The smaller two-storey north wing features a single hipped roof and one stuccoed white chimney similar to that of the main centre wing. The front of the wing overlooking the driveway has a large open first storey verandah laid with artificial grass. The wing is accessible from Whernside Avenue and has a three door garage.

Whernside is located on a large lot with extensive open areas to the front and back of the structure. The grounds of Whernside are highly landscaped and have several large mature palm trees (*arecaceae*) along the north and east boundary wall perimeter that are original plantings from the estate. The front setback includes a large turning circle driveway with a centered oval shaped lily pond and fountain. To the left of the driveway and beside the south wing open verandah is the formal Italian garden featuring rectilinear garden beds. The gates have the address '22 ALBANY ROAD' in cast iron numbering and lettering on the left wall pier. The street front boundary along Whernside Avenue and Albany Road is demarcated by tall white rendered and painted brick wall with continuous capping and piers that feature arched capping typical of the Italianate style. A tall, stepped hedge wall forms the south boundary wall of the property.

Whernside is located on the junction of Whernside Avenue and Albany Road. Whernside remains in use as a residential property and is considered to be in good condition. The property has been significantly subdivided over time, and the original structure was modified and extended in the early 20th century. As a result, the property is considered to be of moderate integrity.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- New metal roof ridge cap.
- New turbine chimney caps.
- Tennis court added.
- Swimming pool added.
- Extensive wing additions (early 20th century).
- Remodeling of the main building in 1919.
- Original (possibly arcaded) two-storey return verandah in centre wing infilled.
- Original rear service wing demolished (1919).
- Original stables demolished (1919).
- Three door garage added to the north wing.
- AstroTurf laid on balcony of the north wing.
- New boundary fence.

[History](#)

- [Historical Context](#)

For thousands of years preceding European colonialism, the area now known as Stonnington was the traditional home of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. This environment would have provided Traditional Owners with access to pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot), and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), in a rolling landscape on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay. It is important to note that the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington did not end with colonialism—it has a rich presence to this day.

Following the establishment of Melbourne in 1835, squatter John Gardiner and many others like him sought out land in what would become present day Toorak and surrounds on account of its densely timbered landscape, undulating terrain and proximity to water. By 1840, crown land sales marked the area's transition to pastoral settlement, and later in 1851, with the purchase of land in Hawthorn by Thomas Herbert Power, the surrounding environments gradually became a place where the early merchant and squatter elite of Melbourne built their homesteads. In Toorak, this is best represented by the purchase of lot 26 by James Jackson, associate in Jackson, Rae & Co. soap and candle merchants. Jackson was described by politician William Westgarth as 'Melbourne's greatest merchant of this early time' (Forster 1999, 10). It is only fitting that his house, called Toorak House, would be the namesake of what would become arguably the most affluent suburb in Melbourne. Following the discovery of gold in the 1850s and the wealth this produced for ancillary trades, the Toorak area drew in Melbourne's newly wealthy. Today, over a century later, Toorak still has connotations of wealth and prestige as best represented in its history and built environment (Forster 1999, 5–26).

- ## Place History

A significant portion of the history of 2A Whernside Avenue has previously been authored by the National Trust (Victoria) in 1976. The following account is drawn from this study and is augmented by supplementary archival research conducted by Extent Heritage.

With alterations designed by leading architect Harold Desbrowe Annear, Whernside, known as Belcroft at the time of its erection in 1876, comprised a two-storey, twenty roomed brick mansion. The original occupants were merchant and politician Sir James Lorimer, Lady Elizer Lorimer (née Kenworthy) and their children. During their occupancy, James Lorimer was a member of the Legislative Council in the Victorian Parliament. He would go on to become the Minister for Defence in 1886, a role he held until his death in 1889. Following his passing, the house was sworn for probate at £60,000, and Elizer Lorimer became the official owner of the house (Badger 1971). While ownership was subsequently taken up by race horse breeder Albert Miller in 1891, Lady Whernside retained over two acres of vacant land adjacent to the house. At the time of Miller's occupancy, the property, now renamed Whernside, stood on about ten acres of land and featured a main entry drive from Albany Road to the south of the residence, as well as a second service entry leading into a stable courtyard behind the house (MMBW 1907). The 1907 plan also shows a large but typical double bayed Italianate villa with a two-storey return veranda, and a single storey wing that extended to the south (MMBW 1907). Notable social events at Whernside during the Miller occupancy include a social ball for daughter Irene in 1897, and a garden fete in 1900 to raise funds for the Victorian Infant Asylum (The Australasian 1897, 3; Weekly Times 1900, 9, 14).

Between 1918 and 1927, Anthony J. Lucas, Greek Australian businessman and philanthropist, became the owner. Lucas' occupancy saw the removal of the verandah, and the presumed demolition of the rear service wing and stables. By 1925, Whernside is listed in rate books as a brick house consisting of seventeen rooms (Malvern Rate Books 1925/26). This period also saw the threat of demolition following further subdivision of land into five allotments in 1928 (Argus 1928). This risk was subsequently mitigated following its purchase by Colin Fraser, geologist and managing director of BHP, and his wife Mary Fraser (née MacNamara) in 1928. Notable alterations during the Fraser occupancy include the insertion of a new entry off Whernside Avenue in 1929, as well as the incorporation of Desbrowe Annear's now familiar Serlian screen over the entry.

By 1949, the company General Motors-Holdens Ltd is listed as the new owner of Whernside on lot 2, as well as the vacant land on lot 5, while wool merchant Robert Southey is listed as the owner of lot 1. Ownership of Whernside on lot 2 and 5 is briefly transferred to Myer Emporium Ltd in 1954, before being officially taken up by Bernard James Dowd in 1957. Key alterations during the Dowd occupancy include the installation of a swimming pool in 1958, as well as the additions to the garden, store, washroom and garage in 1967. Further subdivisions of Whernside land took place prior to its auction in June 1976.

Comparative Analysis

Whernside is a difficult place to compare on account of the historical alterations made to the house. These alterations, however, do not reduce the significance of the site due to their associations with the architect Desbrowe-Annear. With this, this comparative analysis will address both the site's 19th century

history and later alterations by comparing it to comparable late Victorian examples, as well as a residence characterised by alterations made by noteworthy architects.

Comparative examples include:

- **Coonac (65 Clendon Road, Toorak) (HO21).** Coonac, formerly San Souci, was constructed in 1867 by owner Robert Bruce Ronald. The house is a comparable example to Whernside as two houses constructed in the late Victorian style, embodying all of the characteristics associated with this period such as the form and scale, masonry construction and decorative stucco rendering. The use of polygonal bays and arcaded verandahs also show wealth and status. The comparison between both sites is not reserved exclusively to the built form but is also evident in their settings. Both places are located in the bend of their associated roads/streets, indicating the gradual encroachment of ancillary development as the Victorian estates were subdivided and sold. The gardens surrounding both properties reflect the original environment of these houses, with mature remnant plantings evident at both sites. The key difference between both sites, however, lies in the alterations made to Whernside in the early 20th century. The Arts and Crafts alterations made to the house do not detract from its late Victorian origins, but they do apply some architectural differences that separates it from houses like Coonac.
- **Larnook House (519 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO85).** Larnook, constructed in 1881, is comparable to Whernside as another example of a late Victorian mansion within the City of Stonnington. Common features evident at both sites include the double storey rectilinear form of each mansion, the use of slate as a roofing material, the hipped rooves, the polygonal bays, and the use of stucco rendering. Larnook underwent extensive alterations when it was converted from a private residence into an education centre between 1949-1952. These alterations have no immediate association with a notable architect and can only be assessed as an impact to the site's integrity. However, the alterations made to Whernside were also undertaken by Harold Desbrowe-Annear. Larnook, regardless of its alterations, is still considered to be highly significant, and Whernside is the same. The alterations made to Whernside by Desbrowe-Annear do need to be noted as an alteration which has had an effect on the building's Victorian integrity, but they are not considered detrimental to the aesthetic or historical significance of the mansion either.
- **Duncraig (Former Hampton Villa) (31-33 Hampden Road, Armadale) (HO48).** Duncraig at 31-33 Hampden Road Armadale, formerly known as Hampton Villa, is significant for its 19th century origins, being first constructed in 1856, as well as the later alterations made to the house when occupied by renowned Arts and Crafts architect Walter Richmond Butler. This site provides the best comparative example to Whernside: two sites with Victorian and late Victorian origins that were then altered by highly significant Arts and Crafts architects. Both sites retain the original form and features associated with Victorian houses of this period and are also accented with features that would have been considered a jump in design ethos at the time. While these alterations impact the original Victorian integrity of each respective site, they do not invalidate the heritage value of either site.

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Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

Further Images

Note: the following section includes historical images to demonstrate the style of the dwelling. The building is not clearly visible from the street.



Entrance gates off Whernside Avenue (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View of polygonal bay from Whernside Avenue (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Chimney cap from Whernside Avenue (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Decorative mouldings from Whernside Avenue (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Whernside garages from Whernside Avenue (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Roofscape and chimneys from Whernside Avenue (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Later chimney design, associated with Harold Desbrowe-Annear (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Original chimney design (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Eastern façade, dated 1976 (source: Collins, J. (1976). *Toorak. "Whernside" [picture]*).



Western façade. (source: Collins, J. (1976). *Toorak. "Whernside" [picture]*).



Detail shot of eastern façade (source: Collins, J. (1976). *Toorak. "Whernside" [picture]*).



Eastern façade, looking south. (source: Collins, J. (1976). *Toorak. "Whernside" [picture]*).

Authors

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