

39 Irving Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 39 Irving 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 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 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, although some stepped outside the dictates of fashion to explore ideas and innovation in design and construction. As a result Toorak contains houses that are amongst the earliest or purest form of particular architectural styles that were later diluted or even changed outright when they gained wider acceptance and usage. Other architects explored stylistic innovation that pushed the boundaries beyond the restrained detailing found on most contemporary houses. One such architect was Harold Desbrowe Annear, whose Georgian revival design for Katanga at 372 Glenferrie Road (1933) was described as 'functional, somewhat eccentric and essentially theatrical.'

Place History

The property at 39 Irving Road originally formed part of Crown Allotment 28, which was first sold to James Jackson at the Crown land sales in 1849. In 1852, merchant Alfred Ross purchased Lot 28, which included 55 acres of land between Irving and Clendon Roads. Orrong, the first house to be built in the area, was located midway between Gardiners Creek Road (Toorak Road) and Commercial Road (Malvern Road). The Orrong estate was gradually subdivided and by 1890, John Horsfall had transformed the house, by then on two acres, into a forty-room mansion.

Although Clendon and Irving Roads retain their original form, re-subdivision created a number of east-west roads linking these earlier roads. Grant Avenue is the result of the subdivision of Orrong's much reduced, although still large estate. The mansion remained for some years, standing midway along Grant Avenue.²

In 1929, the Sand and McDougall directory lists a 'house being built' at present day 39 Irving Road (the property was initially unnumbered in the directory).³ The house was built for

² Stonnington Local History Catalogue. PH9411

³ Sand and McDougall Directories, 1928-1929.

wealthy grain merchant Traugott Johann Noske to designs by architect George E Nichterlein⁴ (a relative of Noske's through marriage). Noske was an early pioneer in wheat exporting and the founder of Noske Bros flour millers.⁵

Noske's fortunes declined rapidly with the onset of the Great Depression, such that in 1930 he lost £121,000 speculating on the price of overseas wheat options.⁶ He also lost large sums speculating on wool prices. In 1933 Noske went before the Bankruptcy Court with liabilities of £166,510.⁷ By 1935 Noske was reported to be living at the YMCA in South Melbourne.⁸ His Irving Road house had by then become the residence of chartered accountant Walter H Tompson.⁹ Contemporary newspaper articles refer to Tompson's house as 'Shotts'.¹⁰ Auction notices from the 1980s name the house 'Chiverton'.¹¹

G E Nichterlein

George Edward Nichterlein received a Diploma of Architecture from the University of Melbourne in 1924 and then completed post-graduate studies in America. Around the same time as the Noske house was built, Nichterlein designed the [now demolished] St John's Lutheran Church in City Road, South Melbourne. This was a gable-fronted building with Romanesque details and a dramatically steep roof, giving it a Medieval Germanic feel. The architrave over a side door to the church was similar to the fanciful work at the Noske house. Nichterlein was a skilled designer on the evidence of his small body of completed work. His architectural career was nonetheless brief. He ceased practicing in 1935 to become an artist, opening a studio at Olinda. The RVIA Journal of September 1935 noted that Nichterlein had 'removed to Mernda Road, Olinda'.¹²

Description

The property at 39 Irving Road, Toorak is occupied by a substantial double-storey house with an eclectic Arts and Crafts/ Mediterranean character. The house orientated so that its principal façade addresses the corner of Irving Road and Grant Avenue. The property also contains a single-storey servant's wing and attached garage aligned to Grant Avenue. The house's external walls are uniformly finished in a finely textured cream painted render apart from contrasting clinker brick accents at the sills and chimneys. The principal hipped roof has terracotta shingle tiles and graceful bellcast eaves. The house is inventively and intricately detailed. A classical Greek style key pattern frieze runs across the façade either side of the front entry porch. The influence of the Old English style is evident in the battered clinker brick chimneys with small gablets. Of particular interest are the florid mouldings and sculpted window reveals suggestive of German Baroque architecture.

The servant's wing on Grant Avenue has a long rectangular plan form and hipped terracotta shingle roof. It is similarly detailed to the house and has elaborate parapet mouldings over a recessed doorway. The western half of the servant's wing and attached garage are relatively recent additions, detailed to precisely match the original. The front fence was constructed c1991.¹³ The house otherwise appears to be substantially intact in terms of its streetscape presentation.

⁴ Nichterlein is named as the agent on the first MMBW Plan of Drainage, dated 9/8/1928. Plan No. 170671. Held by South East Water.

⁵ <http://www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/1885.php>

⁶ *Riverine Herald*, 11 May 1935, p.2

⁷ *Argus*, 11 May 1935, p.26.

⁸ *Argus*, 11 May 1935, p.26.

⁹ Sand and McDougall Directories, 1934-1935.

¹⁰ *Argus*, 23 May 1941, p.4. & 24 May 1941, p.5.

¹¹ *The Age*, 28 March 1983, p.26.

¹² *Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Journal*, September 1935, p. 86.

¹³ City of Stonnington Property File No. 7045.350.

Comparative Analysis

The Arts and Crafts movement had its origins in the mid-1800s in England, with writer and designer William Morris as its figurehead. Morris strove to address the lowering of standards of design and the loss of craftsmanship resulting from industrialisation and the ascendancy of cheap mass produced goods. Arts and Crafts designers were concerned with the integration of art into everyday life through the medium of craftsmanship, and had a strong moral tone with a stress on the truthfulness of expression. In Australia, the Arts and Crafts style emerged in the eastern states in the late 1890s.¹⁴

The Arts and Crafts movement was defined more by a set of ideals and principles than an adherence to a uniform style, but its buildings have many common characteristics. They are typically domestic in scale and make free use of traditional vernacular motifs to create something that was homely but at the same time distinctive and 'modern'. Artful informality and picturesqueness are strong characteristics, with symmetrical formality occurring less frequently. Buildings were typically conceived as objects 'in the round' rather than concentrating all architectural effect on a single street facade. The roof is a dominant element and could be either gabled or hipped or a combination of the two. Roughcast rendered walls, bay windows, timber shingles, battered piers and tall tapering chimneys are common. Art Nouveau inspired details are also common, both externally and internally.¹⁵ A characteristic of Melbourne Arts and Crafts architecture was the diversity of approach and the high quality of design and craftsmanship.¹⁶ Major figures in the Melbourne Arts and Crafts scene include architects Harold Desbrowe Annear, Walter Butler, Rodney Alsop and Robert Haddon.

The house at 39 Irving Road exemplifies Arts and Crafts principles in its strong roof form, picturesque irregular massing, meticulous attention to detailing, and free and inventive use of traditional motifs. In relation to Arts and Crafts style houses in the City of Stonnington, 39 Irving Road compares favourably with Walter Butler's Eulinya (c1925-27), which is located nearby at 48-50 Irving Road [listed individually on the heritage overlay schedule as HO158]. 39 Irving Road is similar in terms of its large scale, design quality and integrity to its original design.

Thematic Context

The house at 39 Irving Road, Toorak illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006, Addendum March 2009):

- 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
- 8.4.2 Functional, eccentric and theatrical –experimentation and innovation in architecture

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.

¹⁴ Harriet Edquist, *Pioneers of Modernism – The Arts and Crafts Movement in Australia*, p.xii.

¹⁵ Apperly et. al., *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, p.140.

¹⁶ Harriet Edquist, 'Arts and Crafts' in *Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture*, p. 45.

Statement of Significance

Note that the relevant HERCON criteria and themes from the *City of Stonnington Environmental* (TEH) are shown in brackets.

What is Significant?

The house at 39 Irving Road, Toorak is a substantial double-storey Mediterranean/Arts and Crafts Style building erected in 1929 to designs by architect George E Nichterlein. The house occupies a large site on the corner of Irving Road and Grant Avenue, which in the nineteenth century formed part of the Orrong mansion estate.

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 (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The absence of modern vehicle accommodation in the undeveloped front setback.

Modern fabric, including the front fence and garage addition, is not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 39 Irving Road, 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 and architecturally distinctive interwar Arts and Crafts style residences in the municipality (Criterion D). It is a notably inventive and eclectic design combining Mediterranean, English Domestic Revival and German Baroque influences (TEH 8.4.2 Functional, eccentric and theatrical – experimentation and innovation in architecture, Criterion E).

The house is of some historical interest as evidence of the major change that took place in the 1920s and 1930s when many of Toorak's grand nineteenth century mansion estates were subdivided and redeveloped as 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 large architect designed houses 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 retain its current A2 grading.

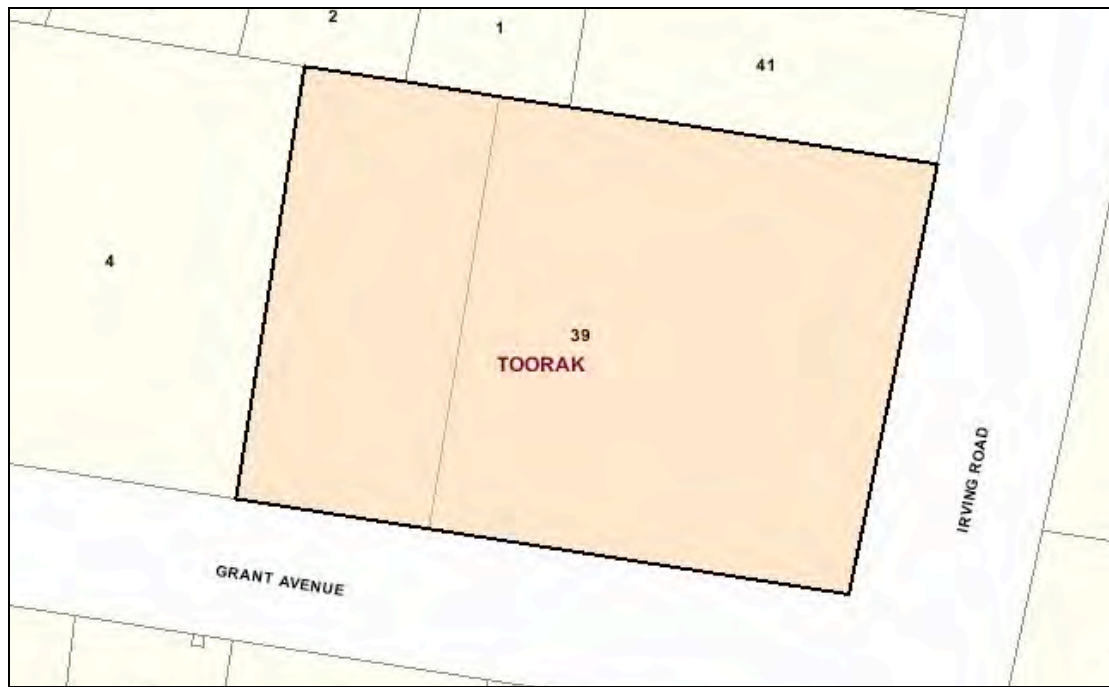


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 39 Irving Road, Toorak.