

39-41 Hopetoun Road, Toorak

Citation



Figure 1 39-41 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.

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

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 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.

Place History

The property at 39-41 Hopetoun Road originally formed part of Crown Allotment 25, which was bound by present day Toorak Road to the north, Glenferrie Road to the east, Malvern Road to the south and the line of Denham Place to the west. It was first purchased in 1849 for £151 by John Sullivan assistant to the Colonial Surgeon for the Port Phillip District. In 1853, English barrister Charles Skinner paid £10,972 for Sullivan's land, reflecting inflated gold rush property prices.

On Lot 25 Skinner planned a village to be named Ledbury after the market town on the southern slopes of the Malvern Hills in England. Skinner's Malvern Hills Estate was subdivided into mainly small allotments with streets named after family members. As an inducement to purchasers, Skinner built the Malvern Hill Hotel on the corner of present day Glenferrie Road and Malvern Road. However, Skinner's vision of an English style village, complete with church and school, did not succeed and much of the land eventually reverted to pasture.

By the end of the nineteenth century a number of substantial villas and mansions had been erected along the area's main roads, including Malvern Hill Road (renamed Hopetoun Rd in 1901 in honour of Australia's first Governor General).

In 1897 Samuel Black built his mansion Rostrevor on the west side of Hopetoun Road. The property was gradually reduced in size through early twentieth century subdivisions. Rostrevor was eventually demolished in 1926 and the land subdivided, creating new house

allotments on Hopetoun Road – one allotment was purchased in 1931 by Wilfred Kent Fether.² Fether was a manager at Australian Royal Insurance, and a decorated First World War officer.³

In 1932, architect Cedric Ballantyne submitted plans for a two-storey brick residence for W K Fethers.⁴ Ballantyne was also responsible for 1938 additions on the north side of the house providing a second garage and ground floor den and sunroom.⁵

Cedric Ballantyne

Cedric Heise Ballantyne (1876-1957) was born in Prahran and educated in Sydney and Melbourne. He was articled to Percy Oakden from 1892 to 1897 and served as his chief draftsman from 1897-1900 before entering into partnership with Oakden in 1901. Oakden and Ballantyne are credited with being the first Melbourne architects to show an interest in American bungalow idioms. Notably early bungalow designs by the firm include Skelbo, Ballantyne's own house in Toorak Road, Malvern (1908, demolished), and Illabrook, Lansell Road, Toorak (1909, demolished). Oakden and Ballantyne were also responsible for a number of commercial buildings in the city including Lister House at 61-65 Collins Street (1915, now demolished), the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency offices, and the Champions Buildings.

After Oakden retired in 1916 due to failing health, Ballantyne designed a garden suburb in Goulburn with Donald Esplin. In 1919, Henry Hare was accepted as a partner in Oakden Ballantyne & Hare (soon renamed Ballantyne & Hare). Projects from this phase of Ballantyne's career include the club rooms for the Lawn Tennis Association of Victoria at Kooyong, and several private homes and flats in Toorak, Brighton and St Kilda Road, Melbourne.

In the late 1920s, Ballantyne designed a series of opulent picture palaces for Hoyts Theatres Ltd, for which he is perhaps best remembered. The finest of Ballantyne's theatres, the Regent in Collins Street (1929), had lavish interiors in an amalgam of Italian renaissance, Medieval and Spanish baroque styles.

Throughout most of his career, Ballantyne was architect for the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board, a position he inherited from Percy Oakden. Ballantyne practised as C H Ballantyne & Associates from 1927, creating the Athenaeum Club in Collins Street (1928-30). By 1933, he entered into partnership with G H Sneddon to form Ballantyne and Sneddon. Ballantyne was in semi-retirement from the early 1930s, working on various projects before closing his office in 1951 and permanently retiring to Merimbula.⁶

Description

The property at 39-41 Hopetoun Road is occupied by an imposing double-storey Old English style house. The fall of land allows the house to have a low level driveway and garage below the house's ground floor. This has provided a dramatic massing, emphasised by the steeply pitched terracotta shingle roof and tall, corbelled brick chimneys. The roof has several ancillary hips to the dominant principal hip, as well as an octagonal front bay containing a stairwell. The entrance porch adjacent to the stairwell features a distinctive curved rendered hood, with the terracotta shingle roof tiles above following the same curvature. The light coloured clinker brick work is relieved by half-timbering at the first floor.

²City of Malvern rate book, North Ward, 1931-32, no.823.

³*Who's Who*, 1950.

⁴Stonninton Local History Catalogue Reg. No.: MB 5232.

⁵Stonninton Local History Catalogue Reg. No.: MB 5232.

⁶Heritage Alliance, *City Road Industrial Precinct - Citations for Individual Heritage Places*, p.4.

The house is essentially intact as it presents to the street apart from the sympathetically designed 1938 additions to the north side. It is set in an attractive garden with a rustic stone front fence echoing the garage's stone piers. The fence may not be contemporary with the house as the original architecture drawings show an 'existing picket fence' retained with new timber gates and brick piers.

Comparative Analysis

English Domestic Revival Styles

Sometimes referred to as Tudor, interwar Old English 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 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 in the interwar years. Examples in this mode with individual heritage overlay 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). 38 Hopetoun Road compares favourably with these houses in terms of its architectural quality and high level of intactness. The nearby house at 3 Hopetoun Road provides a useful point of comparison, being an equally large but less impressive example of the Old English mode with a more conventional symmetrical façade.

Thematic Context

The house at 39-41 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 39-41 Hopetoun Road, Toorak is an imposing double-storey Old English style building constructed in 1934 to designs by architect Cedric Ballantyne. The house was built on land subdivided from the grounds of the Victorian era mansion Rostrevor.

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

- The external form, materials and detailing of the original house and 1938 additions.
- The high level of external intactness to its c1938 state.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The legibility of the interwar form in views from the public realm.
- The absence of modern vehicle accommodation.
- The low height of the front fence.

How is it significant?

The house at 39-41 Hopetoun Road, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as an impressive and largely intact Old English style residence (Criterion D). The house is generally atypical of Architect Cedric Ballantyne's oeuvre but it nonetheless demonstrates a skilful handling of the Old English 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 middle and 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. An A2 grading should be assigned to this building.

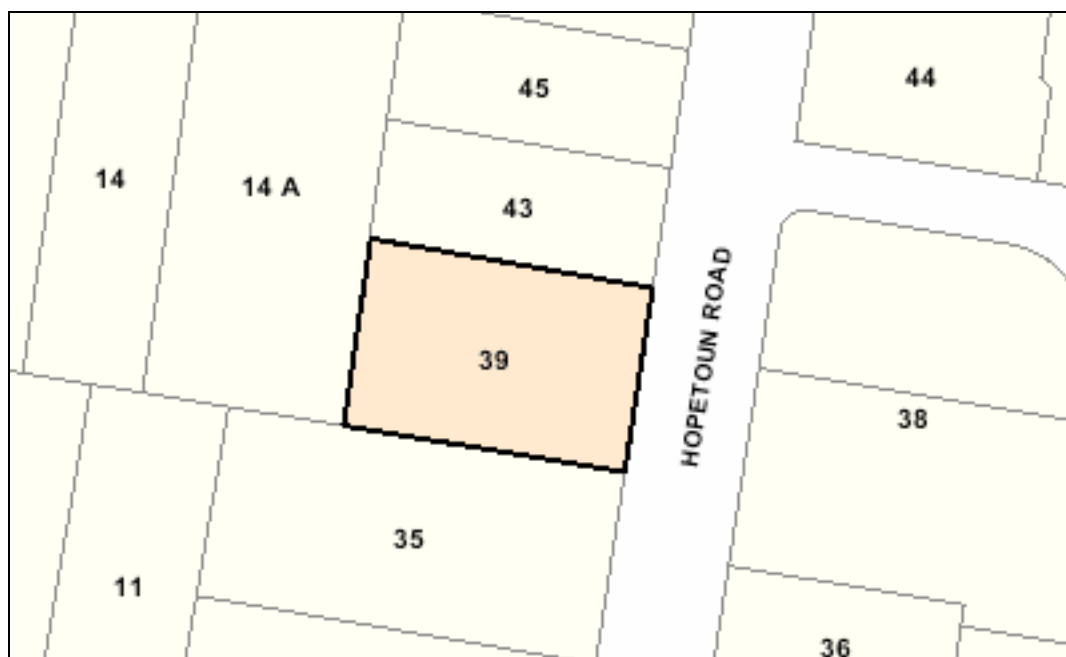


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 39-41 Hopetoun Road, Toorak.