

Former M H Baillieu House, 729 Orrong Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 729 Orrong 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*, 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 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 area bounded by the Yarra River and present day Toorak, Grange and Orrong Roads was first offered for sale at the Crown land sales in June 1840. The land was divided into three long rectangular blocks – lots 13, 14 and 15 - running north-south from the river to Gardiners Creek Road (now Toorak Road). Lot 15, consisting of 73 acres on the west side of Orrong Road, was purchased by Charles Norris. Although Norris further subdivided the land, Kearney's map indicates no development occurred in this area prior to 1855.

In 1867 merchant George Stevenson erected a twenty room mansion near the corner of Toorak and Orrong Roads. Retired pastoralist John Simson enlarged the mansion to fifty rooms in 1885 and named it Trawalla. An 1895 MMBW plan shows Trawalla occupying large grounds bounded by Toorak Road, Orrong Road, Roberston Street, and Grange Road. The entrance gate at the corner of Toorak and Grange Roads opened onto a long, sweeping driveway.

The Trawalla Estate was subdivided in 1922, creating Trawalla Avenue. Allotments bounded by Robertson Street, Orrong Road, Trawalla Avenue, Grange Road were made available for sale as well as several allotments facing Toorak Road.

In 1925, noted architect Harold Desbrowe Annear prepared plans for a residence in the Trawalla Estate for M H Baillieu. Maurice Howard Lawrence Baillieu (1883-1961), son of financier and politician William Lawrence Baillieu (1859-1936), was a stockbroker and company director, and a member of one of Melbourne's (and Australia's) best known dynastic families.

M H Baillieu's house is first listed in Sands and McDougall directories in 1928 as 203 Orrong Road. The directory for the previous year record a 'house being built' on this site.

The house was featured in *Australian Home Beautiful* in November 1928. The article, entitled 'The Unity Of House And Garden', included many comments about the garden:

Situated on the side of a hill, the land slopes rather steeply to the north and west, its eastern boundary having a level frontage to Orrong Road, and the northern boundary sloping down to the side street. The house has a wide frontage to Orrong Road and is set just far enough back to provide a motor drive in and out with the necessary garage accommodation. A balustraded wall guards the front courtyard, and the two entrance gateways are very imposing, with their tall ornamented posts and lamps.

The outstanding charm of the house lies in its unity with the garden. The living rooms open to a terrace which is sheltered at each end by the projecting wings of the house. From this smaller terrace, a circular flight of steps leads to the large terrace, which is so arranged as to take up the greater part of the garden space. It opens at the far end on the tennis court. The natural slope of the hill has been turned to advantage to make the garden on two levels. The upper level is in the nature of a large garden terrace.

... The several flights of steps from terrace to terrace are a beautiful feature of the garden. The steps are broad and easy, with generous balustrades; the big stone vases overflow with flowers. Especially pleasing is the circular flight to the smaller terrace, just in front of the house. The living rooms open upon this terrace [with the] house, terrace and garden combining in a sequence of delightful harmony'.²

Ownership of 729 Orrong Road was transferred to M H Baillieu's son John c 1930-40.³ It remained the home of John and Elizabeth Baillieu until 1979.⁴

Harold Desbrowe Annear

Architect Harold Desbrowe Annear (1865-1933) was born on 16 August 1865 at Happy Valley, Sandhurst (Bendigo). He was educated at the Hawthorn Grammar School and articled to the architect William Salway in 1883.

Annear left Salway to practice on his own around 1889, when he also published essays on John Ruskin and on methods of architectural criticism. They show him to be an admirer of Ruskin and the American H. H. Richardson, whom he called 'the greatest modern architectural genius'. They also reveal his strong commitment to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement and to the concept that architecture was an art form rather than a profession.

In 1900 Annear became the founding member and first president of the T-Square club. The club was closely associated with Working Men's College (now RMIT), where Annear played an important role in establishing the architecture course.

² *Australian Home Beautiful*, 1 November 1928, pp.21-26.

³ Australian Heritage Database, Place ID 100533, Place File No. 2/11/042/0035.

⁴ *The Age*, 8 November 1979, p.19.

Annear's most distinguished early design was the Springthorpe memorial in the Kew cemetery (1897), described by the *Argus* in 1933 as 'the most beautiful work of its kind in Australia'.

In 1902-03, Annear designed three houses for which he is perhaps best known: 32, 34 and 38 The Eyrie, Eaglemont. These were free and decorative adaptations of the so called 'Queen Anne revival' with half-timbered, roughcast walls and Marseilles tiled roofs. Internally, they had an innovative plan form that allowed spaces to freely flow into another, with built-in cupboards and distinctive, vertically sliding windows. Annear continued with the half-timbered roughcast style until about 1906, when he began to develop a more austere and simplified approach.

Annear produced two distinctive houses in the mid 1910s which show the influence of contemporary West Coast American architect Irving Gill and the Spanish mission revival: 'Inglesby', South Yarra (1915, demolished) and 'Broceliande', Toorak (1916, demolished). These plain surfaced houses were incorrectly used by Robin Boyd to typecast Annear as a pioneer modernist architect, although Annear himself believed that those advocating a utilitarian architecture 'did not know definitely what architecture consists of'.⁵

From the late 1910s, Annear designed a series of formal but idiosyncratic neo-Georgian style town houses for wealthy Toorak and South Yarra clientele, later unjustly vilified by critics such as Boyd as evidence of Annear's lapse into superficial stylism. For many of these houses Annear designed the accompanying gardens, most notably at Cranlana, Toorak.

In rural houses of the 1920s, Annear returned to a roughcast, half-timbered Arts and Crafts mode for 'Westerfield', 72-118 Robinsons Road, Frankston (1924) and versions of an American colonial style, as at 'Mulberry Hill', 395 Golf Links Road, Baxter (1925).

Although he was chiefly a designer of houses, Annear had a deep interest in urban planning issues. He developed a scheme for Melbourne which involved a grand axis through the city terminating at the war memorial, a vision which was eventually to be realised.

In the 1920s, Annear achieved considerable exposure through publication of his house designs and essays in *Australian Home Beautiful*. In 1922, he published *For Every Man his Home*, which expressed his desire for a democratic architecture appropriate to Australia.

For reasons that are still unclear, Annear's practice was in difficulty by the late 1920s. He left his South Yarra house and retired for a while to Gippsland where he built a cottage 'Clover Hill.' Annear had returned to Melbourne by 1931, and completed a small number of projects for loyal clients, including the Ince House ('Katanga'), Toorak (1931).

Author Joan Lindsay (for whom Annear designed Mullberry Hill) described him as a devotee of good living:

'... so witty so indiscreet and so truly loved beautiful things that only the most strait-laced clients objected to his eccentricities and occasional full-blooded lapses into vulgarity ... In all things he was rococo, standing for a touch of fantasy in suburbia'.⁶

Annear died of hypertensive heart disease on 22 June 1933 at St Kilda. Architectural historian Harriet Edquist describes Annear as one of the most innovative architects in Australia in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and an 'iconoclast and maverick; a friend of a great number of artists and writers; a bohemian who never outgrew the desire to shock'.⁷

⁵ Quoted from George Tibbits 'Harold Desbrowe-Annear' in Australian Dictionary of Biography, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/annear-harold-desbrowe-5036/text8387>

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⁷ Harriet Edquist, *Harold Desbrowe-Annear: A Life in Architecture*, pp. xi-xii.

Description

The former M H Baillieu house is a substantial double-storey residence the design of which combines a variety of classically-derived elements to produce an exuberant Georgian revival character. Walls are of pale red brick of an unusual elongated dimension with rendered dressings. The roof is hipped and clad in slate and has broad eaves supported on exposed rafters. The composition of the façade is not strictly symmetrical but achieves carefully balanced asymmetry. All ornament is focused on a central pedimented bay rising above the main entry, which is defined by an arched rendered canopy with a coffered soffit. The entry canopy rests on solid piers with ornamental console brackets and small oval windows to each side. Perched above the entry canopy is a small curved balcony, accessed from a slender window with an elegant swan neck pediment. The main triangular pediment above is adorned with an Adamesque swagged *oeil de boeuf* window. A first floor Venetian window is positioned off axis, to the right of the entry bay, marking the location of an internal stair. This window and others are multi-paned in the Georgian manner. The remainder of the façade is left relatively free of ornament other than brick quoining at the corners. Windows have deep sills and rendered lintels creating a strong horizontal emphasis.

The house is substantially intact in terms of its presentation to the street. An addition to the south side is modestly scaled and detailed to match Annear's design. Urn finials are missing from the front first floor balcony and most window frames on the façade appear to have been replaced, albeit with sympathetically detailed timber framed casements. Various works were carried out in 2008/2009 including demolition of some internal walls and floors, the replacement of most of the rear ground floor windows and a double storey addition at south-east corner of the house.⁸

The property retains its original balustraded front fence and original garage in front setback. The rendered fence on the Robertson Street boundary dates from c2009.

Extensive landscaping has taken place in the garden in recent years. It retains the broad format of Annear's original compartmentalised plan, having three main areas: an open lawn area behind the house, a rear tennis court bordered by a cypress hedge, and a lower sunken garden along the north side of the property. The latter originally had a long stone path flanked by strips of lawn and an herbaceous perennial border, but this area has been almost entirely paved over. A relatively recent aerial photograph shows widespread earthworks in this area and a large swimming pool under construction. The original character of the main lawn has been altered by the construction of a large central ornamental pond and stone paving around the perimeter. The original balustraded terrace and circular steps at the rear of the house appear to remain intact. Annear's plan for the garden shows a complex pattern of concentric paths radiating out from the circular steps. This path layout does not appear on the earliest available aerial photograph of the site (dated 1945) and was presumably never instituted.

Comparative Analysis

The former M H Baillieu house is an example of a distinctive version of the free-standing double-storey town house, developed by Annear in the 1920s in the prestigious suburbs of Toorak and South Yarra. These houses have been described as a curious hybrid of Palladian form, Adamesque detailing and modern planning, cemented by Arts and Crafts functionalism.⁹ Typical features of Annear's town house idiom include formal rectilinear and generally symmetrical facades, sited in close proximity to the street with reduced front gardens and emphatic porches.¹⁰ Annear's neo-Georgian expression of the 1920s can also be characterised as a largely undecorated building, usually smooth rendered, with a central

⁸ City of Stonnington Building File BL 1092/982501/0

⁹ Harriet Edquist, *Harold Desbrowe-Annear: A Life in Architecture*, p.128.

¹⁰ Harriet Edquist, *Harold Desbrowe-Annear: A Life in Architecture*, p.128.

projecting mass. This section of wall is classically detailed, terminates in a gable or pediment and rises above either a porte-cochere or main entrance, which also classically detailed. The classical detailing about this central mass is often ornate to a degree far in excess of true Georgian decoration. In houses such as 729 Orrong Road, Annear '*suavely and freely manipulated classic elements such as the pediment, the portico and the Palladian motif to create appropriate but not hackneyed images for his well-to-do clients*'.¹¹

The former M H Baillieu house has also been described by Philip Goad as '*one of the most accomplished of the mannered classical compositions that [Annear] developed in the 1920s for his Toorak and South Yarra clientele*'.¹² It has a baroque flavour in the handling of details that marks it out from the more restrained Georgian revival work of the period. In this sense, 729 Orrong Road is far more elaborate in its classical detailing, and a much bolder statement of Georgian formality than anything contemporary architects like Marcus Martin were to produce.

Annear's neo-Georgian 1920s townhouses were in the past ignored or derided as awkward attempts at Georgian elegance, and more generally overlooked in favour of his celebrated half-timbered Eaglemont houses and his 'proto-modernist' designs at Broceliande (1916) and Inglesby (1915). Nonetheless, 729 Orrong Road should not be dismissed as a minor or unimportant work in Annear's oeuvre. It is a sophisticated and idiosyncratic design that departs from mainstream Georgian revival conformity, and points to the diverse and changing sources of Annear's domestic work, and his concern for an architecture that was intimately related to place, climate and occasion.

Other surviving Annear houses in the City Stonnington include:

404 Glenferrie Road, Malvern, 1911 (A1 graded building in the Kooyong Precinct HO181)
4 Como Avenue, South Yarra, 1917 (A2 graded building in the Como Precinct HO140)
3 Como Avenue, South Yarra, 1918 (A2 graded building in the Como Precinct HO140)
4 Heyington Place, Toorak, 1922 (A2 graded building in the Toorak Precinct HO143)
104 Kooyong Road, Armadale, 1922 (H0270)
8 Power Avenue, Toorak, 1924 (A2 graded building in the Power Street Precinct HO180)
1 Heyington Place, Toorak, 1925 (A1 graded building in the Toorak Precinct HO143)
10 Chastelton Avenue, Toorak, 1926 (HO18)
611 Toorak Road, Toorak, 1926 (A1 graded building in the Toorak Precinct HO143)
Katanga, 372 Glenferrie Road, Malvern, 1932 (VHR H935)

The former M H Baillieu house stands out as the largest and most flamboyant residences in this group. Katanga has a notably eccentric porte-cochere but is generally more austere. 404 Glenferrie Road and 4 Como Avenue are earlier, less idiosyncratic designs in a half-timbered Arts and Crafts mode with Annear's trademark angled corner bay. 3 Como Road has a conventional looking façade that appears to have been heavily altered. 4 Heyington Place was altered in the 1930s by architect Marcus Martin and has more recently been defaced by front additions. 10 Chastelton Avenue and 104 Kooyong Road are smaller scale and less spectacular than the former M H Baillieu house.

Thematic Context

The former M H Baillieu house, 729 Orrong Road, Toorak illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006):

6.3 Constructing Capital City Economies

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

¹¹ Apperly et al. *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, p.158.

¹² Philip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture*, p.127.

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 former M H Baillieu House, 729 Orrong Road, Toorak is a large Georgian revival style house designed by celebrated Australian architect Harold Desbrowe Annear. It was built in 1926 for Maurice Baillieu, a member of one of Melbourne's (and Australia's) best known dynastic families. The house site was created through subdivision of the nineteenth century Trawalla mansion estate.

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

- The original external form, materials and detailing, particularly to the façade.
- The high level of external intactness including the unpainted state of face brick elements.
- The legibility of the original built form from the public realm.
- The general absence of modern vehicle accommodation in the front and side setbacks.
- The domestic garden setting – but not the fabric of the garden apart from the following elements surviving from Annear's original garden plan: the terrace and circular steps at the rear of the house and the terrace wall running east-west alongside the sunken garden.

All modern fabric, including recent landscape elements, is not significant.

How is it significant?

The former M H Baillieu House is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The former M H Baillieu House is architecturally significant as an outstanding and largely intact interwar Georgian revival style house displaying Harold Desbrowe Annear's flamboyant and idiosyncratic approach to domestic design in this idiom (Criterion E). It is one of the most spectacular of the Toorak town houses designed by Annear in the 1920s for his wealthy clientele (Criterion F, TEH 8.4.2 Functional, eccentric and theatrical – experimentation and innovation in architecture).

The house is of some historical interest for its association with the Baillieu family (Criterion H, TEH 6.3 Constructing Capital City Economies).

The house derives additional 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 large architect designed houses generally, and Georgian revival 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 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.

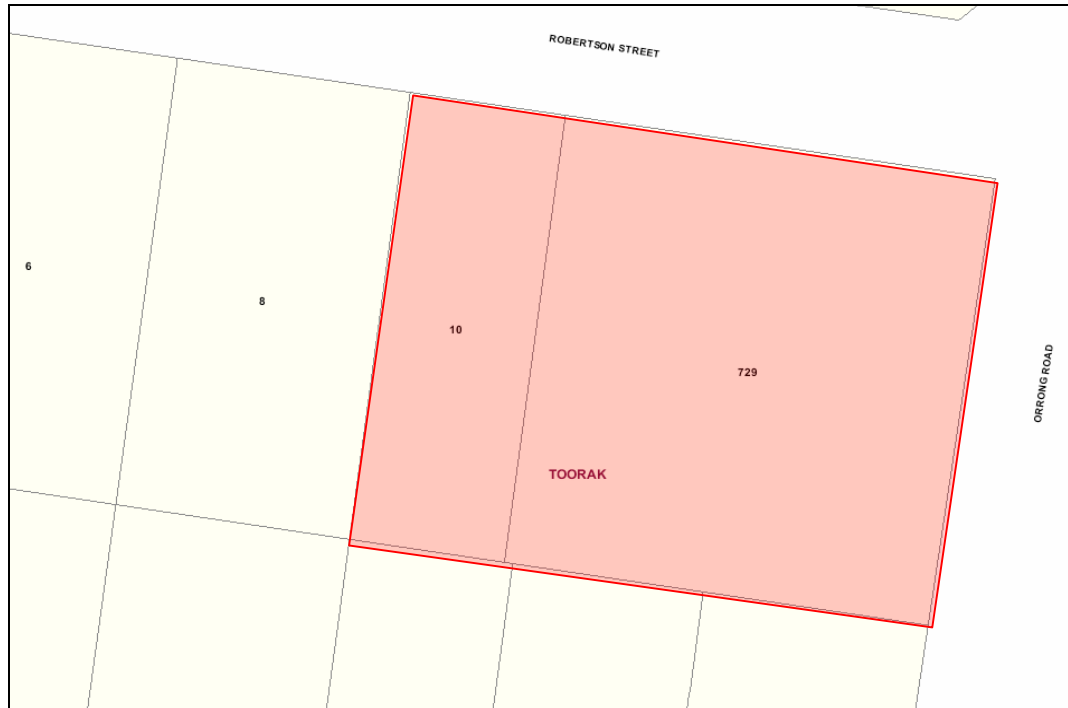


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 729 Orrong Road, Toorak.