

PLACE IDENTIFICATION FORM

ADDRESS

10 Laurel Court
 TITLE (28 Harcourt Street)

TYPE

- Single Residence
- Shop
- Office
- Landscape feature
- View
- Multiple Unit Res.
- Outbuildings
- Industrial Building
- Public building
- Other flats??.

EXISTING DESIGNATION

HBR [] GBR [] AHC [] NT [] VAS []

STREETSCAPE LEVEL

1 [] 2 [] 3 [X]
 SIGNIFICANT [] SIGNIFICANT []
 STREET TREES KERB & GUTTERS

GRADING

A [] B [X] C [] D [] E []
 KEYNOTE BUILDING []

RECOMMENDED FOR

HBR/GBR [] AHC [X] URBAN CONSERVATION AREA [X]
 VAS [] PLANNING SCHEME PROTECTION [X]
 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE [] OTHER []

SURVEY DATE Nov. 91

NEG FILE

Title
 Vol.
 Fol.

THEME

- Early Settlement
- Mansions
- Victorian Garden Suburb
- Municipal dev.
- 1870s growth
- Garden villas
- Working enclaves
- Commercial Centres
- Edwardian Prosperity
- Interwar Housing
- Flats and Offices

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

Date ^{probably 1870-80 with} additions and tower 1886.
 Architect J. Beswicke *
 Builder
 Elements -
 House, garden



- Contributing garden
- Landmark tree
- Original or early hard landscape layout
- Original or early fence

NOTABLE FEATURES/SIGNIFICANCE

See attached

INTEGRITY Good [X]
 Fair []
 Poor []
 CONDITION Good [X]
 Fair []
 Poor []

Converted to flats??

CROSS REFERENCED INFORMATION

Associated significant garden []

The site information given above has been determined from external street level inspection.

* Rupert Beswicke thinks This is designed by his father.

10 LAUREL COURT
ALSO KNOWN AS 24/28 HARCOURT STREET

History

This grand mansion house with its tower was most probably built in 1886 for James Robinson, brassfounder, merchant and engineer,¹ and may have been designed by the architect, John Beswicke.² A new ten-roomed brick house with an NAV of 150 pounds was recorded in the 1886 Hawthorn rate records. The NAV increased to 200 pounds in 1888.³

The site of this property, Lots 63 and 86, were owned at first by William Free, a carter. Free was the owner of house and land in Boroondara in the 1856 Victorian Electoral Roll. By 1864, James Ross, civil servant, was owner/occupier and added a two-roomed cottage. In the 1870s, Sydney John Webb, printer, transferred the property to Charles Robinson, cabinet maker and furniture dealer of Burwood Road. James M. Robinson became the owner in 1878 of a brick house, NAV 40 pounds, which rose to 50 pounds in 1880.⁴ This may have been the first stage of the present mansion, which was extended with a tower in 1886 to the designs of Beswicke.

"Harcourt Street runs through one of the oldest estate subdivisions in Hawthorn. John Robert Murphy bought Crown portion 70 of some 124 acres (bounded today by Rathmines, Burke, Barkers and Auburn Roads) at the Crown sales in c1851 for about \$900; the then Dean of Melbourne, Hussey Burgh Macartney, buying the block next door in Kew at about the same time. In 1852 small half acre blocks in the Village of Hawthorn around Lennox Street sold for a couple of hundred dollars each, and by 1853 Murphy's allotment had been neatly chopped into 112 one-acre blocks with enough left over to make Harcourt Street, which cut the subdivision in half one way, with Kildare Street cutting it the other way. The subdivision was called the Village of Rathmines. The blocks were in four parallel lines (except for five at either end facing Auburn and Burke Roads) facing either side of Harcourt Street with Rathmines Road on the south and "Westmoreland Road" on the north. At that time Barkers Road finished at Auburn Road, and what little traffic came that way (from the bridge over the river at Burwood Road) should have then turned down Auburn Road and travelled out along Rathmines Road and Canterbury Road to the hills. The choice of the name "Westmoreland Road" possibly points to an "Old Country" origin for the street names, despite later popular opinion that "Harcourt" and "Rathmines" were firstly the names of houses (which, in fact, were not erected until at least a decade later)".⁵

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1. Gwen McWilliam, "Harcourt Street and the Village of Rathmines", 1991, p.27 (also spelled Robison).
 2. Rupert Beswicke thinks this house was designed by his father.
 3. McWilliam, op. cit.
 4. Ibid. *Village of Rathmines, Area Walk V*, Hawthorn Historical Society, 1987-88.
 5. Loder & Bayly, *Hawthorn Conservation Study, Harcourt Street Area*, 1978, p.5.

10 Laurel Court continued

In the 1850s and 1860s several large mansions were built and some small homes. Most of these are since demolished making way for further subdivisions. Those left are "Borak House" at 28 Ryeburn Avenue (remodelled), William Davies house at 1099 Burke Road (greatly extended), "Oakburne" at 24 Harcourt Street and 88 Harcourt Street.

In 1863 there were 13 inhabited buildings in Crown portion 70. By the turn of the century there were ten times that number, mostly from the 1880s.

In 1873 Charles Beswicke had his son design a mansion on 3 acres at 5 Harcourt Street. Charles Beswicke came to Victoria with his brothers in the 1840s but after both brothers died he returned to England. He returned to Geelong as a squatter. John was born on 30 November 1847 to Charles and Eliza.

John was educated at Geelong Grammar and articled to Crouch & Wilson. In 1883 he entered into partnership with Wilson. In 1889 he joined with Hutchins, in 1890 with Coote. From 1893 he practised alone. Charles and his extended family, moved up and down Harcourt Street, building one house, then disposing of it and building another. John designed them all, ten in total, (possibly 11) on the same basic principal - A huge front garden gently sloping to the street, incorporating a sweeping drive, some ornamental sections of garden and a mansion house.

The Beswicke could not have chosen a better location or time for their development. The high ground here was already home to mansions of the 1850s and 1860s. The land on the urban fringe offered panoramic views and clean country air, serviced if required nearby, by the railway (at Hawthorn in 1861 until 1882 when the Auburn line was extended). At South Yarra, East Melbourne and St. Kilda much smaller sites were available. At Hawthorn it was possible to have sufficient land to feel like a country estate. The timing was perfect. The 1880s were economic boom times, pushed on by too much lending on speculative ventures. A time when money flowed freely for land speculation, and it was important to be seen to have wealth.

John Beswicke designed 10 or 11 of the following houses in Harcourt Street.

1873	No. 5
1878	No. 7 (for Charles' son in law)
1879	No. 15 for Charles
1881	No. 13 for John & Charles Jnr.
1881	No. 25 "Yallambie" for Alexander Higham.
1882	No. 35 "Charlton" for Charles.
1883	No. 31 for Beswicke
1884	No. 41 for J. & R. Martin "Carrick Hill".
1885	No. 11 "Thurston" for Eliza Beswicke.
1885	No. 37 (9 Kildare St) for Hodgkinson.
1887	No. 9 "Chelmsford" for John Duigan.
1887	No. 4 or 2 for Joseph Britten.
1888	No. 29 "Rotha" for John Beswicke.
1891	No. 16 for Isabel Scott.
1891	No. 20 for Euphemia Law
1890c	Cnr Auburn Road for Leo Cussens.
1900	No. 1 (27 Auburn Road) "Tolarna" for Annie Jones.

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Beswicke designed extensively throughout Hawthorn and the wider Metropolitan area, including shops - Auburn Road, the Australia building in Elizabeth Street 1889, Hawthorn Town Hall and many other town halls in Melbourne. Beswicke is thought to be responsible for many other mansions throughout the suburbs. He died around 1906.

The concentration of like designed mansion houses from the late 20th century at Harcourt Street is without equal in Melbourne. Although similarly large examples can be found in Toorak and St. Kilda there are no comparable examples where such a large number by one architect, seemingly working to a precinct objective, can be found.

Description

A two storey mansion executed in render with a slate roof. The building is set back only a "villa" distance from Harcourt Street and its side boundary is now very close to the Laurel Court frontage.

The house has its principal elevation facing south to the view in conformity with the mansions on the high side of Harcourt Street. This elevation presents a two storey colonnade adjoining a bayed projecting wing. The colonnade is uneven but symmetrical, with full half round arches to the sides and an elliptical arch to the centre. This is also reflected in the window openings to the wall behind, where the central opening is wider than those flanking it. An acanthus leaf string course runs across the elevation at the springing point of the arches, extending in plain form to the side and the tower. A more substantial moulded string course carries the first floor definition at the colonnade through to the remaining elevation.

The tower is attached to the side of the building, addressing Laurel Court now with an entrance at ground level. Originally it would have been only visible from Harcourt Street. The tower comprises three stages; the lower two are detailed to match the main body of the building, the upper stage has paired windows flanking corinthian pilasters and a parapeted termination, probably with roof top access.

Assessment

For a mansion, this building is unexpectedly close to the road. This siting is the strongest evidence of earlier construction in the building. Although the building is on the low side of the road, and therefore less prominently located, the once large allotment size would have provided ample open space in which to display a towered mansion design. It seems likely that the tower and the south elevation, which are attributed to Beswicke are part of a process of conversion of a smaller dwelling, possibly even Ross' cottage of 1864, into a mansion. This makes the property all the more interesting, in its capacity to illustrate the early large allotments which characterised the area before its 1870s and 1880s suburban development.

The designs of the south elevation is very similar to Beswicke's work at 7 Harcourt Street of 1887 and to a likely Beswicke design at 39 Kinkora Road of 1890-91. The Harcourt Street example adopts the same bayed projecting wing. Incorporation of the tower has created quite a different impression however.

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There the tower is only linked to the principal elevation by the string courses which extend along the Laurel Court elevation. Its key design purpose appears to be as an eyecatcher from the higher ground in Harcourt Street. This is consistent with the romantic image of a "mansion" in the late nineteenth century, where the tower was the key feature, encouraged in large part by the Vice Regal use at Toorak House and Government House.

The exterior of the building appears to be altered at the rear (north elevation) and a new fence has been added to the side. The principal and tower elevations are substantially intact although the render is painted.

Significance

Metropolitan

1. Historically significant for the potential to illustrate the transfer from the large allotments of the 1850s to the mansion house subdivisions of the 1870s in the Rathmines Village Area.
2. Architecturally significant as a probable John Beswicke design, which illustrates both the standard mansion house form of the 1880s and the mansion house image associated with tower design.
3. An important component of the Harcourt Street mansion house precinct.

