

10 Chastleton Avenue, Toorak



History and Description

This double-storeyed six roomed brick house was built between 1926 and 1927 for Margaret Ada Merfield.¹² A 1927 drainage plan shows the property bounded by Chasleton Avenue and Hill Street. The agents, Glover and Roberts of Hampton, listed on this plan may have been the builders.¹³ The property remained in the hands of the Merfield family. In 1951-52 it was owned and occupied by Miss Isabella H. Mabel Merfield, librarian, and her brother, Theon, and was described still as a six-roomed brick house.¹⁴ In 1928, Charles James Merfield, astronomer; Margaret Merfield, home duties; Zeus Amphion Merfield, physicist; Mabel Isabel Merfield, teacher; and Theon Numa Merfield, were living at Chasleton Avenue.¹⁵

The designing architect is thought to have been H. Desbrowe-Annear.¹⁶ A tender notice in *Building and Construction* 1926,¹⁷ for a residence in Hill Street, architect H. Desbrowe-Annear, seems likely to relate to the Merfield property. Annear, a notable inter-war domestic architect designed a number of Toorak residences for wealthy families, including 1 and 4 Heyington Place and 203 Orrong Road, Toorak.¹⁸ He is widely recognised as an early Australian Modernist.¹⁹ His background in engineering lead him to design and patent several architectural devices such as

12. Prahran Rate Book 1926-27 Toorak Ward No. 1928; 1927-28 Toorak Ward No. 2086.

13. MMBW House Cover No. 157824.

14. Prahran Rate Book 1951-52 Toorak War No. 2298.

15. Electoral Roll, Fawcner, 1928.

16. *Toorak Residential Character Study*.

17. *Building and Construction* 11 May, 1926

18. Woodfall, 1967, p.108.

19. Boyd, 1967, p.457.

window mechanisms and chimneys.²⁰ He also co-designed the Church Street Bridge in Prahran.

The symmetrical form, rendered wall surfaces and central portico demonstrate Georgian architectural ideas which appeared in some of Desbrowe-Annear's work, such as 1 and 4 Heyington Place, Toorak.²¹ The unusual window form, framed in a manner which gives the illusion of a long sash, is similar to fenestration in the porte cochere at 1 Heyington Place.²² However, several details in this building are less typical of this architect's work. The building is small, of simple symmetrical form and has unusual fenestration for Desbrowe-Annear. The pillar treatment in the portico, the applied plaster decoration in the gable end (in place of the elliptical window frequently used by Desbrowe-Annear), and the absence of the trademark features in the chimneys are not typical of this architect's work. However, this architect is known for 'a surprising range of eclecticism from the formal Doric of the Springthorpe Memorial at Boroondara Cemetery, through varying degrees of post-renaissance design, often with a slightly French overtones'.²³

Significance

This Toorak house has state architectural significance as most probably an example of a residence designed by Harold Desbrowe-Annear a highly innovative Victorian architect whose work was popular with wealthy residents in Melbourne in the 1920s, and which is exemplified in several residences in the Toorak area. The building contains research value. If the architect is confirmed as Desbrowe-Annear, this confirms the state level of architectural significance of the building which could be considered to be an unusual example of his work, of smaller scale than many of his commissions and featuring window and porte cochere treatment which differs slightly from his commonly recognised motifs of the patented sash windows and elliptical window decoration. Should further research reveal the architect to be a lesser known designer, the building has regional significance as an example of domestic architecture influenced by the Georgian Revival and Desbrowe-Annear's work. The property has local historical significance for its associations with the Merfields, an interesting district family.

Sources

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John Curtis Pty. Ltd., *Toorak Residential Character Study*, City of Prahran, 1991.

Desbrowe-Annear, 1922.

20. Desbrowe-Annear, 1922, pp.48-50.

21. *Architecture in Australia*, February 1967, p. 107.

22. Woodfall 1967, p.107.

23. Miles Lewis, 1986, p.21.

Electoral Role, Fawkner, 1928.

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Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended that this property remain ranked A1 for the following reasons:

- The building has state architectural significance as it is believed to be an example of the work of the innovative Victorian architect Harold Desbrowe-Annear, based on comparative architectural assessment and on the evidence in building notices dated around the time of construction.
- The building might demonstrate an unusual example of Annear's work, being of smaller scale than many of his domestic commissions and featuring windows treatment and ornament on the porte cochere which is not typical of his designs.