

Wooragee, 28 Clendon Road, Toorak



History and Description

This Toorak residence, constructed in 1918-19 as the home of Alfred A. Billson, brewer and politician, is believed to have been designed by his son, the architect, Edward Fielder Billson.³⁰ The house was called Wooragee after the birth place of its first owner, who lived there until his death in 1930.³¹ His architect son lived at Wooragee in 1923-24, when he was working on a house built on land he owned at 2 Selbourne Road, South Yarra.³² The Clendon Road house, begun in 1918-19,³³ was completed the following year.³⁴ It was described in that year as Wooragee, an 8 roomed brick house, NAV 160 pounds.

Alfred Arthur Billson, 1858-1930, was the son of George Billson, an English brewer who came to Victoria in 1852. George Billson settled in Beechworth, purchased the Ovens Brewery, and became MLA for Ovens in 1877. He died in 1886. His son, Alfred Arthur, was educated at Beechworth Grammar School and Scotch College. He took over his father's brewery in 1882. This brewery's Anglo-Australian Ale sold in Victoria and NSW. Later, when the teetotal movement was launched, Billson sold such drinks as Social Ginger Cup. Like his father, he entered politics. He held the seat for Ovens for 23 years. In Parliament, he supported educational reform, tourist development, the liquor trade and the establishment of an architects registration

30. Edward Billson, architect, son of E. F. Billson, *pers. comm.*; D. L. Johnson, *Australian Architecture*, 1901-1951, illustration of A. A. Billson's house.

31. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7. pp.289-290.

32. Prahran Rate Book 1923-24 South Yarra Ward No. 1862.

33. Prahran Rate Book 1918-19 Toorak Ward No. 1289

34. Prahran Rate Book 1919-20 Toorak Ward No. 1325.

board. He retired from Parliament in 1927 because of ill-health and died three years later. He was survived by his wife, three sons and two daughters.³⁵

The house is a two storey bungalow of unusual design demonstrating fine finishes and incorporating a diverse combination of architectural ideas. The house is composed of a series of parallel gable roofed sections with wide overhanging eaves emphasised by the absence of brackets, the flat fascia and soffit containing circular vents. These features suggest the influence of Walter Burley-Griffin in whose office Billson worked.³⁶ A second storey built above the carport was a popular feature of houses of various styles in the inter-war years, effectively dividing the front and rear sections of the house. The wall surfaces are stucco rendered with smooth rendered dressing and thin strip courses decorating the main gable with a diamond pattern. The windows are a striking feature of the house, with decorative glazing bars also reminiscent of Burley-Griffin. Regular placement of windows overlooking the driveway on the upper storey is reminiscent of Desbowe-Annear's approach. A small patio porch in the front of the house features curved, flat railing typical of the Modern 'steam-liner' aesthetic. Overall, the house represents an unusual and relatively early use of Modern design ideas.

Significance

Wooragee has state significance for its historical associations with Arthur A. Billson, brewer and politician who made his home at Wooragee from c1918 until his death there in 1930. Designed by Billson's son, the notable domestic architect, Edward F. Billson, the house has high architectural significance, demonstrating the early use of Modern architectural ideas in domestic design, in combination with features derived from the Bungalow style.

Sources

Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 7.

Billson, Edward, architect, son of E. F. Billson, *pers. comm.*

City of Prahran Rate Books, South Yarra and Toorak Wards.

Johnson, D. L., *Australian Architecture*, 1901-1951, illustration of A. A. Billson's house.

Nigel Lewis & Richard Aitken, *City of Malvern Conservation Study*, 1992, Appendix 1.

Navaretti, Peter, *Navaretti Index*.

Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended that this property be retained at A1 level.

35. *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 7 pp.289-90; Age 1 Nov. 1930 obituary.

36. Nigel Lewis & Richard Aitken, Appendix 1, p.32.