

28 Albany Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 28 Albany 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.

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 house was 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 than make up 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 30 Albany Road originally formed part of Crown Allotment 26. First purchased in 1849 by merchant James Jackson, lot 26 comprised 76 acres of land bordered by present day Kooyong, Malvern and Toorak Roads and the line of Denham Place. Jackson also purchased 108 acres of land west of Kooyong Road, where he built his mansion 'Toorak House'. East of Kooyong Road, most of 'Jackson's Paddock' remained undivided for more than twenty years. The land was fenced and leased to a succession of dairymen.

Jackson's Paddock was subdivided in 1872, creating Albany Road. In 1886, the mansion Eilyer was built on Albany Road for wealthy Western District pastoralist and one time President of the Victoria Pastoralist Union, Albert Austin. Edward Shackell purchased Eilyer in 1919 from the estate of Austin's wife. The mansion was then demolished, the formal gardens sub-divided, and in 1922 Linlithgow Road was extended to meet Albany Road.

The Sands and McDougall directory for 1935 record a 'house being built' at 28 Albany Road. The following year H J Lane can be found at this address. Lane's Albany Road house was designed by prominent architectural firm Irwin and Stevenson. The plans submitted to Malvern City Council are dated June 1934.²

Henry Lane, a motor car trader, was featured in a 1938 newspaper article '*Who's Who in the Victorian Motor World*'. The article describes Lane as a pioneer in the assembly of car chassis in Australia.³ Sands and McDougall directories list Henry Lane at 28 Albany Road until the early 1960s.

A freestanding attic-storied garage was built on the site's Linlithgow Road boundary c1991.

² Stonnington Local History Centre Malvern Building Plan No. 1039000600.

³ *Argus*, 18 May 1938, p 18.

Irwin and Stevenson

Leighton Irwin was born 9 November 1892 at Mitcham, Adelaide. Coming to Victoria at the age of eight, he was educated at Haileybury College and the University of Melbourne, undertaking a diploma of Architecture course within the Engineering faculty. He was subsequently articled to Frederick Klingender. Further employment at Bates Peebles Smart was cut short by his enlistment in the AIF in 1915. Irwin rose to the rank of Lieutenant during the war, serving mainly in France. On the conclusion of the war, he, along with contemporaries such as Percy Meldrum, Marcus Martin and Roy Stevenson, spent a period of study at the Architectural Association in London.

Irwin returned to Melbourne in February 1920 and became assistant director of the newly opened Melbourne University Architectural Atelier. In 1925, Irwin became director of the Atelier, retaining the position for nearly twenty years. He also served on the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects' board of architectural education.

In 1922, Irwin and Roy Stevenson established a joint practice, which in its early years was to specialise in domestic architecture. Both had through European travel become interested in the simply planned houses of Italy, Spain and southern France. The design of elegant houses of Mediterranean and Georgian influence was to be their leitmotif throughout the 1920s. Irwin's own Spanish-flavoured, double-fronted villa at 3 Holmwood Avenue, Brighton (1927) won repute for the firm.

The firm undertook its first medical commissions at Mildura Base Hospital in 1930. It was an application of the northern European approach to hospital design, with its streamlined form, multi-storeyed construction, and continuous, north-facing sun balconies: a theme which was frequently repeated in hospital design.

In 1931, Irwin was elected president of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects.

Before they dissolved their partnership in September 1934, Irwin and Stevenson designed the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons building and a factory complex for British Xylonite. After 1934, Irwin's clients consisted almost entirely of hospital boards.

Irwin designed hospitals and hospital extensions in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart and Launceston, as well as in country towns in New South Wales and Victoria. Perhaps his greatest triumph was Prince Henry's Hospital and Nurses Home in St Kilda Road.

Leighton Irwin was one of the foremost architects in Victoria in the interwar period and into the post war period. He was influential through his capacity as a designer, his position as at University of Melbourne Architectural Atelier and as a leader within the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. He was an enthusiastic proponent of the use of modern materials, planning and style and his work as an architect is distinctive for its attention to refined decorative detail and his skill. Irwin died of hypertensive heart disease on 4 August 1962 at Epworth Private Hospital, Richmond.

Description

The residence at 28 Albany Road, Toorak is a handsome double-storey English Domestic Revival style building with a gabled terracotta shingle roof. External walls are finished in a smooth render with clinker brick quoins to the openings providing contrasting texture and colour variation. The picturesque, asymmetrically composed front elevation has a gabled clinker brick entry porch at its centre with a rendered Tudor arch. The projecting gable ended bay on the side south of the entry porch has a decorative screen marking the location of an internal staircase. The front elevation also has a double-height faceted bay window. The roof has gentle bellcast eaves and subtly detailed clinker brick infill to the gable ends, surmounted

by squat brick chimney with raised brick banding. Windows typically have timber-framed multi-paned double-hung sashes.

The house appears to remain substantially intact as it presents to the street apart from the attic storey dormer windows to the garage roof, which date from c2006.⁴ The skillon roofed attic storey addition to the rear of the garage roof has a minimal impact on the integrity of the original design. The front fence is constructed of rendered masonry with clinker brick detailing matching the house but may be a relatively recent addition to the site. The c1991 garage fronting Linlithgow Road adopts an interwar character in keeping with the main house.

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.

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.

⁴ City of Stonnington Property File BS1587-001806

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 were built in the English Domestic revival style in the well-heeled suburbs of Stonnington during the interwar period. Houses in this mode with individual heritage 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). 28 Albany Road is distinguished from the somewhat more conventional designs in the Old English mode, such as 3 Hopetoun Road and 8 Monaro Road, in that it avoids the local characteristic of half-timbering in the gable end for subtly detailed clinker brick infill. 28 Albany Road is also unusual in so much as the houses designed by Irwin and Stevenson are more typically Mediterranean in character.

Thematic Context

The house at 28 Albany 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 double-storey English Domestic Revival style house at 28 Albany Road, Toorak was constructed in 1934 to designs by the noted architectural firm Irwin and Stevenson. The house was built on land subdivided from the grounds of the 1880s Eilyer mansion.

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

- The original external form, materials and detailing.
- The high level of external intactness.
- The legibility of the original built form.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The low height of the front fence and its sympathetic clinker brick and render design.
- The absence of modern garages or carports in the front and side setbacks.

Modern additions and alterations, including the freestanding garage on Linlithgow Road, are not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 28 Albany Road, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as a fine and largely intact English Domestic Revival style residence (Criterion D). It is not typical of Irwin and Stevenson's oeuvre but nonetheless demonstrates a skilful handling of the English Domestic Revival 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 English Domestic 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 defined by the title boundaries. External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended. It is further recommended that an A2 grading be assigned to the building.

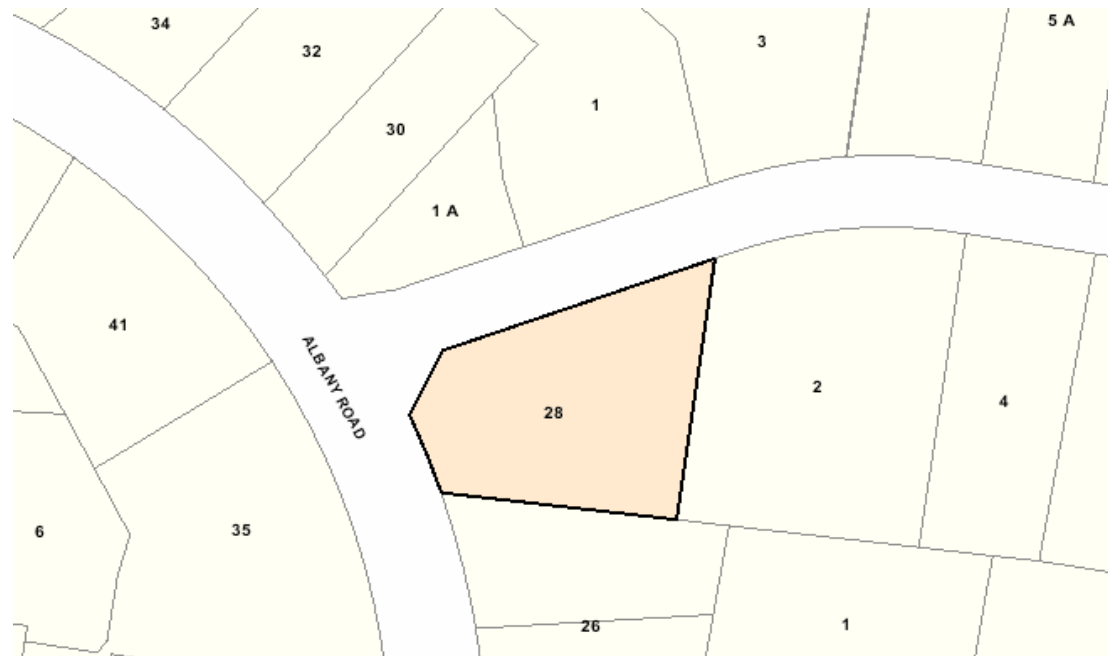


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 28 Albany Road, Toorak.