

## Mindai, 407 Glenferrie Road, Malvern Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 407 Glenferrie Road, Malvern.

### 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*’.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 within 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

In 1853, English barrister Charles Bruce Graeme Skinner purchased around 84 acres of land bounded by present day Malvern, Glenferrie and Toorak Roads and Denham Place. Skinner planned a village to be named Ledbury after the market town in the Malvern Hills, England, where his forebears had lived. Skinner's Malvern Hill Estate was mainly divided into small allotments. As an inducement to purchasers, Skinner built the Malvern Hill Hotel on the corner of present day Glenferrie Road and Malvern Road. However, Skinner's vision of an English style village, complete with church and school, did not succeed and much of the land eventually reverted to pasture.<sup>2</sup>

From 1865, five acres of land fronting the west side of Glenferrie Road between Bruce (later Benson) and Russell Streets formed part of the estate of solicitor David Braham. Braham's home 'The Elms' was a substantial brick villa sited in extensive gardens with a tennis court, croquet lawn, conservatories, a fernery, fountains and a lodge house at the Glenferrie Road entrance. By 1911, the house was rated as a mansion of twenty-three rooms and re-named 'Buncrana' and then 'Medindie'. In 1932, the Medindie Estate was sold and Medindie (Ledbury) Court was created. The mansion was subsequently demolished.<sup>3</sup>

Present day 407-409 Glenferrie Road formed part of the Medindie estate. A house was built on this site c1934 for Lachlan Roy McFarlane.<sup>4</sup> The builder was W C Burne, three-time president of the Master Builders' Association.<sup>5</sup> The original architectural plans could not be located but the first MMBW Plan of Drainage names A M McMillan as the 'agent' (the agent

<sup>2</sup>Di Foster and Steve Stefanopoulos, *Walk into History 1: Six More Great Walks in Stonnington*, p.5.

<sup>3</sup>Stonnington Local History Catalogue. MH 14377.

<sup>4</sup>MMBW Plan of Drainage No. 192778. PROV VPRS 11570/P1 Unit 40.

<sup>5</sup>Pers. Comm. Ellen Porter, Stonnington History Centre. 01/10/14.

was often the architect or builder).<sup>6</sup> Architect A Mortimer McMillan was a skilful exponent of the Old English mode but also designed one of Toorak's finest European Modernist inspired houses (68 Hopetoun Road).

Lachlan McFarlane's Glenferrie Road house first appears in the Sands and McDougall directories in 1935 as no.419, and was renumbered 409 by 1937. McFarlane apparently resided there until his death in the late 1960s.<sup>7</sup>

## Description

Mindai is a substantial double-storey Old English style building with clinker brick walls and a terracotta shingle roof. The roof is a complex arrangement of hips and gables with pronounced bracketed eaves and sturdy brick chimneys with paired angled shafts. The Glenferrie Road façade is a picturesque composition with strong allusions to the architecture of Medieval England. The gabled entry porch at the centre of the facade has a rendered Tudor arch, above which is the name of the house 'Mindai' in a Gothic style font. Abutting the south side of the entry porch is a double-storey gable ended bay with prominent corbelled brick eaves and a faceted bay window with decorative rendered panels recalling Medieval heraldry. The façade's clinker brick walls are enlivened by lozenge pattern diaper work. Half-timbering is used sparingly about a front attic storey window and gable ends on the north and rear elevations.

The house appears to remain highly intact externally. A small verandah at the southern end of the Glenferrie Road façade has been enclosed in a sympathetic fashion, apparently retaining the original timber posts and brackets. Relatively minor changes seem to have been made to the Benson Avenue elevation, including the enlargement of three arched ground floor windows. It is also noted that the overall building footprint of the house is essentially unchanged from the first MMBW Plan of Drainage of 1933.

## 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

<sup>6</sup>MMBW Plan of Drainage No. 192778. PROV VPRS 11570/P1 Unit 40.

<sup>7</sup>Di Foster and Steve Stefanopoulos, *Walk into History 1: Six More Great Walks in Stonnington*, p.5.

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.

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.

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 French Normandy for inspiration.

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 drawing inspiration from English Domestic revival sources were built in the well-heeled suburbs of Stonnington during the interwar period. Examples 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). The house at 407-409 Glenferrie Road compares favourably with the nearby example at 429 Glenferrie Road in terms of its impressive scale, design quality and intactness. However, 407-409 Glenferrie Road has a more complex, picturesque facade than 429 Glenferrie Road and has more finely wrought detailing with stronger allusions to the architecture of Medieval England.

### **Thematic Context**

Mindai at 407 Glenferrie Road, Malvern 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?*

Mindai at 407 Glenferrie Road, Malvern is a substantial double-storey Old English style house constructed c1934 to designs by accomplished interwar architect A Mortimer McMillan. It was built on land subdivided from the grounds of the nineteenth century mansion Medindie (formerly The Elms).

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 unpainted state of the face brick and terracotta elements.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The legibility of the original built form from the public realm.
- The understated presence of on-site vehicle accommodation created by the basement level garage and the general absence of modern garages and carports in the front and side setbacks.
- The clinker brick front fence and wrought iron gates.

Modern fabric is not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

Mindai is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

### *Why is it significant?*

Mindai is architecturally significant as a large, skilfully designed and highly intact Old English style residence (Criterion D). The richness of its Medieval inspired detailing and complex articulation of hips and gables exemplifies the picturesque romanticism of the Old English mode (Criterion E).

Mindai 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 and Malvern'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). Mindai also illustrates the role of houses generally, and Old English style houses in particular, as symbols of wealth, status and taste for Melbourne's 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 as shown in figure 2 below. External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended. It is further recommended that an A2 grading be assigned to the house.

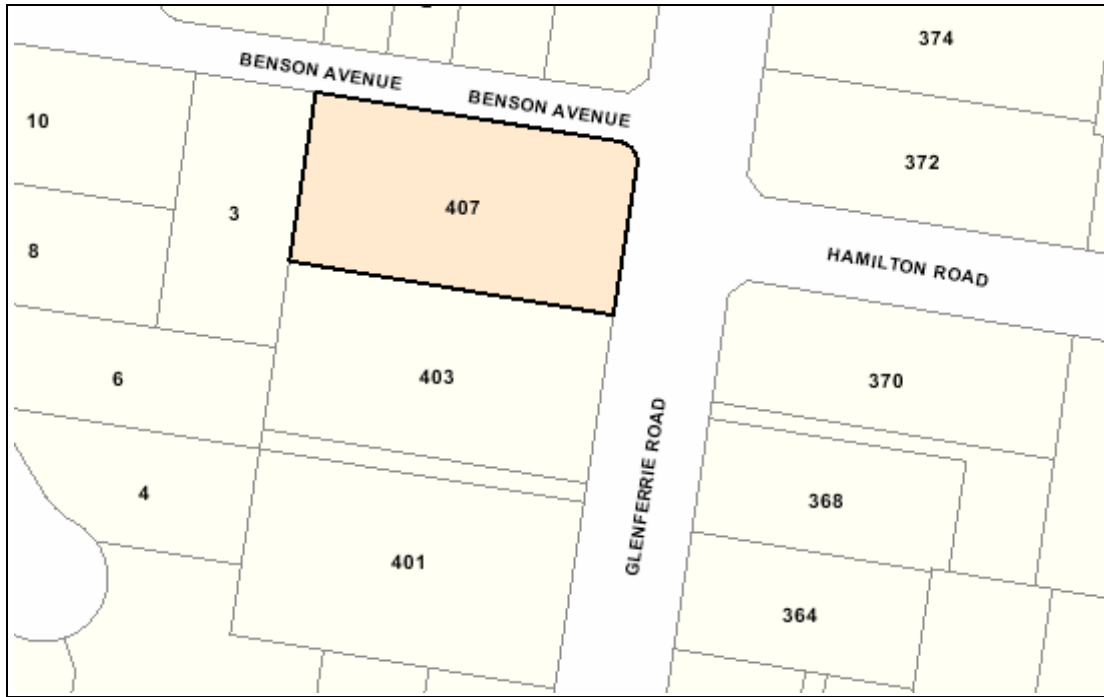


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 407 Glenferrie Road, Malvern.