

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Coonac
Address: 65 Clendon Road, Toorak

HO Reference: HO21
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 24 October 2023

Designer: Joseph Reed (potentially)
Builder: Unknown

Year of Construction: 1867



Photograph of Coonac (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO21.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings
Heritage Type: Mansion

Key Theme: Buildings Suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Creating Australia’s most ‘prestigious’ suburbs – seats of the mighty – mansion estates in the 19th century

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as an individually significant place on the HO; tree controls recommended in relation to the mature palm (*Arecaceae*) trees, cypress (*Cupressus*), monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) tree and a fourth unidentifiable tree to the east of the façade.

Controls:	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input type="checkbox"/> Internal alterations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tree controls
	<input type="checkbox"/> Victorian Heritage Register	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporated Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Prohibited uses may be permitted	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 65 Clendon Road, Toorak (otherwise known as Coonac) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the substantial 1867 mansion is of local significance, as well as the mature palm (*Arecaceae*) trees, cypress (*Cupressus*), monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) tree and a fourth unidentifiable tree to the east of the façade. The front boundary wall, tennis court and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Coonac is of local historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonington,

Why is it significant?

Coonac is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of late Victorian mansions on estates within Toorak during the late 19th century, prior to the wider subdivision of the late Victorian estates. The mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period. (Criterion A)

Coonac is important in demonstrating the principle characteristics of an late Victorian Italianate boom era design. These features include the use of stucco render; a hipped roof form clad with slate, hidden eaves behind decorative parapet, polygonal bays, arcaded loggia and the rectilinear form. (Criterion D)

Coonac has aesthetic significance as a high-quality, fine and intact example of a late Victorian mansion on a large allotment with a deep setback. Likely designed by architect Joseph Reed, noted characteristics that contribute towards this aesthetic value include the use of stucco render, polygonal bays, scale, a decorative pediment and parapet, arched windows and arcaded loggia, and hipped slate roofing with an intact lantern. The established landscape setting and mature plantings also contribute towards the aesthetic value of the site, making it a landmark residence in Toorak. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Coonac is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of late Victorian mansions on estates within Toorak during the late 19th century, prior to the wider subdivision of the late Victorian estates. The mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period.
B	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
C	<i>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

D	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	Coonac is important in demonstrating the principle characteristics of a late Victorian Italianate boom era design. These features include the use of stucco render; a hipped roof form clad with slate, hidden eaves behind decorative parapet, polygonal bays, arcaded loggia and the rectilinear form.
E	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Coonac has aesthetic significance as a high-quality, fine and intact example of a late Victorian mansion on a large allotment with a deep setback. Likely designed by architect Joseph Reed, noted characteristics that contribute towards this aesthetic value include the use of stucco render, polygonal bays, scale, a decorative pediment and parapet, arched windows and arcaded loggia, and hipped slate roofing with an intact lantern. The established landscape setting and mature plantings also contribute towards the aesthetic value of the site, making it a landmark residence in Toorak.
F	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
G	<i>Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
H	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

- **Physical Analysis**

Coonac is a large two-storey mansion built in the Victorian Italianate style. The mansion has two distinct wings, the main wing and a smaller two-storey wing extending to the north.

Coonac displays two different architectural styles. Its design essentially belongs to the first style of the earlier Italianate houses with simple unadorned stucco work. The second style is present in a limited area of the canted bay window, specifically associated with the Mannerist and Baroque detailing of the Boom style houses of the late 1880s. However, this could be attributed to the overall arrangement of

the basic massing of solids and voids in the design of Coonac which is more commonly seen in boom era residences built between c.1875 and c.1895.

Coonac has a two-storey arcaded loggia which returns to form an L-shape. The columns are cast iron with Corinthian capitals. The L-shaped loggia is placed between two projecting two-storey height bay windows. The entrance is marked by a slightly projecting two-storey pedimented portico.

Coonac is particularly Australian in design for a Victorian mansion, adopting the neo-classical and picturesque concepts of 19th century English architecture to suit a hotter and harsher climate by the use of a wide two-storey loggia or piazza. This provided a cool shaded space around the main rooms and further protected these rooms from the heat and glare of the sun. Coonac is architecturally noteworthy as it forms a link between the restrained style of the earlier Italianate residences and the extravagant boom style mansions of the 1880s and early 1890s. The architectural link also goes beyond this, and forms a bridge between the Italianate houses and the diagonal axis layouts of the Queen Anne style villas. This is particularly notable in the work of Ussher and Kemp in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

The main wing presents an asymmetrical front (south) façade. The main entrance is located in a slightly projecting two-storey pedimented portico. It is raised via steps and connects to the two-storey return loggia. The front façade loggia has three arched bays. The loggia is flanked by the street front façade porte cochre with Corinthian style pilasters and a projecting bay on the south façade. The hipped roof bay is typical of the Italianate design. The rest of the structure has a hipped roof that wraps around a centred clerestory window with a square hipped roof. The façade is capped by a moulded cornice and balustraded parapet with cast ball finials. Four large stuccoed corbelled chimneys with grouped brackets extend from the roof of the main wing. The façade of the main wing is emphasised by a simple floor moulding. Bracketed eaves sit under the slate tiled roof. Arched double hung sash windows and rectangular double hung sash windows are located on the main wing. The rectangular windows are characterised by sill and frame mouldings with a keystone motif, while the arched windows feature a border of leadlight red stained glass with a floral design.

The smaller north wing also features arched and rectangular double hung sash windows. It has a hipped roof and a single-storey conservatory by the main wing. The north wing has two stuccoed chimneys extending from the roof. There is a private courtyard to the north of the wing which is located above the ramp to the underground carpark.

Although the property has been extensively subdivided since it was first established, Coonac is still located on a large lot with extensive open areas on all sides of the main structure. The lot projects south at the south west corner of the main lot. The grounds of Coonac are highly landscaped with several large mature trees particularly along the east and south areas of the property. This includes a large monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) tree located by the street boundary wall. The main entrance to the property along Clendon Road curves around a lawn area and a hexagonal raised fountain to a parking area off the main south façade of the house. The driveway extends north and curves around a formal Italian style garden parallel to the boundary wall leading to a ramp to the underground parking area off the north courtyard of the house. There is a tennis court with a tall hedge wall located at the north extent of the property. To the south of the tennis court and beside the main house is a free-standing

pool house structure and swimming pool. There are extensive areas of lawn particularly along the east and south areas of the property.

The street front boundary of Coonac is demarcated by a tall, non-original blockwork wall with a string course cap. The wall is supported along a single course foundation and piers with a pedimented gable cap. The recessed main entrance is flanked by in ground garden beds with a young tree and Lily of the Nile (*agapanthus*) underplanting. The gates area detailed wrought iron and supported by freestanding piers in a similar style to the wall piers. To the left of the gates is a stucco mould with an expressed border and lettering reading 'COONAC' in a similar colour to the blockwork wall. To the right is a similar stucco mould with expressed numbering reading '65' and a letter box slot. There is a secondary entrance located off the north underground ramp with a timber paling gate.

Coonac is located on Clendon Road with Clendon Court and Woorigoleen Road located off the property. Coonac remains in use as a residential property and is considered to be in good condition. The landscape of the property has been altered to include a swimming pool, pool house, tennis court and underground parking and ramp. Despite this, the main structure appears intact, along with several mature plantings, and would be considered to be of high integrity.

• Alterations and Additions

- Air conditioning units located on the main roof.
- Concrete laid driveway and above ground parking area.
- Timber paling gate.
- Underground parking area and ramp.
- Tennis court with high hedge wall.
- Freestanding pool house added.
- Swimming pool added.
- Paved area around swimming pool area to north side of the house.

History

• Historical Context

For thousands of years preceding European colonialism, the area now known as Stonnington was the traditional home of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. This environment would have provided Traditional Owners with access to pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot), and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), in a rolling landscape on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay. It is important to note that the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington did not end with colonialism—it has a rich presence to this day.

Following the establishment of Melbourne in 1835, squatter John Gardiner and many others like him sought out land in what would become present day Toorak and surrounds on account of its densely timbered landscape, undulating terrain and proximity to water. By 1840, crown land sales marked the area's transition to pastoral settlement, and later in 1851, with the purchase of land in Hawthorn by Thomas Herbert Power, the surrounding environments gradually became a place where the early merchant and squatter elite of Melbourne built their homesteads. In Toorak, this is best represented by the purchase of lot 26 by James Jackson, associate in Jackson, Rae & Co. soap and candle merchants.

Jackson was described by politician William Westgarth as ‘Melbourne’s greatest merchant of this early time’ (Forster 1999, 10). It is only fitting that his house, called Toorak House, would be the namesake of what would become arguably the most affluent suburb in Melbourne. Following the discovery of gold in the 1850s and the wealth this produced for ancillary trades, the Toorak area drew in Melbourne’s newly wealthy. Today, over a century later, Toorak still has connotations of wealth and prestige as best represented in its history and built environment (Forster 1999, 5–26).

- [Place History](#)

An extensive history of Coonac has previously been authored in ‘History of Coonac’. The following account is primarily drawn from this study and is augmented by revisions and supplementary archival research conducted by Extent Heritage.

Coonac was designed in c.1866/67 and belongs in the line of mid 19th century traditional Italianate residences that emerged following the Gold Rush influx of British trained architects to Melbourne. Its architectural style is thus readily visible in contemporaneous houses like Bishops Court (1853), Charnwood (1855), and Frogmore (1856). The mansion itself was built in 1867 for squatter and pastoralist R.B. Ronald following his purchase of Orrong Estate land in c.1865/66. At the time of its completion, the house was named Scan Scud and consisted of twelve rooms, an office and stables on just under three and one quarter acres of land. Although the architect is not known, the close relationship between R.B. Ronald and J. MacBain suggests that architect Joseph Reed, who designed MacBain’s house in 1868, may have been involved. This is supported by Reed’s call for tenders in 1867 for a large house, office and outbuildings in Clendon Road, Toorak (Argus 1867, 3). Although this is too late to be attributed to the building of Coonac, it does indicate that Reed had a reputation for domestic work within the area. Due to the lack of written historical evidence, it is difficult to verify with certainty the exact architect.

Upon Ronald’s departure for England in 1875, the house was sold to pastoralist Thomas Armstrong. Armstrong’s occupancy of Coonac was short lived however, and by 1880, the official owner was Isabella Affleck. Affleck married into a Scots Presbyterian pastoralist family who owned extensive sheep stations in Western Australia. Notably, all the families of Ronald, Armstrong and Affleck are recorded in Henderson’s Australian Families (1943) as being pioneer pastoralists who settled on enormous stations around Port Phillip Bay and in the Western District of Victoria.

Coonac’s early association with pioneering pastoralists saw an end in 1884 when hotel proprietor Archibald Menzies purchased it. Following a brief occupancy at the house, it was again sold in 1887 to engineer, railway contractor and Director of the Federal Bank John Robb. Notable for leading the removal of Batman’s Hill in preparation for the building of Spencer Street Railway Station in 1863, Robb’s work spanned water supply distribution systems, drainage and sewer works, and he was particularly renowned for his railway construction work in the Western District of Victoria, East Gippsland, South and Western Australia. By the time of his occupancy at Coonac, Robb held considerable areas of land, pastoral stations, and sugar plantations across Melbourne. In 1889, J. Robb’s son-in-law Alfred Dunn, commenced his residency at Coonac. An architect by training, his occupancy saw the design of furniture for the house, as well as several architectural additions and renovation (Building, Engineering and Mining Journal 1890).

Both the end of the land boom and the onset of the Great Depression saw a series of financial losses for Robb. By mid-1893, rural losses and the collapse in value of his real estate left him £680,000 in debt. As a result, the Federal Bank was temporarily closed and an investigation revealed Robb's part in the milking of funds. Following this controversy, Coonac was taken over by the Federal Bank and leased to his wife Elizabeth Robb (née Stranger), before John's sudden death in 1896 (Lack 1976). From this period onwards, the Federal Bank continued to lease Coonac to tenants until an associated finance company Melbourne Trust Co. took over the house in 1899.

In 1907, William Baillieu, financier, politician, and patriarch of the Baillieu family dynasty, purchased Coonac. His occupancy lasted for seven years and the mansion was subsequently purchased by Mrs J. Collins in 1914, and Ivie Constance Hammond (née Webb) in 1920. This marked the beginning of the Hammond's family twenty-three year occupancy at the mansion. In 1943, the Hammonds leased the house to the Legion of Ex-Servicemen and for a period it was used as a Woman's Hostel. The family's ownership of Coonac ultimately ceased in 1948 when it was purchased by the Department of Social Services for use as outpatient centre. As previous research has indicated, government ownership played an integral role in preventing Coonac's likely subdivision during the 1950s and 60s. It operated as a Commonwealth rehabilitation centre until 1986, before it was taken over by property developer Livio Caellante and his wife Josie. Their occupancy saw the refurbishment of the mansion's thirteen main rooms and servants quarters, as well as a number of modern additions (Domain 2010). Following their renovations, it was auctioned off in 1990 and then again in 2002 (The Age 2002).

Comparative Analysis

The first Italianate house in Australia was Rosedale, located in Tasmania and built in 1847. In Melbourne, the Italianate character of Toorak House (1850) was greatly enhanced when it was converted and enlarged as the Governor's residence in 1854. This put the seal of approval on the use of the Italianate style for domestic work. Other houses followed including Bishops Court (1853), Charnwood (1855), Frogmore (1856 J. Reed), Orrong (Grey Lodge c.1850). When looking for comparable examples to Coonac, it is important to understand the developmental context of these 19th century mansions.

Comparable examples within Toorak include:

- **Mandeville Hall (10 Mandeville Crescent, Toorak) (HO80 and VHR No. H0676).** Mandeville Hall was originally constructed in 1869 for Alfred Watson and comprised twelve rooms. The original austere mansion was redesigned following Joseph Clarke's purchasing of the property in 1876, by renowned architect Charles Webb. The additions expanded the mansion from eleven rooms to thirty rooms and provided the mansion with the boom era façade it has today. It is this renovation which makes Mandeville Hall a comparable example to Coonac. Mandeville Hall's façade comprises a double-storey wraparound arcaded loggia with balustrading and curved arches. Stucco render pilasters support a pediment over the centred entrance, and a parapet, complete with additional balustrading and urns, conceals the slate roof. Many of these characteristics are comparable to Coonac, the main features being the use of loggia, stucco render, pilasters supporting decorative pediments and a parapet. Mandeville Hall contextualises Coonac as a boom era mansion constructed in the late Victorian Italianate style.
- **Whernside (2A Whernside Avenue, Toorak).** Though altered extensively by famed Arts and Crafts architect Harold Desbrowe-Annear, Whernside still conveys its late Victorian design qualities. Characteristics shared by both Whernside and Coonac include the use of rectilinear

form; the use of brick masonry with stucco rendering, the hipped slate roof, polygonal bays, and environmental setting, where both mansions occupy extensive mature remnant gardens. Both properties are located in the bend of their respective streets, conveying the gradual subdivision of their original acreage and the historical encroachment of development following the subdivision of the Victorian estates in Stonnington.

- **Larnook House (519 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO85).** Larnook, constructed in 1881, is comparable to Coonac as another example of a late Victorian mansion within the City of Stonnington. Common features evident at both sites include the double-storey rectilinear form of each mansion, the use of slate as a roofing material, the hipped roof, the polygonal bays, and the use of stucco rendering. Differences between both sites include the verandah designs and the use of parapets – where Coonac conceals its roofline with the use of a parapet and has an arcaded loggia, and Larnook has a visible roof and a wrought iron lacework and brick verandah. Differences extend to contrasting uses, where Coonac continues to be used as a private residence, and Larnook was converted between 1949-1952 into a school. Both sites are comparable however as remnant Victorian mansions within the City of Stonnington.

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Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

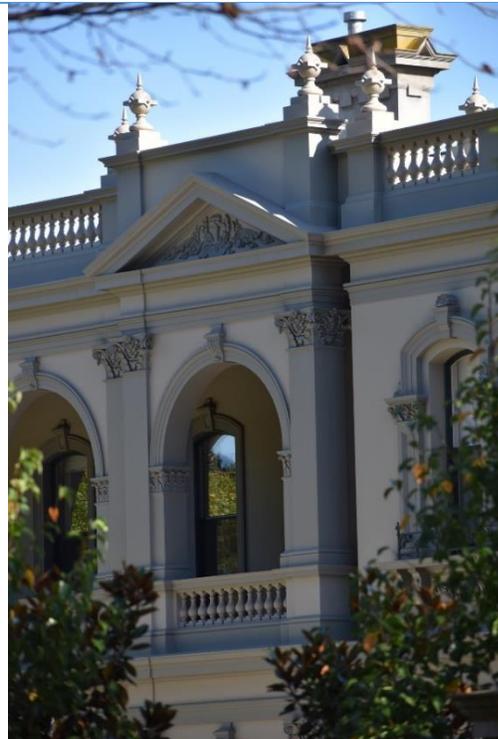
Further Images



View of the façade from Clendon Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Façade details from Clendon Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Second storey parapet and loggia details (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Window details (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Northern elevation of Coonac (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Western elevation of Coonac (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Entrance gates on Clendon Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Chimney and lantern details (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Original chimney design (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Later chimney design (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



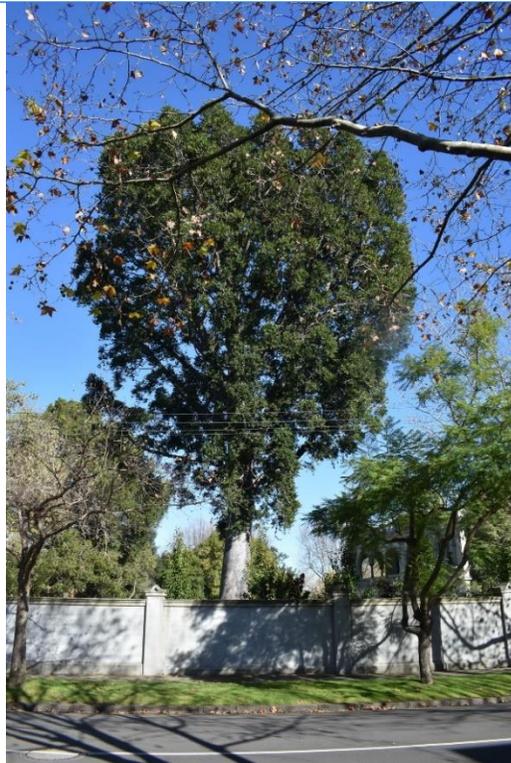
Later chimney design on northern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Mature cypress (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Mature Monkey puzzle tree (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Mature unidentified tree (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Mature palms on northern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



House name, beside entrance gates (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

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