

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Blair House

Address: 17 St Georges Road, Toorak

HO Reference: HO98

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 24 October 2023

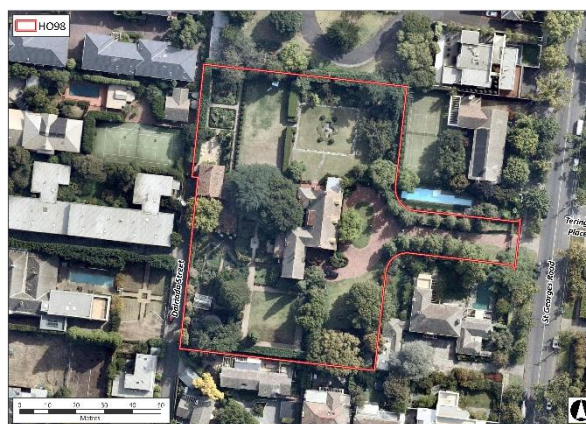
Designer: Hughes and Orme

Year of Construction: 1936

Builder: Unknown



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



Location map and extent of HO98.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings

Heritage Type: Mansion

Key Theme: Buildings suburbs

Key Sub-theme: Creating Australia's most 'designed' suburbs – houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as an individually significant place on the HO; Tree controls recommended in relation to former Toorak House including a red cedar (*Toona australis*), zean oak (*Quercus canariensis*), Ormeau bottle tree (*Brachychiton sp*) and Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria hetrophylla*).

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 17 St Georges Road, Toorak, (otherwise known as Blair House) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale, setback and detailing of the substantial Old English Revival mansion with Arts and Crafts influences is of local significance, along with the carriage house, front boundary wall, the formal tree lined herringbone brick driveway and alignment, and remnant trees from Toorak House including a red cedar (*Toona australis*), zean oak (*Quercus canariensis*), Ormeau bottle tree (*Brachychiton sp*) and Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria hetrophylla*). The lap pool, tennis court and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Blair House is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Mature trees at Blair House, including a red cedar (*Toona australis*), zean oak (*Quercus canariensis*), Ormeau bottle tree (*Brachychiton sp*) and Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria hetrophylla*), have historical significance as remnant plantings from the former Toorak Estate. (Criterion A)

Blair House is aesthetically significant as an intact and visually distinct early 20th century interwar Old English Revival mansion with Arts and Crafts influences designed by architects Hughes and Ormes. These characteristics include the use of terracotta shingle tiles, the use of symmetry, brick masonry and fenestration, timber window shutters, sash windows and sandstone entrance treatment. The carriage house is aesthetically significant as a two-storey red brick Georgian Revival style structure fitted with sash windows with timber shutters, deep eaves and a tiled gable roof. The manicured grounds, the formal tree lined herringbone brick driveway and mature plantings from the former Toorak Estate are also of significance, contributing to the overall setting of the place. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Mature trees at Blair House, including a red cedar (<i>Toona australis</i>), zean oak (<i>Quercus canariensis</i>), Ormeau bottle tree (<i>Brachychiton sp</i>) and Norfolk Island pine (<i>Araucaria hetrophylla</i>), have historical significance as remnant plantings from the former Toorak Estate.
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>	This place does not meet this criterion.
E	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Blair House is aesthetically significant as an intact and visually distinct early 20th century interwar Old English Revival mansion with Arts and Crafts influences designed by architects Hughes and Ormes. These characteristics include the use of terracotta shingle tiles, the use of symmetry, brick masonry and fenestration, timber window shutters, sash windows and sandstone entrance treatment. The carriage house is aesthetically significant as a two-storey red brick Georgian Revival style structure fitted with sash windows with timber shutters, deep eaves and a tiled gable roof. The manicured grounds, the formal tree lined herringbone brick driveway and mature plantings from the former Toorak Estate are also of significance, contributing to the overall setting of the place.
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

Blair House is a large three-storey face brick mansion built in the Interwar Old English style with Arts and Crafts style influences. The structure has a robust and simple overall form. The structure includes two projecting bays flanking the west elevation and a large two-storey wing adjoining the south bay. The main structure and two-storey wing present a high-pitched gable roof and a hipped roof at the projecting west elevation bays. The roof is clad in terracotta tiles. There are six open face brick chimneys

projecting from the roof; this includes three tall chimneys on the main wing and north bay. The secondary two-storey wing has one tall chimney and a pair of short chimneys.

The single fronted façade features a symmetrical fenestration layout. The main entrance is located in a central position on a raised recessed porch, with elaborate and classical sandstone capping used as an entrance treatment around the door. The ground level fenestration includes three windows on each side of the main entrance, a pair of small arched windows and a large sash window. The upper level fenestration includes a bank of three windows in the centre bay flanked by a large sash window. The fenestration details include white timber paned windows and white louvred shutters. The façade terminates under the projecting roof eaves. The façade is capped with three dormer windows spaced equally across the gable roof. The gable windows have an arched form with a corresponding roof form clad in sheet metal.

The northern and southern elevations of the main three-storey wing are capped with the chimneys that are located flush to the façade before projecting above the roof ridge. The northern elevation includes French doors flanked by two large windows. The second level includes five smaller windows and one centred arch window at the attic level. The ground level of the northern elevation includes a small extension with a lean-to roof clad in corrugated galvanised iron. To the right of the extension is a raised porch laid in a similar brick to the structure's façade. The porch is accessed from a set of semi-circular shaped steps. The southern elevation includes smaller fenestration on the three levels and opens up to a parking area. The western elevation includes a flat dormer roof extension. The secondary two-storey wing includes fenestration in a similar size and finish as the main structure. It includes a covered porch area on the western elevation leading to the backyard.

The carriage house located on the western property boundary of the property comprises of a modest double storey red brick Georgian Revival structure. Rectilinear in form, the building runs north south with boundary wall, and is fitted with a gabled roof. Two chimneys are present at the apex of each gable, with an additional chimney on the southwestern corner of the building. Sash windows face out onto lane access, fitted with timber shutters mimicking the design reflected on the main house. There are some differences between the main residence and the carriage house, the two main ones being the colour of brick masonry and the eaves. The masonry on the main residence has an orange hue, while the carriage house is constructed out of a more classic red brick. The eaves on the carriage house are deep and angled, with exposed trusses.

The grounds of Blair House are extensive and highly landscaped with several distinct areas. The property is located on a large lot set back from St Georges Road and accessed via a long driveway extending east forming a 'T' shaped allotment. The driveway is flanked by two residential properties that were likely part of the original 17 St Georges Road lot prior to later subdivision. The property has rear access to Dalriada Street off the west boundary of the site. The main entrance is located on the east boundary wall fronting St Georges Road.

The St Georges Road front wall includes a tall open face masonry wall with a recessed main gate entrance. The black palisade front gate is flanked by two robust square piers capped with a highly decorative wrought iron lantern light fixture. The west Dalriada Street wall mainly consists of a timber paling fence. However, the recessed main entrance, consisting of a large timber gate and arched door painted green is set within a section of tall convex curved walls that are face masonry and laid in a

stretcher bond. The left wall continues to form the façade of a two-storey freestanding addition. The structure includes fenestration with a similar detailing as the main house and bracketed projecting eaves. The structure has an overall simple open gable form and is the only freestanding addition located on the property and was known as Kildrum.

The main driveway consists of red brick laid in a herringbone pattern. Once past the flanking properties it forms a return arch with an extension to the parking area of the south elevation of the house. The driveway includes an area of lawn around the return arch. The north expanse of the property includes three sections separated by tall hedge walls. The east most section includes dense tree planting with a centred boxwood (*Buxus*) hedge and ball topiaries around a water fountain. The centre section consists of a lawn tennis court which was the former location of the carriage drive of Toorak House. The west section includes two smaller square gardens with ornamental planting.

The south expanse of the property includes a large south lawn and an extensive formal garden that extends from the west elevation of the main house to the southwest corner of the property. The formal garden includes an original glass house by the west boundary wall. The property includes a number of mature trees. Several trees which have been retained from Toorak House are significant, including a red cedar (*Toona australis*), zean oak (*Quercus canariensis*), Ormeau bottle tree (*Brachychiton sp*) and Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria hetrophylla*).

17 St Georges Road remains in use as a private residence. The property retains some structures and layout which was originally connected to Toorak House. While the grounds have been altered over time, significant features have been retained. The main structure and carriage house appear largely intact with minor additions. 17 St Georges Road is considered to be in good condition and of high integrity.

• Alterations and Additions

- Small extension with a lean-to roof clad in corrugated galvanised iron on the north elevation.
- Flat dormer roof extension on the west roof on the main wing.
- West timber paling boundary fence added.
- Subdivision of allotment for the provision of two new dwellings.

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**

Blair House at 17 St Georges Road, then listed as 9 St Georges Road, was erected in 1936 to designs prepared by noted Melbourne architectural firm Hughes and Orme. Known for their domestic Old English designs during the interwar period, Hughes and Orme were also responsible for several other dwellings both within and outside the vicinity. These include the Georgian house at 2 Yar Orrong Road, Toorak, Old English maisonettes at 12 Monomeath Avenue, Toorak, as well as Old English flats at 16 York Street, St Kilda West.

Built for Margaret Hunter, the house was constructed following the demolition of an earlier sixteen roomed house on the site known as Blair. Built in 1902 to designs of the architects Hyndman and Bates, this earlier house also appears to have been owned by Hunter prior to demolition (Sands & McDougall 1925). Completed in 1936, the new two-storey replacement house was designed in the Old English style and set back on the large allotment. It comprised exposed orange brick, semicircular steps, an attic storey, a formal tree-lined drive as well as a tennis court.

In 1939, ownership of the property was taken up by Dame Hilda Mabel Stevenson. A prominent Australian philanthropist and community worker, Stevenson was the daughter of successful industrialist Hugh Victor McKay. Records indicate that she owned the house with her husband Colonel George Ingram Stevenson until at least the 1970s (Sands & McDougall 1955-1970).

Comparative Analysis

Blair House was designed by Melbourne-based architects Hughes and Orme. Whilst other examples of their work are represented on the Heritage Overlay, there are limited comparable examples that are of the same grand scale and status as the residence on St Georges Road. The absence of other protected examples highlights the significance of the site as one of the best examples of their work.

Comparable examples include:

- **Residence (2 Yar Orrong Road, Toorak) (H0522).** The residence at 2 Yar Orrong Road was designed by Hughes and Orme and constructed in 1940, four years after the completion of Blair House. The residence at Yar Orrong Road is a comparable example to Blair House as a structure designed by Hughes and Orme, a large scale mansion built in the interwar years, as well as for shared aesthetic characteristics including the use of orange brick masonry, brick fenestration under the eaves, the use of terracotta shingling as a roofing material, hipped roof form, timber window shutters and grand entrance treatments. Many of these elements are reflective of Hughes and Ormes Arts and Crafts Old English Revival influence.

- **15-17 Fairlie Court, South Yarra (HO6, contributory graded in a broader precinct).** The house at 15-17 Fairlie Court is comparable to Blair House as another example of Hughes and Ormes' interwar Old English influenced designs. Clear differences that are readily recognisable include the difference in scale, with the house on Fairlie Court being significantly smaller than that represented on St Georges Road, and that the original face brickwork at Fairlie Court house has been painted white. The house originally had terracotta tiles to the roof, the same as the residence on Yar Orrong Road and Blair House, however the house has since been re-roofed in slate. Nevertheless, the house still observes features that can be linked to the original design, including the use of fenestration and quoining. Overall, the house on Fairlie Court can be considered as a less intact example of Hughes and Ormes residential work compared to Blair House.
- **Former M H Baillieu House (729 Orrong Road, Toorak) (HO510).** The Former M H Baillieu House at 729 Orrong Road was constructed in 1926, ten years prior to the construction of Blair House. The house was designed by pre-eminent Arts and Crafts architect Harold Desbrowe-Anneer and is considered to be significant as an outstanding example of an interwar Georgian Revival residence. This building, though fitted with more elaborate elements than Blair House and with a closer emphasis on Georgian Revival, is still comparable to Blair House as an intact example of an interwar domestic building of the same scale built in Toorak. The use of similar brick masonry, fenestration and roof form are all elements that contribute to the overall aesthetic form of the building and establishes architectural significance of the site.

References

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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



Entrance gates on St Georges Road, looking west (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Blair House as viewed from the public domain (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Looking west down the driveway (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Oblique aerial view, taken November 2020 (source: NearMap, 2021).



Zoomed detail view of the sandstone entrance treatment of Blair House (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Curved wall at the rear of the site, accessed from Dalriada Street (source: Google Streetview, 2020).



Carriage house, as viewed during winter in August 2014 (source: Google Streetview, 2014).

Authors

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