

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Former Oma Gateway

Address: 170 Kooyong Road, Toorak

HO Reference: HO320

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 24 October 2023

Designer: William Salway

Year of Construction: 1888

Builder: Unknown



Photograph of Former Oma Gateway (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO320.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings (private)

Heritage Type: Gate

Key Theme: Building 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 cypress (*Cupressus*)

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 170 Kooyong Road, Toorak (otherwise known as Former Oma Gateway) is significant. Specifically, the original former Oma mansion boundary wall is significant and the period appropriate gate is contributory in relation to the wall. The cypress (*Cupressus*) is also significant. The contemporary house, garage and later alterations and additions behind the gates are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Former Oma Gateway is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The Former Oma Gateway is historically significant as remnant elements of the former Oma mansion. Designed by William Salway, the gateway is an important physical reminder of the Victorian mansions on estates that once dominated and defined Toorak. The mature pine is also historically significant as a remnant example of the formerly extensive Oma Estate gardens. The gates, though not original, are period appropriate to the wall and contribute towards an understanding of the historical importance of the boundary walls. (Criterion A)

The late Victorian wall and period appropriate gate are aesthetically significant as key character elements of the site, comprising wrought iron gates, painted brick posts and brick boundary walls with rendered capping. The wall is now painted but would have originally had a red brick finish. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	The Former Oma Gateway is historically significant as remnant elements of the former Oma mansion. Designed by William Salway, the gateway is an important physical reminder of the Victorian mansions on estates that once dominated and defined Toorak. The mature pine is also historically significant as a remnant example of the formerly extensive Oma Estate gardens. The gates, though not original, are period appropriate to the wall and contribute towards an understanding of the historical importance of the boundary walls.
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.

<i>D</i>	<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.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	The late Victorian wall and period appropriate gate are aesthetically significant as key character elements of the site, comprising wrought iron gates, painted brick posts and brick boundary walls with rendered capping. The wall is now painted but would have originally had a red brick finish.
<i>F</i>	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>G</i>	<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.
<i>H</i>	<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

The original Former Oma Gateway entrance at 170 Kooyong Road, Toorak, is recessed from the road with flanking Castlemaine slate garden beds. The gate is not original, however it is in a period appropriate style. The gate consists of black wrought iron and is framed by two tall feature piers on each side. Each pier cap is decorated with curved pediments, mimicking a design implemented on the original Oma mansion (demolished in 1965). A house name plaque reading NAREEB and cast metal numbering is located on the right pier by the front gate. The entrance walkway is laid in stone paving leading to the 1960s house, which is not significant. A smaller driveway gate is located along the main wall and features a similar black wrought iron spear top fence. This entrance is not original to the design and has been achieved by cutting an opening in the original wall, large enough to fit a small car. This second gate is also not original to the site. The whole wall has been painted white, however it is very likely that the original fence was red face brick.

The subject place is located on Kooyong Road close to the junction with Huntingfield Road. The gates are currently used as access to a residential property and are considered to be in fair condition. The original mansion lot has been heavily subdivided, and the mansion demolished in 1965. The current structure occupying the property would have been built after the demolition. The extant evidence of the original mansion structure remains in the front wall and mature pine tree. The original wrought iron gates built in

the 1870s in England have since been relocated to the Royal Botanical Gardens. The wall is considered to be of fair integrity.

- **Alterations and Additions**

- Lot heavily subdivided.
- Original mansion demolished in 1965.
- New property on site built after 1965 demolition.
- Exposed aggregate driveway.
- New crossover and driveway added, including creating a hole in the wall for access a garage.
- Stone paving front yard walkway.
- New landscaping.
- Original wrought iron gates relocated to the Royal Botanical Gardens (1967).
- Open face brick front wall painted white.

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**

170 Kooyong Road comprises the remains of an entrance to a now demolished two storied Italianate mansion named Oma (short for Sommariva). Designed by architect William Salway for Irish-born Australian piano manufacturer and philanthropist Octavius Charles Beale and his family, Oma was completed in 1888 and set behind a vast garden with many trees (Nigel Lewis Richard Aitkin P/L 1992, 219). It stood on what is now 166-170 Kooyong Road, and early references to the mansion make note of

its 'fine well-planted grounds, with handsome elaborate scroll-work entrance gates (set in ornamental brick walls) opening onto a serpentine drive' (The Australasian 1892, 44).

Merchant, pastoralist and horseman James Grice purchased the mansion in April 1890 upon Beale's move to Sydney. Following the Grice's family extended stay in England in 1892, the residence was temporarily leased to pastoralist and squatter John Catto and his wife (The Australasian 1892, 44). The Catto's staged at least two major spring balls during their occupancy (Leader 1892, 30; The Australasian 1895, 39). As outlined in a newspaper article, the 1892 ball, attended by around 300 people, saw the transformation of the large drawing and dining rooms into a dance floor (Leader 1892, 30). The mansion was subsequently put on sale in 1904 (Punch 1904, 12). At the time of its auction, the property was described as having 'an extensive frontage to Boundary-road by a great depth for a portion of the land right through to Albany-road, containing in all about five acres', while the mansion itself is noted for its 'spacious vestibule, Drawingroom, Library, Morningroom and Breakfastroom, with folding doors opening to an enclosed verandah...exceptionally large dining room with servers... large kitchen...Servant's Hall, Butler's Room and a large, dry and commodious Cellar' (Punch 1904, 12-13).

It was ultimately sold to Western district squatter Walter George Simmons and his wife Alice (née Swain) in 1906. The Simmons were associated with the Nareeb Nareeb squatting run near Glenlouth and had renamed the mansion Nareeb by 1907 (The Kyneton Observer 1888, 2; Punch 1907, 24;). Their occupancy was accompanied by their daughters Gertrude Alice, Nellie Harriet, Edith Lillian and Jane Constance. The mansion stayed within the Simmons family until it was sold by the trustees upon death of Gertrude Simmons in 1964, marking a remarkable fifty-eight occupancy (RBG Friends 2020). Following this transfer of ownership, Nareeb was subdivided and demolished in 1965. The Simmons' impressively long occupancy undoubtedly played a part in the lack of structural alterations at the house. In the period before its demolition, Nareeb was described as 'a museum' (The Bulletin 1964, 19), as well as 'gas-lit, heavily ornate, crowded with late and early Victoriana...and ghost ridden from the attic to the stables. Apart from the beautiful garden, which tended to renew itself each season, the household seemed to have stood still for 70 years...' (Hutton 1965, 10-11). The high integrity of the house and its interior, along with its extensive collection of furniture and fine arts, is reflected in the large crowds that attended the 1964 public viewing of Nareeb held by the National Trust prior to its auction (The Bulletin 1964, 19).

Demolition and subdivision of the five acre property transformed the site into what is now present day Nareeb Court. Before the mansion was pulled down, several items were removed and either donated or sold. This included the original elaborate wrought iron gates that were eventually relocated to D Gate at the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1967 (RBG Friends 2020). While the brick work at the current fence are in their original form, the period iron gate is a replacement that is of a different design to the original. The current property behind the gates was built in the 1960s following demolition. Due to the lack of available historical material, it is difficult to ascertain the precise architect and date of construction. The house was last sold in 1985 and is currently being leased out as a commercial space.

Comparative Analysis

It is difficult to establish a comparative analysis for 170 Kooyong Road, as the protections are afforded to the site are purely for the remnant planting and the front wall. The house behind the gates is not significant. Whilst the gates present onsite are period appropriate, they are not the original. With the subdivision of the Victorian estates, original entrances and drives were lost. Though many mansions within Stonnington are equipped with large stately entrances, like Coonac and Whernside, few are original to the houses.

Comparable examples include:

- **Sherren House (St Catherine's School) & Elaine Haxton Mural (17-23 Heyington Place, Toorak) (HO50).** Sherren House, now part of the St Catherine's School campus, is a late Victorian mansion and a remnant element of City of Stonnington's 19th century landscape. The gates and gate posts are described in the citation for the place as being constructed in polished granite. The original wrought iron gates are present and are still in use, although now mechanised. Though the wall at Sherren House is different in style to that at 170 Kooyong Road, both sites are comparable as intact and remnant examples of late Victorian gated entrances.
- **Wombelano gates and stone gateway (176 Kooyong Road, Toorak) (HO272).** The Wombelano gates and stone gateway at 176 Kooyong Road are the best comparable example for the former Nareeb gateway. Both sites have lost their original 19th century mansions and are therefore the only built evidence of their associated estates. In addition, both sites are within fifty metres of each other and were likely constructed during the same period of development. Aesthetically, both sites abide by similar principles – they share similar dimensions and form, with two grand piers aside wrought iron gates and curved recessed entrances. The key difference revolves around the materiality; the Wombelano gateway is constructed in bluestone and the Former Oma Gateway is constructed in brick masonry. Regardless of materials however, both sites are representative of the rise and fall of the Victorian estates within Toorak and the broader City of Stonnington.
- **Raheen (96 Studley Park, Kew) (HO128).** Raheen is a stately and highly intact late Victorian mansion in Kew. Constructed in red brick, the front boundary wall and gate is a good comparison to the remnant Oma wall at 170 Kooyong Road. Raheen was constructed to the designs provided by William Salway, the same architect who designed the Oma mansion and boundary wall. As Salway designed the main mansion, it is likely that he designed the extant and remnant wall at Raheen too. The wall at Raheen is directly comparable to the Former Oma Gateway as both are representative of 19th century boom era development in Melbourne's wealthiest suburbs, as well as both being associated with the architect William Salway. However, unlike Raheen, the Former Oma Gateway has been painted.

The lack of comparable examples within Stonnington highlights the significance of the remnant wall as a signpost or reminder of the early Victorian estates.

References

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The Pictorial: Suburban Mansions- "Oma". (1892, August 13). *The Australasian*, 44.

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



c. 1962-1964 photo of Oma prior to its demolition (source: Collins, J. T. (1962). *Toorak "Nareeb" [picture]*).



c. 1962-1964 photo of original entrance gates at Oma (source: Collins, J. T. (1962). *Toorak "Nareeb" [picture]*).



THE VESTIBULE, "OMA."

1904 image of the vestibule at Oma (source: Melbourne Punch, 1904).



Extensive Two-storey Brick Stabling.

1904 image of the stabling at Oma (source: Melbourne Punch, 1904).



The existing gateway, gates and tree (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail view of the non-original gates (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail view of the southern gate pier (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of pier capping and nameplate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View along entire wall (source: Google Streetview, 2019).

Authors

Former citation prepared by: Nigel Lewis and Richard Aitken Pty Ltd, 1992.

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