

202 Kooyong Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 202 Kooyong 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

¹ Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-1880*, p.147.

when the cost of maintaining these large properties became prohibitive. This process of subdivision created a unique pattern of development that can still be understood and 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 mansions and grand residences were built for the newly prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators. 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 in Stonnington. Walter Butler, Robert Hamilton, Marcus Martin and Rodney Alsop were among the notable architects whose work is 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 202 Kooyong Road originally formed part of Crown Allotment 26, which was 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.

With the subdivision of Jackson's Paddock in 1872, Albany Road was created and successful merchant William Bayles purchased several large allotments, including 22 acres of elevated land at the corner of Toorak Road. Bayles' mansion 'Yar Orrong' was built in 1873 on a corner site bound by Albany Road, Kooyong and Toorak Roads. The property included a billiard room, tennis court, gardener's cottage, detached kitchen, orchard, formal garden, and stables on the east boundary, close to Albany Road.

At the end of the First World War, fifteen acres of the Yar Orrong Estate were subdivided, and three new roads, Yar Orrong, Macquarie and Barnard, were created. Yar Orrong remained on three acres of land with its entrance off Albany Road. The twenty-five residential allotments offered for sale in the Yar Orrong Estate in May 1918 do not seem to have included a large allotment on the north-east corner of Albany and Kooyong Roads (encompassing present day 202 Kooyong Road).² It is not clear when this allotment was subdivided but new houses sites were created by the mid 1930s.

²Stonnington Local History Catalogue Reg. No. MP532

In June 1934, architects Yuncken, Freeman & Freeman prepared plans for Mrs Cecil Finch for a double storey house on Kooyong Road (ie present day 202 Kooyong Road).³ The 1935 Sands and McDougall directory record a 'house being built' at 202 Kooyong Road. The following year C Finch is listed at this address. The Finch's named the house 'Redheath',⁴ and from 1949 their son in law J C D Esdaile is listed as the occupant in the Sands and McDougall directories.⁵ The house was reputedly later known as the 'Elder House' on account of it having been owned for forty years by Elder Smith Goldsbrough Mort for its chief executive.⁶

Yuncken, Freeman & Griffiths

The architects of 202 Kooyong Road were Yuncken, Freeman & Freeman, a firm which in the post war era was to become one of the largest, most successful and most highly regarded architectural practices in Australia.⁷ The firm was established in 1933 by Otto Yuncken (1903-1951) and brothers John Freeman (1898-1962) and Tom Freeman (1904-1971).⁸ All three were graduates of Leighton Irwin's Melbourne University Architectural Atelier and spent time in the office of A & K Henderson where they had been offered partnerships. Shortly after establishing their own practice, Yuncken and the Freeman brothers were joined by William Griffiths, the firm becoming Yuncken, Freeman, Freeman & Griffiths. The firm developed an early architectural reputation based on its interpretation of the refined Georgian mode in buildings such as the Lempriere house, Illawarra Crescent in Toorak (c1939), 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak (c1934) and 4 Grant Avenue, Toorak (1936). Yuncken, Freeman, Freeman & Griffiths also produced work in the contemporary International Modern style, most notably the Smith House, Hopetoun Road, Toorak (demolished). The firm became Yuncken, Freeman Bros, Griffiths and Simpson in 1945 when architect Roy Simpson was made partner.⁹

After the war, the firm was responsible for landmark modernist works such as the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (1959) and South Yarra Library in Toorak Road, South Yarra (1960s). In 1962 the firm name was shortened to Yuncken Freeman, who ultimately became one of the most successful practices in Australia producing Eagle House (1970-71), BHP House (1972) and the former Estates House (1976) in the central business district of Melbourne.

Description

The house at 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak is an elegant double-storey Georgian revival style residence with a symmetrically composed façade and hipped tiled roof partly concealed by a parapet surmounted by urn finials. The façade is of face brick relieved by rendered dressings. The double hung multi-pane sash windows are square headed at the upper floor and segmental arched at the ground floor. Ornament is concentrated about the central entry which has an arched rendered pediment and deeply banded pilasters. The house adopts a characteristic interwar townhouse format, being sited close to the road with a low fence and gravel forecourt.

The house originally had a single car garage to the south side, which was enlarged to create a double car garage by 1992.¹⁰ More extensive works were carried out in 2014 involving a single-storey addition on the south side and an attic storey addition to the rear wing (apparently built above an existing addition).¹¹ The 2014 additions have a generally low-key presence to Kooyong Road and do not diminish an appreciation of the original design. The

³Stonnington History Centre, Malvern Building Plan No. 10010,02900

⁴*Argus* 5 February 1939, p.32.

⁵Sands and McDougall Directories 1949-1950.

⁶<http://news.domain.com.au/photogallery/domain/elder-house-toorak-20130215-2egvp.html>

⁷City of Prahran *Significant Tree and Garden Study*, Vol 3, 4 Grant Avenue.

⁸Philip Goad 'Yuncken Freeman' in *Australian Encyclopedia of Architecture*, p. 781.

⁹Philip Goad 'Yuncken Freeman' in *Australian Encyclopedia of Architecture*, p. 781.

¹⁰Stonnington Local History Catalogue. Reg. No. MP12980.

¹¹City of Stonnington Building File BL1160/20140007/1

2014 works also included narrowing of the garage door. This apart, the principal front façade has remained essentially unchanged.

The front fence may not be original but its design is consistent with the Georgian revival character of the house. The original 1934 plans show the fence in a different configuration with a central pedestrian gate and single driveway entrance.

Comparative Analysis

Georgian architecture is understood as the style that developed in England during the reigns of the first three Georges. In general terms it is seen to have grown out of a re-examination of the work of Andrea Palladio, the noted architect of the late Italian Renaissance. The foundations of English Georgian architecture were laid by Sir Christopher Wren and others towards the end of the seventeenth century and developed over the following century into an accepted mode for both public and domestic buildings.

During the 1920s, buildings in the Georgian revival styles constructed in the United States and to a lesser degree the work of English revivalists, such as Edwin Lutyens, promoted a resurgence of interest in these modes amongst local architects. The interest in the Colonial Georgian also resulted in part from a continued desire for the creation of a national idiom through a search for a local vernacular, which in Australia was equated with Colonial era buildings of the early nineteenth century.

In Melbourne, architects Marcus Martin, Harold Desbrowe Annear, Rodney Alsop and Walter Butler all incorporated aspects of the Georgian style along with Californian and Mediterranean influences into their domestic projects. The arrival of Modernism in the 1930s did little to temper local enthusiasm for the style. Rather, elements of each were combined and the eclecticism foreshadowed in the 1920s was further heightened.

The Georgian revival idiom was particularly fashionable in the 1930s in the wealthy suburbs of Toorak, South Yarra and Armadale when it became synonymous with upper class concepts of good taste.

The house at 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak is a fine example of Yuncken Freeman & Freemans' academic approach to the Georgian revival style, with its symmetrical façade, pronounced central entrance and multi-paned sash windows without shutters. Many other architects of the period took a more eclectic approach to the Georgian revival mode, often merging their work with the Mediterranean modes, or modernist influences resulting in simplified forms and details. The house at 202 Kooyong Road is by contrast more emphatically Georgian than many contemporary works in this mode.

Thematic Context

The house 202 Kooyong 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 interwar Georgian revival style house at 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak was designed by noted architectural firm Yuncken, Freeman & Freeman (later Yuncken Freeman). It was built c1934 on land subdivided from the grounds of the nineteenth century mansion Yar Orrong.

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

- The original external form, materials and detailing.
- The generally high level of external intactness of the front facade.
- The legibility of the original form from the public realm
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The undeveloped front setback and low height front fence.

Modern fabric, including the rear additions, is not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, the house is significant as a fine and largely intact example of the Georgian revival idiom, which was an important component of the work of Yuncken, Freeman & Freeman at this time (Criterion D). The design is more emphatically Georgian than most other contemporary houses in this 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 refined Georgian inspired 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 the house be assigned an A2 grading.

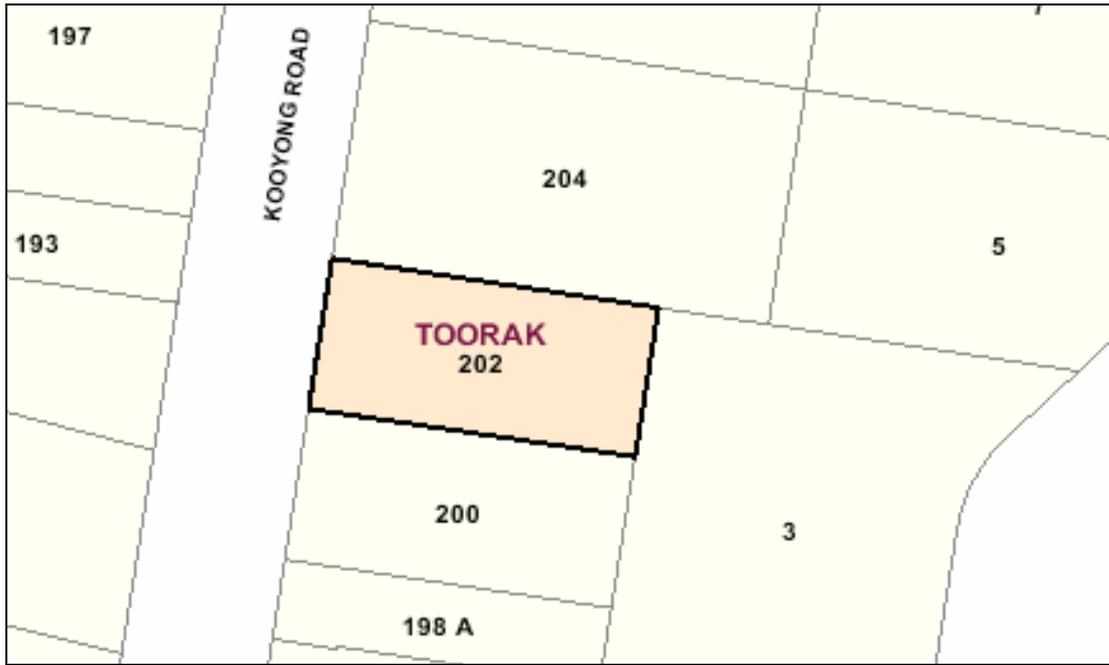


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak.