

618 Toorak Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 618 Toorak 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 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 interpreted today. Although new subdivisions imposed new road patterns within the original

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

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 (as of 2006). 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 newly prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators built mansions and grand villas 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 character of the wealthy suburbs in 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

The property at 618 Toorak 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. 25 residential allotments in the Yar Orrong Estate were offered for sale in May 1918.²

A house was built on Lot 6 of the Yarr Orrong estate in 1925 for A C Gillespie Esq.³ It was presumably designed by architect Arnaud Wright on the basis that the earliest MMBW Plan of Drainage names 'A E Wright' agent (the agent often being the house's architect).⁴ Wright was a designer and builder active in Toorak and Malvern.

² Stonnington Local History Catalogue. Reg. No. MP531.

³ MMBW Plan of Drainage. No. 139921. Stamped 'Work Carried out to this plan' 10/9/1925.

⁴ MMBW Plan of Drainage. No. 139921.

Alex Gillespie's Toorak Road house is unnumbered when it first appears in the 1926 Sands and McDougall directory. By 1928, the house is listed as 12 Toorak Road. Herbert Abrahams replaced Gillespie as the occupant c1933. The house was renumbered 618 Toorak Road by 1935 when Konrad Hiller is listed as the occupant. In the 1940s, 618 Toorak Road was the residence of Robert T Lane, managing director of Lanes Motors.⁵

MMBW plans indicate that additions were made to the east side of the house around 1980.⁶

Description

The building at 618 Toorak Road is an imposing double-storey Georgian revival style residence sited prominently on the hillside above Toorak Road. It has a hipped terracotta tiled roof punctuated by simply detailed chimneys with arched caps. Walls are rendered and generally unadorned apart from prominent quoining at the corners. Georgian antecedents are strongly expressed in the Classical style entry portico with a triangular pediment supported on columns. The whitewashed walls, irregular massing, arched chimney capping and wrought iron pedestrian gate provide Mediterranean overtones. The house also has multi-pane sash windows with shutters characteristic of the both the Mediterranean and Georgian revival idioms. The house appears to remain largely intact externally apart from the enclosure of a small first floor porch on the west elevation, and comparatively modest single-storey c1980 additions to the east elevation.

Comparative Analysis

The interwar Georgian revival style is closely related to the Colonial revival and Mediterranean style. It was particularly fashionable during the interwar period in the wealthy middle ring suburbs of Toorak, South Yarra and Armadale when it became synonymous with upper middle class concepts of good taste.

Interest in the Colonial Georgian resulted in part from a desire on the part of Australian architects to create a national idiom through a search for a local vernacular, which in Australia was equated with Colonial buildings of the early nineteenth century. Various other factors prompted a re-investigation of Colonial and Georgian modes. A precedent had been set by British architects such as Edwin Lutyens of abandoning the medieval inspiration of the Arts and Crafts style for a return to classicism. Australian architects also looked to the United States where a vigorous Colonial Georgian revival had been underway since the late-nineteenth century.

By the First World War, the revived Georgian style was well established in Britain, often being used for houses, blocks of flats and commercial buildings of modest size. In Australia, William Hardy Wilson is credited with a major role in popularising the Georgian revival idiom through his rediscovering and recording of early nineteenth century architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania, and through his admiration for American Colonial architecture encountered on his overseas travels.

Georgian revival buildings began to appear in Melbourne from about the end of the First World War. Architects drew eclectically from British, French and even Spanish architecture for motifs which to aggrandise the basic Georgian box. Almost invariably the idiom was represented by a two storey rectilinear form of brick or stucco with a simple hip or single ridge gable roofs, symmetry or near symmetry in the arrangement of doors windows and balconies, and restrained classical or Adamesque detailing, quoins at corners and around entries, a porte cochere, often with balconies above. Gabled porticos and simple wrought iron were also common. Occasionally elements of the Mediterranean or modern styles might be

⁵ Sands and McDougall Directories.

⁶ MMBW Plan of Drainage. No. 139921.

introduced in an attempt at variety of expression but the end result was always suitably restrained.

The house at 618 Toorak Road is distinguished from the many representative or more typical examples of the Georgian revival idiom in Stonnington by its assertive character and large scale. The house is also of interest in having been constructed in the mid 1920s before the widespread adoption of the Georgian revival idiom in the 1930s. Later versions of the Georgian revival typically have a more restrained appearance than the house at 618 Toorak Road.

Thematic Context

The house at 618 Toorak 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

The relevant HERCON criteria and themes from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (TEH) are shown in brackets.

What is Significant?

The large interwar Georgian revival style residence at 618 Toorak Road, Toorak was erected in 1925 by builder and architect Arnaud Wright. The house site was created from a subdivision of the nineteenth century Yar Orrong mansion estate.

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 domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).
- The legibility of the original built form from the public realm.
- The absence of modern garages and carports in views to the site from Toorak Road.

Modern fabric is not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 618 Toorak Road is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as an impressive and highly intact example of a large house in the interwar Georgian revival style with Mediterranean overtones (Criterion D).

The house is of some historical interest as evidence of a major phase of development beginning around the end of the First World War 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).

Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 618 Toorak Road, Toorak.