

## Heritage Citation – Individual Place

**Heritage Place:** Tsoshaan Flats

**Address:** 1-7/777 Malvern Road, Toorak

**HO Reference:** HO79

**Citation status:** Final

**Date Updated:** 8 March 2022

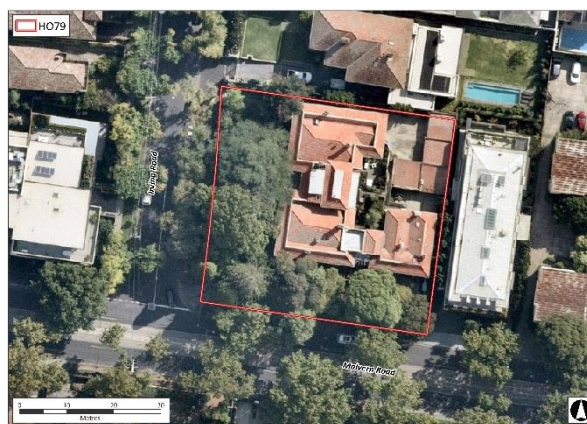
**Designer:** Arthur W. Purnell (of Beaver and Purnell)

**Year of Construction:** 1918 and 1922

**Builder:** Unknown



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



Location map and extent of HO79.

**Heritage Group:** Residential buildings

**Heritage Type:** Flats

**Key Theme:** Building suburbs

**Key Sub-theme:** Developing higher density living – architect designed apartments

**Significance Level:** Local

**Recommendation:** Retain as an individually significant place on the HO; tree controls recommended in relation to the mature Bhutan cypress (*Cupressus torulosa*) plantings.

<b>Controls:</b>	<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 1-7/777 Malvern Road, Toorak (otherwise known as Tsoshaan Flats) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the interwar era apartment building is locally significant, as well as the pagoda-style entrance gate, garden beds with volcanic boulders both on the boundary of the property and along the driveway and paths, as well as the mature Bhutan cypress (*Cupressus torulosa*) plantings.

### *How is it significant?*

The Tsoshaan Flats has historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington, and is associated with leading domestic architect, Arthur W. Purnell.

### *Why is it significant?*

Built in stages between 1918 and 1922, the Tsoshaan Flats are historically significant as one of the earliest surviving examples of a block of flats in Toorak and the wider Stonnington municipality. It is an important example of early flat development in the municipality, an era of development that altered the physical and social environment of a municipality that was previously characterised by the traditional nuclear family development of a large freestanding house. (Criterion A)

The Tsoshaan Flats have aesthetic significance owing to the Chinese design influences on what would otherwise be a standard interwar era apartment building design and landscape. Key features of aesthetic interest include the terracotta pitched roof form, deep eaves with concave shaped rafters, triangular brackets, pedestal brackets with urns, a pagoda-style entrance gate, garden beds with volcanic boulder borders, two mature Bhutan cypress (*Cupressus Torulosa*) and a mature maple (*Acer*) tree. (Criterion E)

The Tsoshaan Flats are associated with leading domestic architect, Arthur W. Purnell. The flats are an important example of his domestic work with Chinese design influences. (Criterion H)

## HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Built in stages between 1918 and 1922, the Tsoshaan Flats are historically significant as one of the earliest surviving examples of a block of flats in Toorak and the wider Stonnington municipality. It is an important example of early flat development in the municipality, an era of development that altered the physical and social environment of a municipality that was previously characterised by the traditional nuclear family development of a large freestanding house.
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>	The Tsoshaan Flats have aesthetic significance owing to the Chinese design influences on what would otherwise be a standard interwar era apartment building design and landscape. Key features of aesthetic interest include the terracotta pitched roof form, deep eaves with concave shaped rafters, triangular brackets, pedestal brackets with urns, a pagoda-style entrance gate, garden beds with volcanic boulder borders, two mature Bhutan cypress ( <i>Cupressus Torulosa</i> ) and a mature maple ( <i>Acer</i> ) tree.
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>	The flats are an important example of his domestic work with Chinese design influences.

## Description

### • Physical Analysis

Tsoshaan Flats is a two-storey residential apartment complex built with Chinese architectural influences in the detailing. The complex consists of three distinct sections distinguished by breaks in the street front façade, forming an L shaped plan on the property. The masonry structure is rendered in an off-white roughcast stucco. The pitched roof terminates at a flat parapet with an internal pitched roof hidden behind it. The roof of the main apartment complex is clad in terracotta tiles. There are seven stuccoed chimneys at different heights extending from the main roof.

The façades along both Malvern Road and Irving Road present complex asymmetrical forms. This includes banks of three white timber framed double hung sash windows. The ground level windows

include palisade window grills. The breaks in the façade between sections are connected by a first level balcony. The balcony forms a covered entrance porch for each side. The entrance porches are raised and accessible via a set of four steps. The balconies are laid with square stone tiles and have a timber balustrade with projecting joists. There are covered balconies on the upper levels of the apartments with a projecting arched balcony balustrade walls clad in timber shingles. There are pedestal brackets located between the floors at each bay supporting a terracotta urn planter. The roof creates a deep overhang over the elevations. The awning is clad in timber with exposed concave eaves rafters. The corners of the awnings are supported by large louvred brackets that are triangular in profile.

There is a group of private car garages along the east boundary at the rear; they are not visible from the street and accessible from Irving Street on the northeast corner of the property. The flat roofs of the garages are clad in a terracotta coloured sheet metal. Along with the main apartment complex, this forms an internal courtyard. The courtyard is paved with masonry tiles and has curved garden beds with rough boulder edging. There is a set of timber stairs and walkway leading to the first level of the apartments at the rear.

The street front boundaries of Tsoshaan are demarcated by a low garden bed constructed of volcanic boulders that have been laid organically. The garden beds along the Malvern and Irving Roads frontage include mature trees and dense underplanting that mostly obstruct views of the Tsoshaan Flats from the street level. At the corner of the property at the front, addressing the street corner, is a pagoda style entrance gate. It is finished to match the main structure with white stucco, exposed rafters and a terracotta clad roof. The mailboxes for the apartments are located under this pagoda structure. The structure is flanked by mature Bhutan cypress (*cupressus torulosa*) plantings. Another notable planting is a mature maple (*Acer*) tree to the left of the pedestrian entry pathway.

The Tsoshaan Flats are located on the corners of Irving Road and Malvern Road, close to Toorak Railway Station. The Tsoshaan Flats remain in use as a residential apartment complex. It is considered to be in fair condition and has high integrity overall, inclusive of the landscaping.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)
- Sections of the main roof reclad in corrugated galvanised iron.
- Driveway re-laid in concrete.

## 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**

The overarching history of the development of apartment buildings in the municipality is included in the Stonnington Thematic History as follows:

The first apartment buildings or flats began to be constructed in Melbourne in the first decades of the twentieth century. In many municipalities, restrictive building codes were enacted to control or stop this new form of development, ostensibly for safety reasons.

...widespread development of purpose-built flats did not really begin until the 1920s when the last of the remaining big estates in South Yarra and Toorak began to succumb to what Wilde (1999:40) describes as 'the combined pressures of probate, depression and profit'.

Apart from changing the physical character of the suburbs, the flats also changed the social mix by encouraging more single people to live within the area. Until the development of flats, the accommodation choices for single people were very limited, and the new form of accommodation provided additional freedom, particularly for unmarried women. This even led to rumblings of concern among some social commentators that flats would undermine the family and lead to the downfall of society.

However, not all flats were designed with single people in mind. Flats also became fashionable for the wealthy in Toorak and South Yarra as a way of living in a prestigious suburb without the bother of a large house and garden or servants, although some flats did include a servant's room, such as Denby Dale in Kooyong (Malvern Heritage Study, p.168). Flats in Toorak were therefore spacious and designed for families, rather than single people (Context 2009, 144-145).

The Tsoshaan Flats, also known as Tsoshaan Mansions, form part of the above story as an early apartment building in Toorak.

The Tsoshaan Flats were built in stages between 1918 and 1922 to designs prepared by the architectural firm Beaver & Purnell in 1917 (a partnership between architects Isidor George Beaver and Arthur W. Purnell). It is understood that Arthur W. Purnell was the lead architect on the design. Early records of the site prior to construction indicate that the land was initially owned by Purnell himself, who went on to become the owner of the flats until 1919.

Born and educated in Geelong, Purnell initially practiced in Guangzhou, China with engineer Charles S. Paget. Following a successful architectural career in China, Purnell returned to Australia in 1910 and

designed factories, offices, shops, warehouses, flats and houses (Goad and Willis ed. 2012, 571). Always eager to move with the times, his style was quite varied; for example, he designed ornate Queen Anne-style houses when in his thirties and plain ranch-style houses when in his seventies (Goad 2012, 571). Purnell's commissions frequently reflected his love for sport, and his prominent designs include the grandstand at the Western Oval, Footscray (1929), the Olympic Stand at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (1953-5), the dwelling Carinya at 61 Clendon Road, Toorak (1925), and the now demolished Wattle Path Paalis in St Kilda (1922) (Goad and Willis ed. 2012, 571). Evident in the Chinese-style concave eaves and verandah at the Tsoshaan Flats, his career influenced his later projects, and many of his works in Australia would come to feature elements of Chinese design. As described in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, 'Purnell was a wonderfully eclectic architect who was something of a chameleon, effortlessly designing buildings that could be in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright or Walter Gropius, but were never merely copies' (Goad 2012, 571).

In 1918, the Tsoshaan Flats comprised four six-roomed brick flats (Prahan Rate Books). Cantonese for 'grassy hill', the name Tsoshaan was likely given as a testament to Purnell's earlier career in Guangzhou. The initial tenants during this period included architect Cedric Bellantyne (Flat 1), Arthur Purnell himself and manager James Bruce (Flat 2), merchant James Montgomery (Flat 3) and buyer Frederick Hentze (Prahan Rate Book). Purnell's ownership of the Tsoshaan Flats was short-lived, and in 1919, the flats were purchased by Collins Street physician Dr. Wenn.

By May 1922, three additional six room flats were added. While Purnell was still an occupant at the flats during this period, he had moved from Flat 2 into the newer Flat 7. These additional flats had lower valuations than the original four and were situated to the east of the original building that fronted Irving Street. Other tenants in this year included merchant Fred Hentze, William Hansen, Jessie Anderson, woolbuyer Fred Hill, and Edward Duckett and May E. Stirling (Prahan Rate Book). The Tsoshaan flats saw another two ownership transfers when it was purchased by the National Mutual Life Association of Australasia in 1922, and then by George McAlpin in 1923 (Prahan Rate Book). While several of the original tenants remained, Purnell had vacated Flat 7 by this period.

Known tenants throughout the 1930s and 1940s include Meg Johnson (1936), Geoffrey Edwin Barratt (1940) and Barbara Dorothy Love (1941) (*The Argus* 1936, 9; *The Argus* 1940, 10; *The Argus* 1941, 8). As with other interwar flats erected in Toorak during this period, Trawalla Court was known for housing single people, particularly women, a distinct contrast to the traditional nuclear families that occupied the larger houses in the surrounding area. Tsoshaan continued to be used as residential flats into the 21st century, although the details of the tenants in more recent decades remain unknown.

### Comparative Analysis

Upon returning to Australia from China in 1910, Arthur Purnell designed many factories, offices, shops, warehouses, flats and houses. As noted in the above history, a number of his domestic designs show the influence of Chinese architecture, with a key extant example being the Tsoshaan Flats. The c. 1916 bungalow at 1050 Malvern Road, Malvern was once a comparative example, however it is now demolished. Other comparative examples of his work with Chinese design influences include:

- **Shan Teng (492 Punt Road / 2b Gordon Grove, South Yarra) (HO122 Alexandra Avenue Precinct).** Built in 1926 as a home for Purnell himself, this interwar era residence reflects



Chinese design elements through the form of the roof and chimneys, concave eaves and timber window hoods.

- **173 Hotham Street, Balaclava (HO7).** An Arts and Crafts style residence with some Chinese design influence to the form of the roof. A contemporary two-storey building has been added directly onto the rear.

A non-residential example of his work with Chinese design influences is the Regent Picture Theatre at 49 Lydiard Street, North Ballarat (HO192). Notably, none of the above comparative examples are of his domestic apartment buildings, making the Tsoshaan Flats an unusual example of his work afforded heritage protection.

The 1993 citation made the following claim with no comparative assessment to substantiate it – ‘Tsoshaan has state significance as one of the earliest and most interesting examples of custom-built blocks of flats surviving in Melbourne’. Although this block of flats is clearly an early example of apartment building in Toorak, there are a range of examples within the municipality such as Fawkner Mansions (HO448, built 1912), Franklyn House Flats (HO447), built 1919), and a number in the Alexandra Avenue Area Precinct (HO122) that were all built either prior to or around the same time as Tsoshaan Flats. With these other examples in mind, the building meets the threshold for historical significance at the local level as opposed to the state level.

## 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



Corner of south and west elevations (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Central section of the front (western) elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).





Overview of the front (western) elevation  
(source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Landscaping to the front of the property, showing  
the volcanic boulders (source: Extent Heritage Pty  
Ltd, 2021).



Entry gate/pogoda, as viewed from the street  
(source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Entry gate/pogoda, as viewed from within the  
site (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Overview from the street corner showing the  
rock border boundary walls, pogoda and mature  
cypress trees with the maple tree behind to the  
left (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

## Authors

**Former citation prepared by:** Context Pty Ltd, 1993.

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