

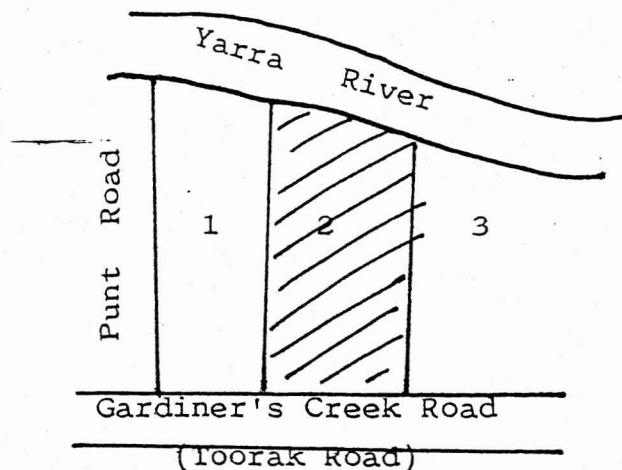
NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)

RESEARCH INTO "AVOCA", 8 GORDON GROVE,

SOUTH YARRA.

F.N. 953

The earliest part of "Avoca" may have been built in 1850 or earlier⁽¹⁾ for William Montgomerie Bell (1813 - 1867), pastoralist, merchant, churchman and civic leader,⁽²⁾ on Crown Allotment 2 in the Parish of Prahran, consisting of about 22 acres of land stretching from Toorak Road to the Yarra.⁽³⁾



Bell subdivided and sold to William Easey, auctioneer and pastoralist, in 1854, who extended the building from five to eight rooms between 1857 and 1858 and to seventeen rooms by 1859 (more than three times its original size).⁽⁴⁾ By this time the house stood on only ten acres of land and had its entrance in Domain Road. Views of the building before these additions include a lithograph in a Vale auction map of 1854 and James Kearney's 1855 map of Melbourne and its suburbs.

(1) See research below. Architect/builder unknown.
MCC Building Permit Registers checked.

(2) ADB vol. 1, pp 82 & 83. Part 1, Portion 1.

(3) RGO Application 4626, Prahran, Portion 2.

(4) Prahran Municipality RB 1857 No.70, 1858 No.70 & 1859 No. 71

In the 1850s "Avoca" was set in extensive gardens and overlooked a vineyard on the bank of the Yarra.⁽⁵⁾

Third owner in 1860 was George Kirk (1828 - 1882), pastoralist, merchant and M.L.A. The property remained in the hands of the Kirk family until 1916 when it was owned by the Misses Wippell, relatives of George's wife Elizabeth n^{ee} Wippell.⁽⁶⁾ An 1880s view of the building during Kirk ownership appears in Victoria and its Metropolis vol 2⁽⁷⁾ There is also a detailed MMBW plan of the property dated 1896, which shows its extensive grounds. The vineyard has gone but there is a summer house on the banks of the Yarra, a large pond and fernery set in gardens on the east side and large stables and coach-house on the west Caroline Street side. The drive sweeps down to the corner of Domain Road and Caroline Street.⁽⁸⁾

During the 1920s "Avoca" was owned by Dr. Sydney Sewell. A further subdivision took place in 1934, drastically reducing "Avoca's" grounds and giving it a Gordon Grove entrance.⁽⁹⁾ This subdivision went right through the house and resulted in the conversion of the old building into two maisonettes known as 8 and 8A Gordon Grove. Current owner is C.R. Macdonald.⁽¹⁰⁾

LIST OF OWNERS/OCCUPIERS OF "AVOCA" 1850 - 1979.

<u>1850</u>	W.M. Bell O/O (CA 2 Toorak Rd. → Yarra R) & 22 acres
<u>1853</u>	Claude Farie, High Sheriff, pastoralist, politician occupier etc.
<u>1854</u>	auction & subdivision
<u>1854</u>	William Easey, auctioneer O/O (B.H. 5 rooms and 10 acres. Domain Road. Extended 1858 - 8 rooms, stable, coachhouse etc. " 1859 - 17 " " ")

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- (5) See below. c.f. MMBW 1896 plan of the house.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Victoria and its Metropolis vol 2. p 483
(8) MMBW 1896 plan. City of Prahran.
(9) Dept. of Lands & Survey plan 23 Jan. 1969.
(10) Prahran CC records. See below.

1860 George Kirk, pastoralist, merchant, politician (O/O)
(B.H. 17 rooms and 9 acres. Domain Road)

1890s Elizabeth Kirk, widow (owner)

c.1906. George Kirk, banker (O) Eliza Hall (occupier)
(B.H. 17 rooms Domain Road)

1916/17 Misses Wippell (O), Eliza Hall (occupier)
(B.H. 17 rooms 7 Domain Road East)

1921/22 Michael Jones (O)

1922/23 Dr. S. Sewell (O/O)
(B.H. 16 rooms. 103 Caroline Street)

1933/34 Mrs. Alice Sewell (owner)
(subdivision down centre of house
8 & 8A Gordon Grove 7B & 7B)

Current owner (1979) C.R. Macdonald.⁽¹¹⁾

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION

According to RGO records W.M. Bell purchased Crown Portion 2 in the Parish of Prahran in 1848 for £900 from the crown grantee, Edward Jones Brewster, barrister.⁽¹²⁾ The following year he mortgaged the property for £500 to James Donaldson, pastoralist.⁽¹³⁾ This might be the year in which building commenced.

First mention found of a dwelling on the site is a sale notice in the Argus dated 3 June 1850. Peter Davis offers for sale ten small farms of three to nine acres "near the Botanical Gardens, and in the neighbourhood of Colonel Anderson's, Major Davidson's, Mr. Ogilvy's and Mr. Bell's residences....."⁽¹⁴⁾

There is certainly a substantial building there by 1854 set in spacious and well-planned grounds,⁽¹⁵⁾ which is similar in outline to the building shown on James Kearney's

(11) Prahran rate books, Toorak Ward etc.
(12) RGO Application 4626, Prahran, Portion 2.
(13) Ibid. and Billis and Kenyon p 226.
(14) Argus 3 June 1850.
(15) Vale plan v4, p 110 and Argus 24 Nov. 1854 (2)

1855 map of Melbourne and suburbs and can be identified as portion of the buildings shown on an 1896 MMBW plan of Prahran. (16)

VALE PLAN

The Vale plan includes a lithograph showing "Mr. Bell's House" on an allotment stretching from Domain Road to the Yarra with Caroline Street on the west side. The lower part of Portion 2 between Domain and Toorak Roads is subdivided into building blocks. Bell's paddock stands between Major Davidson's (on the west) and J. Murphy's Paddock (on the east). (17)

ARGUS DESCRIPTION No. 1854.

There is a detailed description of Bell's property in a sale notice in the Argus dated 24 November 1854, which refers to 'beautiful "Avoca" situate on the Yarra Yarra'..... a 'well-known property....with most convenient out-offices, premises, pleasure-grounds, garden etc. at present occupied by Claude Farie, Esq., High Sheriff....' The auction notice speaks of 'that Park-like Estate' only one mile from Melbourne and of the house which 'presents as you approach it either by land or water the most picturesque appearance; it has some nine or ten acres of park-like land fronting it, with extensive premises, orchard, flower and kitchen garden, paddock' etc. 'A carriage road of sixty feet width will run from the house down to the Toorak Road.' The writer points out that the property has 'a noble frontage to the river and the Gardiner's Creek (Toorak) Road leading to Government House'. (18)

FIRST OWNER, W.M. Bell (1813 - 1867)

An article in ADB vol 1. tells how W.M. Bell was probably born in Scotland and arrived in Melbourne in 1841, and with his brother Henrie and Isaac Buchanan formed the firm Bell and Buchanan, agents for J. and A. Dennistoun Glasgow. In 1845 W.M. Bell married Barbara Wilson. In 1847/48 the firm W. & H. Bell was founded which, after Henrie's death in 1849, was operated by W.M. Bell alone. Bell opened a Geelong branch

(16) See research below.

(17) Vale plan. Copy ordered

(18) Argus 24 Nov. 1854(2) See research into Toorak House.

late in 1853 but returned to Melbourne in 1855 after the sale of his Avoca estate for £25,000. He then leased "Tivoli", a stone house above the Yarra built by G.A. Robinson.

W.M. Bell was mayor of Melbourne in 1848 and M.L.A. from January to March 1860. He died at "Tivoli" 16 September 1867.⁽¹⁹⁾

Bell's pastoral properties are listed in Billis and Kenyon and included Kadnook, Tallandoon, Blackheath East, Blackheath West, Woraigworm, Upper Regions and Lochiel.⁽²⁰⁾

Photographs of W.M. Bell and of his wife and a child are included in E.M. Robb's Early Toorak and District together with a photograph of "Tivoli".⁽²¹⁾

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS 1857 - 1859.

As we have seen second owner of "Avoca" and of the rest of Portion 2 in 1854 was William Easey, auctioneer.⁽²²⁾ James Kearney's map of Melbourne and suburbs shows the property in the following year, 1855. It is similar in shape to the building shown on the Vale 1854 plan and is set in spacious grounds stretching from Domain Road; on its east side is a long building which may have been the original stables.⁽²³⁾ At the rear of the main building there is a large vineyard running to the banks of the river. The land between Domain and Toorak Roads is laid out in streets with houses dotted here and there.⁽²⁴⁾

Prahran Municipality rate books indicate the extensive additions made during Easey's ownership of "Avoca". The house does not appear in the pre-1857 MCC rate books as it was 'separated from the city boundary line by a government road and thereby exempt from the operations of the Building Act'.⁽²⁵⁾ William Easey is listed for the first time in the Prahran Municipality rate book of 1857 as owner/occupier of a brick house in Caroline Street of five rooms with outhouses and about ten acres of land, net value £300.⁽²⁶⁾

(19) ADB v.1, pp 82 & 83.

(20) Billis and Kenyon, p 25.

(21) E.M. Robb, Early Toorak and District, p 23

(22) RGO Application 4626 Prahran Portion 2.

(23) c.f. 1896 MMBW plan of Prahran.

(24) James Kearney 1855 map.

(25) Argus 3 June 1850.

(26) Prahran Municipality RB 1857 No. 70.

By 1858 Easey's property is listed as a brick house of eight rooms with coachhouse, stable etc. on ten acres of land, net value still £300. (27)

By 1859 the building has doubled in size to seventeen rooms (three times the original size), has a slate roof and is still on ten acres of land. Value has increased to £595. (28)
Valuation in 1860 is £700. (29)

KIRK & WIPPELL FAMILY OWNERSHIP, 1860 - 1920.

Third owner of "Avoca" in 1860/61 is George Kirk (1828-1881), an Englishman who arrived in Port Phillip in 1839. Working at first as an overseer on a dairy farm on the Darebin Creek, he joined W. Smith in the Victoria Tannery on the Yarra for some years. Later Kirk was one of the firm of Edward Row & Co., Stock and station agents and cattle salesmen, which became George Kirk and Co.

In 1847 Kirk married Elizabeth Wippell (or Weppeel) of Devonshire, whose family settled in Heidelberg, Victoria.

Kirk's associations with "Avoca" began during the 1860s when he was M.L.A. for East Bourke. He owned squatting properties in Queensland as well as many town and suburban properties in Victoria. (30)

Prahran rate books list Kirk as owner/occupier for the first time in 1861 of a seventeen-roomed brick and stone house in Caroline Street with washhouse, laundry, coachhouse, stables and extensive garden on ten acres of land, net value £660. (31)

After Kirk's death in 1882 his wife, Elizabeth, becomes owner of "Avoca". From this date the property is listed in the directories at Domain Road. Victoria and its Metropolis vol 2 includes a sketch of the front of "Avoca" in the 1880s with its formal garden setting and sweeping drive. (32)

Elizabeth Kirk is owner still in 1890/91 when her property is described as a brick house of seventeen rooms on nine acres of land in Domain Road, N.A.V. £650. (33)

(27) Ibid. 1858 No. 70.

(28) Ibid. 1859 No. 71.

(29) Ibid. 1860 No. 72.

(30) Victoria and its Metropolis vol 2, p 482.

(31) Prahran Municipality RB 1861 No. 72.

(32) Victoria and its Metropolis vol 2, p 483.

(33) City of Prahran RB 1890/91, Toorak Ward No. 96.

"AVOCA" IN 1896.

As we have seen a detailed MMBW plan of Prahran dated 1896 shows "Avoca" with its drive sweeping down to the corner of Caroline Street and Domain Road, as it had done in the 1850s. By this time the house is spacious with large verandahs on three sides, and a small rear verandah. There are cellars. The building is set in gardens with gravelled paths. There is a large pond and a fernery on the east side and extensive stables and coachhouse on the west Caroline Street side. Also on the west side there is a conservatory and, near Caroline Street, a fowl house. "Avoca's" gardens with long brick drains stretch to the banks of the Yarra River, where there is a summer house with a path leading back to a caretaker's house. (34)

At the turn of the century George Kirk, banker, is owner of "Avoca". Occupier is Eliza Hall. (35) There is a change in 1916/17 when the Misses Wippell, descendents of Elizabeth Kirk, are listed as owners. Eliza Hall is still tenant. (36)

HISTORY OF THE BUILDING 1920s - 1970s.

A new owner of 7 Domain Road is shown in 1921/22 - Michael Jones, of St. Kilda Road, Melbourne. (37) Dr. S. Sewell is owner the following year 1922/23. (38) Mrs. Alice Sewell, widow, of "Roads End", Berwick is listed as owner in 1933/34 of 103 Caroline Street, a brick house of sixteen rooms, N.A.V. £220. (39)

1934 SUBDIVISION

As we have seen a subdivision takes place in 1934 which goes right through the house. From this date it is listed as 8 and 8A Gordon Grove. (40) A Lands and Survey plan dated January 1969 shows the formation of Gordon Grove and the extension of Caroline Street to the east.

In 1966 Chesborough R. Macdonald becomes the owner of 8 Gordon Grove and in October 1971 purchases No. 8A for \$60,000. (41)

(34) MMBW 1896 plan of Prahran.

(35) City of Prahran RB 1906/7, Toorak Ward No. 25. See history of Walter and Eliza Hall Research Institute.

(36) Ibid. 1916/17, Toorak Ward No. 30.

(37) Ibid. 1921/22, Toorak Ward No. 35.

(38) Ibid. 1922/23, No. 129.

(39) Ibid. 1933/34, No. 165.

(40) Ibid. 1935/36, No. 109. Also listed as 7B & 7B.

(41) Toorak Ward 1964-1976, Book No. 1.

LIST OF SOURCES

ADB vol 1.

Argus 3 June 1850, 24 Nov. 1854 (2)

Billis and Kenyon, Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip

Cooper, J.B., History of Prahran

"Garryowen", vols 1 and 2.

Robb, E, Early Toorak and District

R.G.O. Application 4626, Prahran, Portion 2.

Thomson and Serle, p 63.

Victoria and its Metropolis vol. 2. 1888

RATE BOOKS

MCC Rate Books, La Trobe Ward

___ Building Permit Registers, 1850.

MAPS/PLANS

Kearney, James, Map of Melbourne and Suburbs, 1855.

Lands and Survey plan, Parish of Prahran, Portion 2 1969

MMBW plan Prahran 1896

Vale v4, p 110 (S.L.V.)

C. KELLAWAY.

20 April 1979.