

Toorak Village Precinct

Toorak Road, Toorak



Heritage Assessment

August 2012

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1.0 Introduction

This report was commissioned by the City of Stonnington. It provides an assessment of the cultural heritage significance of the Toorak Village shopping strip, and in particular shops at 527-533A and 464-484 Toorak Road, and provides comment on the appropriateness of a heritage control for the place.

2.0 Sources of Information

The analysis below draws upon an external inspection of the building and historical research using the Stonnington Local History Catalogue, Sands and McDougall Directories and MMBW plans. The report also relies on secondary historical sources including the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006).

3.0 Listings and Controls

City of Stonnington

The buildings at 476-480 and 535-539 Toorak Road are protected by individual heritage overlay controls numbered HO172 and HO173 respectively (see figure 1 below). Shops at the eastern end of Toorak Village formed part of an Urban Conservation Area identified in the *Prahran Character and Conservation Study* (Nigel Lewis, 1992). The *City of Prahran Conservation Review* (Context Pty Ltd, 1993) recommended that the Urban Conservation Area be adopted but planning controls did not eventuate. More recently, a preliminary investigation of Toorak Village was carried out as part of the *Stonnington Heritage Overlay Gap Study* (Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd, March 2009). This investigation was limited to a 'windscreen' survey of the streetscape. The gap study concluded that the Toorak Village overall did not warrant a heritage overlay control. The following assessment is focussed on a much smaller part of Toorak Village.

Heritage Victoria

None of the buildings in Toorak Village are included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Toorak Village is classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) as a place of local significance (File No.B7299).

Australian Heritage Council

None of the buildings in Toorak Village are included on the Register of the National Estate, Commonwealth Heritage List or the National Heritage List.

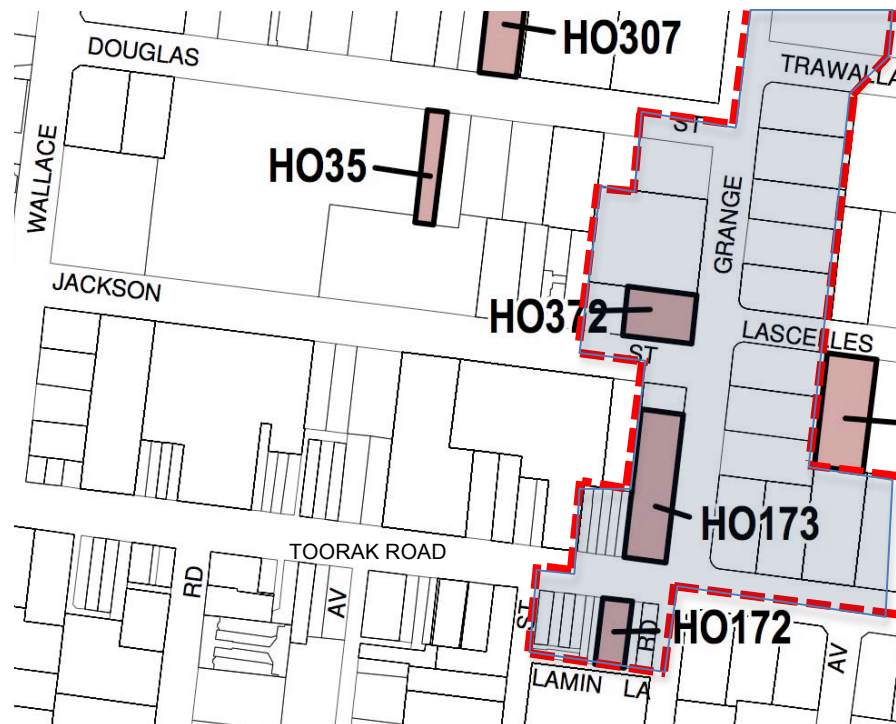


Figure 1 Map showing heritage overlays for 476-480 and 535-539 Toorak Road (HO172 and HO173). The dashed line marks the boundary of an Urban Conservation Area identified in the 1992 'Prahran Character and Conservation Study'.

4.0 History

The northern side of Toorak Village originally formed part of Crown portion 14, sold to John Brown in the first Prahran land sales of 1840.¹ Shortly afterwards the allotment was purchased by RA Balbirnie, wealthy land speculator and punt operator. Balbirnie named the property 'Balmerino' and built a large house on the hill overlooking the Yarra River, north of present-day Burnie Street.

The southern side of Toorak Village formed part of Lot 31 and was first offered for sale in June 1849.² Lot 14 was purchased by Lot 31 was subsequently divided into two halves. The northern half, situated on the south side of Gardiner's Creek Road (later Toorak Road) was subdivided in the early 1850s to form a nest of small streets including Canterbury Road, Ross Street and Carters Avenue.

In the early 1850s, Balbirnie began subdividing the 103 acres that comprised the Balmerino estate, reserving some of the best blocks south of Bruce Street for his children.³ A grid of streets was set out and blocks were sold along Grange Road,

¹ Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran Area Five*, p.1.

² Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran Area Five*, p.38.

³ Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran Area Five*, p.11.

Wallace Avenue, Jackson, Andrew (now Douglas), Washington and George (now Bruce) Streets. Fourteen allotments on Gardiner's Creek Road between Grange Road and Wallace Avenue completed this subdivision⁴

In 1854 the State Government leased James Jackson's mansion 'Toorak House' for use as the Governor's residence and Gardiner's Creek Road (subsequently Toorak Road) was transformed from a rough bush track into a made road. The presence of the Vice-Regal residence attracted wealthy merchants, pastoralists and politicians to the area and a small village gradually developed around Notley's Hotel (later Toorak Hotel) at the foot of Orrong Hill, to service the mansions and villas of the gentry. This group of modest shops and dwellings would later be known as Toorak Village.



Figure 2 Part of Kearney's 1855 map of Melbourne showing a pocket of development on Gardiner's Creek Road (now Toorak Road), which formed the nucleus of Toorak Village. Source: State Library of Victoria.

⁴ Plan of subdivision, portions 13 & 14, Parish of Prahran. 1860.

Toorak Village developed quickly from the mid 1850s. The directory of 1868 lists a number of traders and businesses which catered to the local community, including a blacksmith, draper, coach builder, cab proprietor, grocer, Post Office and carpenter.⁵ From the 1870s, development was slow and the building boom in the 1880s had little impact on this quiet local village. By 1895, Toorak Village included a Shoening Forge adjacent to the hotel, a carriage factory and the Toorak Horse Bazaar.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the term Toorak Village was used to describe the area to both sides of Toorak Road between Tintern Avenue and Canterbury Road. At that time, it contained some twenty-eight shops although a number of private residences remained along the frontage.



Figure 3 Toorak Village looking north, c1908. Source: Stonnington Local History Collection.

As Toorak's local shopping strip, it had a village atmosphere, and in the late 1920s and early 1930s there was an attempt to contrive the English village look with Tudor style facades. The first was a Robert Hamilton designed two-storey shopfront for chemists Ford and Woodhouse at 476-478 Toorak Road.⁶ The premises had operated as a chemist's shop from at least 1888 but the refurbishment was particularly warmly received and was published in a number of contemporary journals. A number of other buildings in the precinct were subsequently developed in a similar manner. The substantial reworking of the building to the corner of Grange Road (541 Toorak Road) in a Tudor mode is often attributed to Hamilton although no documentary evidence to support this assertion. A number of other buildings within the precinct such as 527-533a Toorak Road and the modest retail group to the corner of Wallace Avenue are also attributed to Hamilton but are of a less refined architectural character and are likely to be the work of other designers. Nonetheless, the Tudoresque elements within the streetscape are particularly well known, and are commonly understood to set the character of this small shopping strip.

⁵ Sands and McDougall Directories.

⁶ Photograph of shopfront, designed by architect Cr. R.B. Hamilton, in City of Prahran Annual Report, 1931-32.

By the 1940s the village had developed a special character with a number of cafes, and speciality shops or ‘boutiques’ catering for the particular tastes and their wealthy clientele. One famous boutique was ‘Magg’ an exclusive dress shop opened in 1949 by Zara Holt and Betty Grounds, the wives of Sir Harold Holt and architect Roy Grounds respectively.⁷



Figure 4 *Toorak Village, looking south from the Grange Road intersection, c1950. Source: State Library of Victoria.*

5.0 Description

The Toorak Village shopping strip occupies both sides of Toorak Road between Tintern Avenue and Canterbury Road. It retains a number of properties dating from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Other buildings of interest include those refurbished in a Tudor mode during the 1920s and 1930s.

A number of modern infill buildings have been constructed in the area during the second half of the twentieth century but the general scale and much of the early character of the area survives intact, particularly at the eastern end where key Tudor revival style buildings stand at 476-480 and 535-539 Toorak Road. These two buildings have been added to the schedule to the Heritage Overlay. Another fine Tudor style shop building is located at 527-533A Toorak Road. It has a picturesque half-timbered façade with a curved oriel window at one end and a crenelated bay window at the other. The facade remains largely intact except at ground floor level where all but one of the original shop fronts have all been modernised.

On the south side of Toorak Road, the streetscape is at its most intact between Ross Street and Canterbury Road. This streetscape includes a row of Victorian Italianate shops at 464-470 Toorak Road with a nineteenth century stables at the rear at 60 Ross Street. The stables have a modern fence and shopfront and most original openings have been infilled, but otherwise remain broadly intact. At 472-

⁷ Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, p.108.

474 Toorak Road there is a pair of double-storey interwar shops with a Moderne style fin rising above the parapet. Next to these is the aforementioned Tudor style building at 476-480 Toorak Road. Further east is a double-storey Edwardian shop with a transverse gable roof and half timbering, presumably added in the interwar or post war periods. The corner site at 484 Toorak Road is occupied by a plainer double-storey Edwardian commercial building with a modern shopfront.



Figure 5 *The south side of Toorak Road looking west from Grange Road.*



Figure 6 *Tudor Style shops on the north side of Toorak Road.*

6.0 Comparative Analysis

The Toorak Village shopping precinct belongs to the category of smaller suburban strip shopping centres. These occupy a status between the corner shop development meeting the requirements of a few contingent streets and the larger strip developments such as: Lygon Street, Carlton; Clarendon Street, South Melbourne; Smith Street, Collingwood; Chapel Street, Prahran; and Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, which service the needs of an entire district.

Toorak Village is less intact overall than a number of other small strips within the municipality such as Toorak Road, South Yarra, which to a substantial degree retains its early building stock. Later developments such as the Central Park Road Shopping Precinct in East Malvern or the High Street Road Precinct, Glen Iris are also more intact in terms of their integrity as a consequence of their relatively recent construction dates. Toorak Village is nonetheless distinguished from other local shopping strips in the municipality by its concentration of Tudor Revival facades dating from the 1920s and 1930s. The best two examples of the Tudor Revival style in the village at 476-478 Toorak Road and 535-539 Toorak Road are already protected by heritage overlays (numbered HO172 and HO173 respectively). The Tudor Revival group at 527-533A Toorak Road does not quite attain the same high level of design quality, but is still superior to the more standard examples of the Tudor Revival found in other interwar retail precincts.

Aside from its notable collection of Tudor Revival building stock, the Toorak Village precinct also contains a rare example of a nineteenth century commercial stables (at 60 Ross Street). Structures associated with horse transport were once extremely common, but are becoming increasingly rare. In the City of Stonnington, only a handful of stables are protected by heritage overlays, and most are associated with grand mansions of the Victorian era. Very few of the surviving stables in the municipality were originally used by a business or commercial enterprises. Stables of this type are important because they demonstrate how horses were essential for the transport of people and goods in the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. The stables at the rear of the Bush Inn Hotel, Toorak, is broadly similar to the stables at 60 Ross Street but less intact. The Bush Inn stables were once freestanding but have modern additions to three sides, most openings have been infilled and face brickwork has been painted over. The former bakery stables at the rear of 13/15 Station Street, Malvern has a largely intact unpainted brick first floor façade, but a more heavily altered ground floor façade. The former stables at 39 Caroline Street, South Yarra are even less intact. The former carrier's warehouse at 2-4 Bangs Street, Prahran retains part of its original stables, but much of the fabric, including its archetypal stable door, was introduced as part of reconstruction works in the 1990s, and may not be a historically accurate representation of the original design. There is also a very small and visually unprepossessing stables at the rear of a former shop at 90 Hornby Street, Windsor. In comparison, the former stables 60 Ross Street better illustrate key characteristics of nineteenth century stables design, and survive to a higher degree of integrity than the examples described above.

7.0 Thematic Environmental History

Toorak Village illustrates the following themes as explained in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, Addendum, March 2009):

4.3.2 Changing Modes of Transport – from horses to motor vehicles

7.1 Serving Local Communities

7.2 Creating Specialised shopping centres

8.0 Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The Toorak Village precinct comprises the substantially intact collection of Victorian, Edwardian and interwar buildings located at the eastern end of the Toorak Village shopping strip. The precinct developed from a modest cluster of shops and dwellings in the 1850s servicing the mansions and villas of the gentry. In the late 1920s and 1930s, a number of properties within the precinct were refurbished in a Tudor Revival style, creating a character which, to a large extent, remains intact and distinguishes Toorak Village from other small shopping strips within the Municipality.

Elements which contribute to the significance of the precinct include (but are not limited to):

- The high degree of intactness to an interwar state.
- The generally high integrity of upper level facades and original detailing and finishes typically comprising half-timbering, render, and face brick.
- The attached form of retail buildings with uniform front setbacks.
- The consistent two-storey scale of buildings.
- The picturesque composition of Tudor Revival facades.
- Gabled and hipped terracotta tiled roofs or parapeted facades with concealed roofs.
- The form and fabric of extant early shopfronts.
- External signage on retail buildings mostly restricted to traditional signage zones on verandah fascias, or suspended from the underside of the verandahs.

How is it significant?

Toorak Village precinct is of historical and aesthetic significance at a local level.

Why is it significant?

Toorak Village precinct is historically significant as a shopping strip which has serviced the local community since the mid 1850s (*Historic Theme: 7.1 Serving local communities*). The special character of the Village that emerged in the interwar period reflects the tastes of its affluent clientele (*7.2 Creating Specialised Shopping Centres*).

Toorak Village is aesthetically significant as a substantially intact collection of late-Victorian, Edwardian and interwar retail buildings. Of particular interest are Tudor revival style shops which define the character of the village. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century shops are less distinctive but are

nonetheless significant for their ability to demonstrate the early character of the village prior to its interwar makeover. The buildings in the precinct also compliment, and enhance the setting of, the two individually significant Tudor revival shops at 474-480 and 535-539 Toorak Road.

The former stables at the rear of the precinct (at 60 Ross Street) are significant for the rarity of this building type in the municipality, and for their ability to demonstrate how businesses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied on horse drawn transport (*4.3.2 Changing Modes of Transport – from horses to motor vehicles*).

9.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Toorak Village shopping precinct be added to the schedule of the Heritage Overlay under the City of Stonnington Planning Scheme. The extent of the heritage overlay should encompass the shops at 527-533A Toorak Road and all of the buildings on the south side of Toorak Road, between Canterbury Road and Ross Street, including the former stables at 60 Ross Street and the corner building at 159 Canterbury Road (but excluding the individual heritage overlay site at 476-478 Toorak Road). The buildings at 476-478 and 535-539 Toorak Road should retain their individual heritage overlay controls. It is further recommended that buildings in the precinct be exempt from external paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls under the heritage overlay. In addition, the following schedule of gradings should be adopted for the precinct:

Address	Description	Current Grading	Proposed Grading
527-533A Toorak Rd	Double-storey interwar shop group	A2	A2
464-470 Toorak Rd	Double-storey Victorian shop group	B	B
472-474 Toorak Rd	Double-storey interwar shop pair	Ungraded	C
482 Toorak Rd	Double-storey Edwardian shop	B	B
484 Toorak Rd & 159 Canterbury Rd	Double-storey Edwardian shop	B	B
60 Ross Street	Double-storey Victorian stables	Ungraded	B

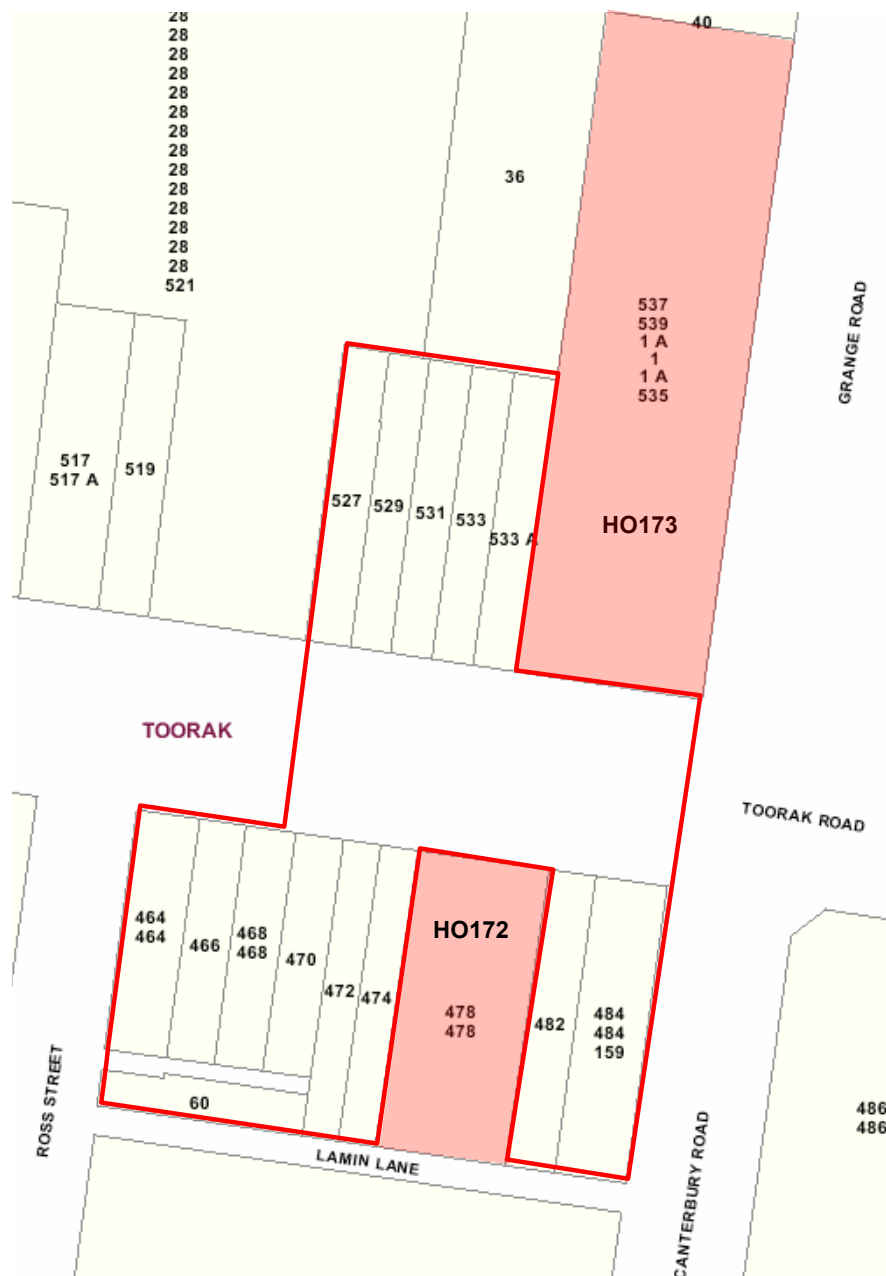


Figure 7 Map of Toorak Village showing the recommended extent of the proposed heritage overlay.

10.0 References

- Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993.
- Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006.
- Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran Area Five*, Prahran Historical and Arts Society, 2002.
- National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Classification Report: Toorak Village*, 2004.
- Nigel Lewis, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*, 1992.
- MMBW Detail Plan No.938 & 973. State Library of Victoria.
- Sands and McDougall Directories.
- Stonnington Local History Catalogue.

