

**541 TOORAK ROAD
TOORAK**

INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd in association with Di Foster, historian. It investigates the significance of the property at 541 Toorak Road, Toorak, in order to determine the appropriateness of its inclusion within the schedule to the Heritage Overlay within the planning scheme.

The building was graded A1 in the Prahran Conservation Study (1983). It is not presently listed on the Victorian Heritage Register or the Register of the National Estate, nor is it classified by the National Trust.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that 541 Toorak Road is of regional and possible state significance and should be added to the schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the local section of the Stonnington Planning Scheme and nominated to the Australian Heritage Commission for inclusion in the register of the National Estate.

HISTORY

Crown allotment 14 extended from the line of Wallace Avenue to the line of Grange Road and contained around 73 acres. At the Crown land sales, lot 14 was sold to John Brown. R. A. Balbirnie purchased the allotment from Brown and acquired part of the holding of Jane Hill. Jane and her father David Hill owned the adjacent lot 13. Jane married James Glover, a fellow pastoralist and lived at Mt. Verdant on the hill overlooking the river and Balbirnie and his family were close by at Balmerino, a large estate located north of present day Burnie Street.¹

Balbirnie began subdividing the 103 acres that comprised the Balmerino estate in the early 1850s, reserving some of the best blocks for his children.² South of Bruce Street, a grid of streets was set out and blocks were sold along Grange Road, 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 subdivision.³ Grange Road led down to the Twickenham Ferry linking Hawthorn and Prahran.

In 1854 the State Government leased James Jackson's Toorak House for the governor's residence, and Gardiner's Creek (Toorak) Road was transformed from a rough bush track to a made road. A small village with shops spanning both sides of the main road and workers cottages to the south, gradually developed round Notley's Hotel. Built in 1854, the hotel was well placed at the foot of Orrong Hill and William and Charles Notley managed the hotel from 1854 to 1866.⁴ The hotel later became known as the Toorak Hotel.

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. Several houses are shown at the western end and district registrar, G. Guillaume is the occupier of a house on the north side of Toorak Road, close to the corner of Grange Road⁵. An 1869 plan of subdivision shows a dwelling on the corner of Grange Road.⁶ From the 1870s, development was slow and the building boom had little impact on this quiet local village.⁷ By 1895, Toorak Village as it came to be known, included a Shoeing Forge adjacent to the hotel, a carriage factory and the Toorak Horse Bazaar. On the west corner of Grange Road, a large brick villa faced Toorak Road, with its garden extending to Jackson Street.⁸ Meanwhile the prestige associated with Toorak House attracted wealthy merchants, pastoralists

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- 1 Betty Malone, Prahran series, Section 9, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.
 - 2 Betty Malone, Prahran series, Section 9, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.
 - 3 Plan of subdivision, portions 13 & 14, Parish of Prahran. 1860.
 - 4 Betty Malone, *Prahran's Pubs*, Prahran, 1988, p. 14.
 - 5 *Sands & McDougall directory, 1868*, as cited in Bill Dane, *The Toorak Village - Past, Present & Future*, Prahran Heritage Series, no. 6. p. 4.
 - 6 Plan of subdivision of part of portions 13 & 14, Toorak, Prahran, 1869.
 - 7 Bill Dane, *The Toorak Village - Past, Present & Future*, Prahran Heritage Series, no. 6. p. 5.
 - 8 MMBW plan, 1895.

and politicians to the area, and the village, with its workers' cottages to the south, was encircled by the mansions and villas of the gentry.

In 1912 the village shops included a jeweller, dairy, picture framer, greengrocer, livery stables, confectioner, draper, grocer, bakery and cake shop.⁹ By 1903¹⁰ Dr Reginald H. Morrison, the son of the first headmaster of Geelong College,¹¹ owned the residence on the corner of Grange Road. Dr Morrison's two storey house was eventually divided into four flats, each of four rooms, and named Brettneaux Flats.¹²

In 1933 a substantial two-storey Tudor style building, with four shops fronting Toorak Road, was erected to the front of Dr Morrison's house, leaving a large section of the early house intact (the section fronting onto Grange Road).¹³ The shops were occupied by a draper, merchant and a chemist and the new building was later numbered 535-541 Toorak Road.

The complex combined the rooms of the old house with the 1930s front section and a new entrance off Grange Road led to the upstairs apartments. In 1934, these were occupied by a dressmaker, dentist, grazier and masseur. The dental surgery established by dentist Max Casley¹⁴ was located above Norm Turnbull's chemist shop. By 1950, Toorak Village was a thriving local shopping strip, with the establishment of several banks and the Village Theatre, attracting visitors from further afield. While the traders in the shops have changed several times, the building at 541 Toorak Road, continues to be used as a dental practice. The distinctive Tudor style building has become a landmark on the corner of Grange Road, with the chimneys of Dr Morrison's old house still visible above the roof line.

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- 9 James Paxton, *Toorak as I knew it, 1900-1930*, Prahran Historical Series, no. 2, p. 26.
10 MMBW plan, 1903. Dr R. H. Morrison, owner, William Campbell, agent.
11 Bill Dane, *The Toorak Village - Past, Present & Future*, Prahran Heritage Series, no. 6, p. 7.
12 City of Prahran rate book, Toorak Ward, 1931-2, no. 1051-1054 & *Sands & McDougall directory*, 1932.
13 City of Prahran rate book, Toorak Ward, 1933-4, no. 1068-1071.
14 City of Prahran rate book, Toorak Ward, 1934-5, no. 1468-1480.

DESCRIPTION

As outlined above, the premises at 541 Toorak Road include the remainder of an old house, much altered, with Old English shopfronts added in 1933 and even more recent additions, in the same Old English mode, to Grange Road.

The facade to Toorak Road is the most strongly modelled and impressive of the various Old English shopfronts associated with this area. Symmetrical like most other examples, it features a canted first floor on timber brackets, with half timbering and a combination of gable and helm roofs clad with terracotta tiles. The central bay to the first floor projects out as a flat oriel, and the windows to the first floor are leadlight casements. The corner, eastern wall is part half timbered but largely masonry, executed in a decorative pattern with an ornate parapet detail.

The frontage to Grange Road appears to retain the footprint of the original house, although the elevational treatment has been transformed to match the Toorak Road frontage. Today it reads as a number of discrete pavilions sympathetic to the character established by the corner building but of a somewhat more simplistic design. The castellated, Tudor parapet treatment to the south east bay of the old house may represent its original character, but this is unknown.

The resultant composition is stylised and self-conscious in the typical interwar manner, but in its size and complexity is extraordinary and is broadly regarded as a landmark within the area. The shopfronts to the ground floor have been rebuilt in recent years.

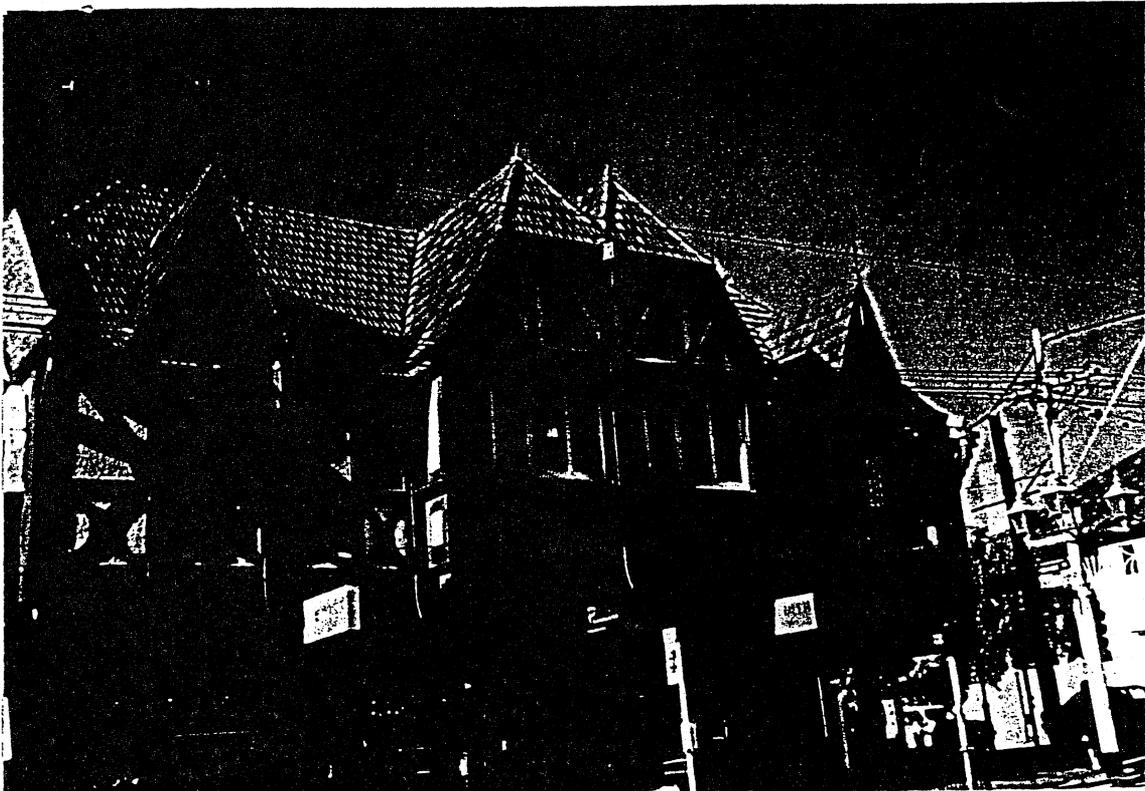


Illustration 1 541 Toorak Road, 1998.

ARCHITECT

The architect of 541 Toorak Road is not known, although popular oral tradition has it that the prominent exponent of the Old English mode, R B Hamilton, may have been responsible for their design.

ANALYSIS

The shops at 541 Toorak Road are fine and substantially intact examples of the smaller commercial work of the interwar period, and are amongst the most dominant of the Old English shopfronts within the well known Toorak Village group.

The Old English was a popular style during the 1920s and 1930s, but more so in relation to domestic work than commercial premises. A stronger Gothic revivalism was more common for the larger commercial work of the central city, generally executed in stone or synthetic stone. The key exception to this was the reworking in this period of the Mitre Tavern, Bank Place. The vernacular based, Arts and Crafts influenced Old English of these smaller buildings in Toorak village is more directly related to the domestic scale, character and detailing of the larger houses in Toorak and south Yarra, such as Burnham in Grange road, or Denby Dale in Glenferrie Road, than it is to typical CBD work of the period.

While isolated examples of a similar Old English commercial mode are scattered throughout Melbourne's middle ring suburbs, few exhibit the quality of design and detailing, or the intactness to their original appearance, of 541 Toorak Road. No ensemble of Old English shopfronts comparable to the several surviving shops at Toorak Village is known to the present author.

The shopfronts at 541 Toorak Road are important for their landmark position within the Toorak Village group, and, as a part of that group, as a contributory element within a stylistic group which is relatively rare within the greater metropolitan area. They are quite possibly the grandest example of an Old English or Tudor Revival suburban commercial premises in Victoria, and are certainly the best example of the mode in Stonnington.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The building at 541 Toorak Road is of regional and possibly state significance as a fine and substantially intact example of the Old English commercial mode of the interwar period, and for its dominant role within the important Toorak Village group of Old English shops. It is of additional significance as a fine example of the commercial work of Robert Bell Hamilton, a prominent commercial and domestic architect in this period and a leader in the use of Old English modes in the interwar years. The building at 541 Toorak Road is important for its landmark position within the Toorak Village group, and, as a part of that group, as a contributory element within a stylistic group which is relatively rare within the greater metropolitan area. They are quite possibly the grandest example of an Old English or Tudor Revival suburban commercial premises in Victoria, and are certainly the best example of the mode in Stonnington.

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