

## INDIVIDUAL HERITAGE PLACE – CITATION

HO272

**NAME OF PLACE:** Wombelano gates and stone gateway

**OTHER NAMES OF PLACE:** Torbain, Heathfield.

**ADDRESS / LOCATION:** 176 Kooyong Road, Toorak

**PROPERTY INFORMATION:** part Crown Portion 26

**LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Local.

**ASSESSED BY:** Graeme Butler, Francine Gilfedder.

**ASSESSMENT DATE:** March 2002

**REVISED ASSESSMENT** October 2003

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### (as visible from the street)

The former Wombelano gates at 176 Kooyong Road, Toorak are locally significant aesthetically and historically:

- for their association with the era of Toorak mansions, specifically Wombelano the Bruce family mansion ( Criterion A4);
- for their craftsmanship in both stone and iron ( Criterion E1);
- for the rarity of 19th century stone gateways and iron gates in the metropolitan area, this example being one of two identified in heritage surveys, with remnant landscape setting ( Criterion B2).

# PLAN

**NAME:** Wombelano gates and stone gateway  
**OTHER NAMES:** Torbain, Heathfield  
**ADDRESS / LOCATION:** 176 Kooyong Road, Toorak  
Not to Scale<sup>1</sup>

176 KOOYONG RD, TOORAK (GATEWAY ONLY)

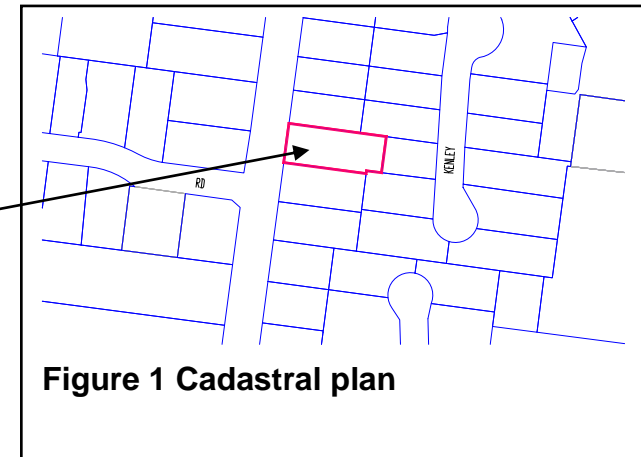
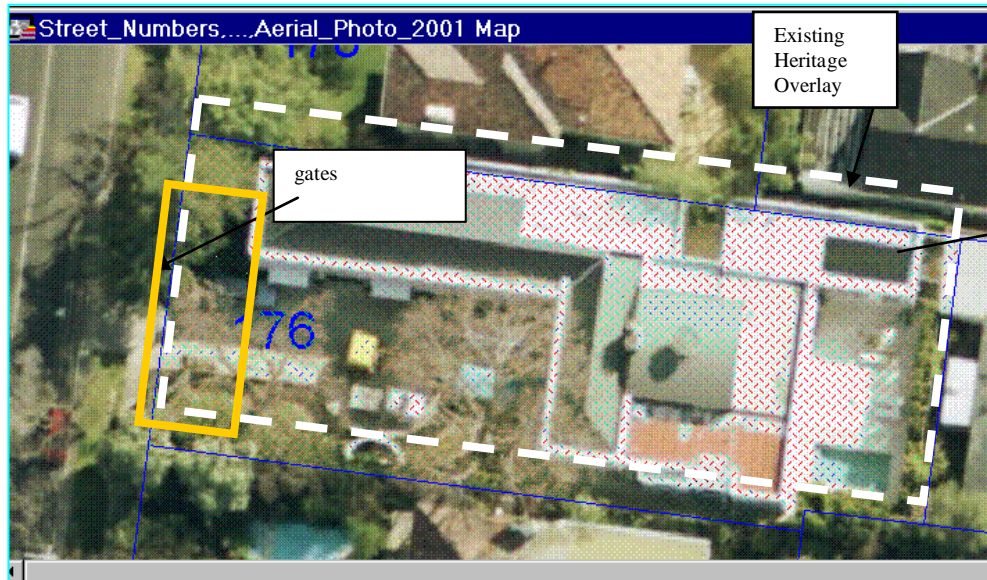
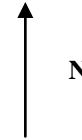


Figure 1 Cadastral plan

<sup>1</sup> Aerial view supplied by the City of Stonnington

**PHOTO:**



Figure 1 (Source: Graeme Butler & Associates )

## DESCRIPTION:

(as assessed from the street)

The gateway consists of:

- four piers, two gateway piers and two fence piers, clad with sawn basalt ashlar with impost and plinth mouldings, and cornice capping of carved stone;
- curved connecting walls either side of the gateway piers;
- basalt balls on the two outside piers;
- two elaborate wrought and cast iron gates, with stiles scrolled at the top.

Each gate is divided vertically into two panels and a bottom frieze. The panels are made up of four flat-iron rails, joined by 17 vertical rods in the bottom panels and eight rods in the top panels, with cast spears at the top of each rod. Within the top panels, between each rod are scrolled iron flats fixed by rivets in a lyre or simple scroll pattern. The rods in the bottom panels are joined by curving flats while the two bottom rails enclose a saltire cross frieze. The lobed leaf shape attached to each scroll end may represent the Scottish thistle. Wrought-iron lamps are placed on each gate pier, date unknown.

The gateway is one of the few surviving from the 19th century mansions built in Toorak.

### Interiors

Not applicable.

### Condition & integrity

(as assessed from the street)

Publicly visible parts of gateway are externally near original, with some welded connections in place of rivets.

### Context

Set in a residential area, with large detached villas and the similar Nareeb gateway nearby.

## HISTORY

Historical background

(From Malvern - A Physical History

Georgina Whitehead in Appendix A, Malvern Urban Character Study)

### Successive Subdivisions

The 1880's (in Malvern) were characterised by booming land prices and a rapid expansion in the subdivision and sale of land, particularly for the affluent middle classes { Garden: 214-215}. During this period there was resurgence of the sentimental cult of Home { Davison: 137}. Home was a refuge from the world of commerce and industry and provided rest and revitalization. While only the very wealthy could possess both a town house and a country house, the suburbs were seen as combining the advantages of country and city life. A house and garden in the suburbs became a goal for many people. The suburban garden soothed the overwrought businessman, but fast efficient transport was needed to speed him back to the city to earn the living which supported his return to nature. The inhabitants of the village of Malvern had the choice of either walking, riding or travelling the five miles to Melbourne by horse drawn vehicle, all of which were slow.

In 1879 a much faster option was provided when a railway line was opened to connect Oakleigh Station, where the Gippsland train terminated, with South Yarra Station, through which the Melbourne to Brighton line passed. Caulfield, Malvern and Armadale Stations were built along the new train route and land in their vicinity was sought after. By the close of the 1880's the village for Malvern had disappeared and the suburb of Malvern had taken its place.

Most of the new development occurred to the west of Burke Road. The wealthy built large houses set in extensive grounds on the highest land. The mansions of Whernside, Flete, Moorakynne and Stonington were situated in the north west of Malvern, an extension of Toorak which had always been a prestigious address. Stonington, built on land that had previously been a market garden, was later used as the official residence of the Victorian Governor between 1901 and 1927 while Government House was occupied by the Governor General of Australia { Cooper: 186}.

... Malvern had little to offer in the way of employment and the relatively high cost of train travel to the industrial suburbs prevented Malvern from developing large areas of working class accommodation. The majority of dwellings were staunchly middle class with a frontage to the street of at least 50 feet.

Malvern had confidence in the future; plans were drawn up for an imposing Town Hall to be built on the reserve at the corner of Glenferrie Road and High Street. Alfred Deakin, then Minister for Public Works, laid the foundation stone in 1885. As well as municipal offices the complex incorporated a court house, post office and library { Cooper: 149-151}. The prominence of the site near the crest of the hill added to the town hall's consequence and, from the vantage of the tower, fine views were had over much of the municipality...

However, the impact of the economic, technological and cultural forces that had transformed Malvern from a village to a suburb in less than a decade, ceased with the end of the boom in 1888. Economic depression followed during the 1890s and land awaiting subdivision and sale reverted to agricultural use { Garden: 215}.

...The Glen Iris railway along Gardiner's Creek Valley was opened in 1890, after the collapse of the boom. There were so few people living adjacent to the more easterly stations that the section of line between Darling and Oakleigh Stations was closed in 1895 { Priestley: 152}. The Outer Circle railway between Hughesdale and Fairfield so lacked patronage that the entire line was closed in 1891 after operating for less than two years { Priestley: 152}.

## Specific History

(see foster 1999)

The gates and gateway at 176 Kooyong Road formed the entrance to Wombelano, the former mansion property of Melbourne merchant John Munro Bruce. Wombelano had been built in Kooyong Road in Crown Portion 26.

1849

Crown Portion 26, bounded by present day Kooyong Road, Toorak Road, the line of Denham Place and Malvern Road, was purchased by Melbourne merchant, author and politician, James Jackson. At the same time Jackson purchased 108 acres of land west of Boundary (Kooyong) Road, where he built his mansion 'Toorak House', which gave the district its name. Following Jackson's early death, the 71 acres east of Kooyong Road, remained undivided for more than twenty years. The land was fenced, a small brick house was erected and a succession of dairymen leased the land from Jackson's widow.

1872

The subdivision of 'Jackson's Paddock' and Albany Road was created.

1883

In 1883 five acres of pasture in Kooyong Road were purchased by merchant John Munro Bruce.

1884

Bruce commissioned architects Richard Twentyman and David Askew (Twentyman & Askew) to design Wombelano, an imposing 'stone' mansion of thirty rooms. 'Wombelano', (meaning 'beautiful' or 'handsome') was located 'on the crown of the hill at Toorak, commanding one of the finest panoramas in the neighbourhood of Melbourne.'

1892

Wombelano was described 'as -

[An] imposing building of excellent proportions, with a fine balcony and verandah facing north. The house is placed well in the grounds, which have been laid out and planted judiciously. The entrance-gates are light and open in design, and permit an excellent view being obtained of the mansion and its surroundings.

Wombelano's carriage-drive led from the entrance in Kooyong Road, past the tennis court, to the stables and coach-house fronting Albany Road. Built at a cost of £20,000, the entire mansion was built to impress and artist Robert Reid co-operated with the architects to produce a stunning result.

1890

As a result of the 1890s bank crashes, many mansions remained empty or were sold. Wombelano was mortgaged to the Savings Bank and leased to Albert Miller. When Miller moved to Whernside, the mansion remained vacant except for a resident caretaker until it was leased to pastoralists and wool brokers, James and George Aitken. The brothers were managers of the firm of shipping agents and general merchants, Dalgety & Co. Wombelano was re-named Torbain.

1902

The MMBW Detail Plan 1764 shows the mansion set to the south east of the gateway, with a long curving drive to the house and stables and a back drive to Albany Rd. Of the many large houses shown, this house and the adjoining Oma are the only examples of masonry gateways.

1911

Torbay was sold to Mrs. Bertha Baillieu, wife of financier and politician William Laurence Baillieu, and re-named Heathfield. Baillieu had the largest and grandest mansion in Kooyong Road.



1930s

Around 1933 another of Baillieu's friends, Sir Keith Murdoch, journalist and newspaper proprietor, became aware that the 'old Baillieu mansion' would soon be up for sale. Elizabeth Murdoch knew that the Kooyong Road house was one of the largest houses in Melbourne, set on five acres of carefully tended land and in 1933 the Murdoch family moved into 'Heathfield'. Dame Elizabeth Murdoch recalls entering the mansion through a small ante-hall into a vast entrance hall. At the bottom of the staircase was the beautiful formal dining room, along with the library, children's schoolroom and the nursery, previously the billiard room. Elizabeth's sitting room opened onto a raised bluestone terrace. A large staff was required to run the house and garden and the Baillieu's gardener and Bob Simmons the 'useful', who had milked the Baillie's cow, were retained to manage the flower gardens, vegetable garden and grass tennis court.

Heathfield was the scene of many business dinners, tennis matches, society gatherings and charity functions. In common with other Toorak mansions, Heathfield was taken over by the Government during the War years. The mansion was offered to the U.S. for General Macarthur's Melbourne base and the Murdoch family and staff evacuated their home, leaving it fully fitted out for the arrival of Lt. Gen. George Brett.

1945

The mansion was lent to the Salvation Army for their servicewomen and was later used as accommodation for the night nurses of the Children's Hospital.

Aerial photograph shows a curving drive and established trees near the gateway.

1947

The sale of the mansion meant land along Kooyong Road was subdivided and sold as building allotments.

1949-

New houses were built and in October 1950, a permit was issued for the house at 176 Kooyong Road. 'Heathfield's' gates remained at the entrance to the new house.

1958

'Heathfield' was purchased for £45,000, the land subdivided and the mansion demolished.' Twenty years before, Kenley had been demolished and Kenley Court created. With the demolition of 'Wombelano', Kenley Court was extended to its present size.

## **John Munro Bruce**

Born in Ireland of Scottish descent, Bruce had arrived in Melbourne in 1840. His hard work and sound business judgment led to the offer of a position at Laang and Webster's. On becoming a partner in the well-established softwoods firm in 1879, the company changed its name to Paterson, Laang and Bruce. Business increased so rapidly that the company took a 'foremost rank among the businesses of the colony' becoming one of the largest importers of softwoods. This success allowed Bruce the time to play a leading role in community affairs and provided the income to build his mansion in Kooyong Road.

As a trade delegate, Bruce travelled to England with his family in 1888, where the elder sons went to school and a governess was employed for Stanley, the youngest son. John Munro Bruce had learnt to play golf at school at St. Andrews in Scotland and on his return from England, he brought back a large collection of golf clubs. At that time Melbourne had no golf course and despite the depression, when the warehousing business was almost wiped out, Bruce, along with (Sir) William Knox, (Sir) Matthew Davies and Hon. James Munro, determined in 1891 to form the Melbourne Golf Club. A committee was formed and land at East Malvern, which had remained unsold during the depression, was leased. John Bruce became Club Captain and signed up eighty of his friends. Foundation members were predominantly successful businessmen and pastoralists, including many of Bruce's Toorak neighbours.

Bruce's devotion to the golf club was extraordinary during this difficult period and he ensured that the club's funds were securely invested. For a time, his sons were withdrawn from school, but Stanley Melbourne completed his education at Melbourne Grammar School and later became Prime Minister of Australia. Bruce worked hard and the business survived the depression and gradually expanded. By the time of his death on a trip to Paris in 1901, the family fortune was rapidly being restored.

### **William Baillieu**

William Baillieu, with financial support from James Munro's Federal Bank, had joined Munro's son, Donald, in a Melbourne estate agency. Baillieu was a resounding success as an auctioneer and with the land boom at its height in 1887, Munro & Baillieu had sold more land than any other agency in Melbourne. The same year William married Bertha, the daughter of Edward Latham.

Munro & Baillieu inevitably became involved in land speculation and when the crash came in 1891-2, the young auctioneers had no hope of surviving the collapse of several land companies in which they were involved and the eventual collapse of James Munro's Federal Bank. However, following his financial arrangement with creditors and the dissolution of the partnership with Munro, Baillieu recovered. Dealing in land, shares and mining property, William's new estate agency, W. L. Baillieu & Co. worked closely with his brother's share broking firm. William Baillieu is said to have become very rich by the turn of the century but at the same time concerned himself with development on a national scale, particularly with regard to mining and related industries. In 1901 Baillieu was elected to the Legislative Council, serving twenty-one years as a member. In 1904 Baillieu handed over the management of the agency to his brother Arthur, and joined a number of boards as director. With great success, William continued to direct and develop the family's banking, mining and land fortunes.





## ANALYSIS

### Thematic context

The Principal Australian Historic Themes (PAHT) have been developed by the Australian Heritage Commission to allow assessment of historical significance within a national historical thematic framework.

PAHT	Subtheme	Category
Building settlements, towns and cities	Making suburbs	house, urban

### Comparative analysis

The 1902 MMBW Detail Plan 1764 shows many large houses but this house and the adjoining Oma (now Nareeb) at 170 Kooyong Road<sup>2</sup> are the only examples of masonry and iron gates. Both have gates today but it appears those at Oma have been relocated or replicated. The Oma (now Nareeb) gates were relocated to the Royal Botanic Gardens.

The former Nareeb gates were manufactured in England in the 1870s and hung at the entrance of Nareeb, a Toorak mansion, until its demolition in 1965, whereupon they were donated to the National Trust. The gates, which are wrought iron with cast iron embellishments, were re-established at the Botanic Gardens in 1967. These gates are on the Victorian Heritage Register and are cited as follows:

*The Nareeb Gates are of aesthetic significance as a fine and increasingly rare example of 19th century ironwork. Although originally located at a Toorak mansion, the delicate leafy design complements their new location at an entrance to the Botanic Gardens.*

*The Nareeb Gates are of historical significance as a symbol and a reminder of Melbourne's heritage of large mansion estates, few of which now remain. Social and economic changes in the 20th century have led to the destruction of many old houses or the subdivision of their land. The Nareeb Gates are a reminder of a time when the wealth of colonial elites was expressed in large estates and mansion houses, made possible by the ready availability of land, supply of cheap domestic labour and rigid social hierarchies..*

Similar arguments apply to this set of gates. No other similar set of 19th century residential gates have been identified by heritage surveys in the City.

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<sup>2</sup> heritage overlay 320

## Assessment against the criteria adopted by the Australian Heritage Commission

### Summary of Australian Heritage Commission criteria

Code	Summary	Assessment at local significance	Assessment at contributory significance
A.4	Association with important events or historical themes	Linked with the first main era of Toorak mansions	
B.2	Rarity or distinction among a comparable group	rarity of 19th century stone gateways and iron gates in the metropolitan area	
F.1	Design or technological achievement	for their craftsmanship in both stone and iron	
H.1	Association with important person or group		association with and symbolism of the grand Bruce family mansion, Wombelano; association with the prominent Baillieu and Murdoch families who lived in the mansion

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The gates, gateway and land should remain a heritage overlay in the Stonnington Planning Scheme.

### Proposed extent of heritage place in the heritage overlay

The gates, gateway and title land within 5m of their perimeter, with emphasis on external fabric from their construction in the 19th century.

### Planning Scheme Protection in a heritage overlay: recommended

### Other heritage registers

Heritage Victoria Register: No  
Register of the National Estate: Recommended

## REFERENCES

Lewis & Aitken 1992 cite:

MMBW plan 1902;  
`Argus', 13 June 1884, p 8; 8 December 1885, p 8;  
`Victoria and its Metropolis', II, p 456.

Foster, 1999 cites:

`The Argus', 8 December 1885.  
`Australian Dictionary of Biography', vol. 3.

Heritage Overlay Review - Amendment C5, C6  
Wombelano gates and stone gateway 176 Kooyong Road, Toorak heritage assessment

`Australian Dictionary of Biography', vol. 7.

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Shire of Malvern valuation book, Western Riding, 1884, no. 67

de Serville, Paul, `Pounds & pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-1880', Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1991.

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Lewis, Miles, (ed.) Australian Architects Index, University of Melbourne, 1977.

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Shire of Malvern valuation book, Western Riding, 1883, no. 63.

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Sutherland, Alexander, `Victoria and its Metropolis: Past and Present', McCarron Bird and Melbourne, 1888, vol. 2.

Joseph Johnson, The Royal Melbourne Golf Club, Centenary History, Royal Melbourne Golf Club, Melbourne 1991,

Butler, Walter, Building plan, 1551, Malvern Archives.

`Who's Who in Australia' 1929, International Press Association, Sydney.

### Further references

Foster, Diane. 1999. Melbourne's most fashionable suburb, A history of Toorak, east of Kooyong Road 1840-1998, Master of Arts in Public History, Department of History, Monash University

### Further work

None

## Appendix 1 Previous citation

Council has considered a series of amendments to the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme. During the exhibition period of former Amendments L47 and L61 objections to the inclusion of some properties in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay were received. Therefore Council resolved to undertake further analysis of the heritage citations of affected properties prior to holding an independent panel hearing. The amendments are now known as C5 and C6(2) respectively.

The following citation was exhibited with the heritage planning scheme amendment L47. Wombelano, 176 Kooyong Road (entrance gates mid fence only) - R

1902: MMBW plan shows the garden layout, gateway, plan of house and house name Wombelano (MMBW 160' to the inch plan 387 (59))

This is a remnant of the mansion property shown on the 1902 MMBW plan. This was the residence of J M Bruce of merchants Patterson, Laang and Bruce. Tenders were called by Twentyman and Askew in 'The Argus', 13 June 1884, p 8, the interior decoration described in 'The Argus', 8 December 1885, p 8. [1] The exterior was illustrated in 'Victoria and its Metropolis', II, p 456 (see opposite). The vast garden, with many large trees and the mansion with a two storey balcony, is clearly shown in a 1925 aerial photograph of Toorak [2]. The property was sold to William Baillieu who renamed it Heathfield, and later it was purchased by Sir Keith Murdoch.

The gateways are sawn basalt with an elegant curved recess and comprise four principal piers with cappings also of sawn stone. The external piers have basalt balls surmounting them. The gates are of an elaborate and elegant wrought iron and cast iron composition with the side hinged stiles curved over at the top in an elegant scroll form. The design of the gates, as well as the gateway, is extremely refined and represents one of the most important and elegant surviving gateways of a mansion allotment in Toorak. It is enhanced by the mature trees which originally formed part of the garden of this property and are of a character and age associated with a nineteenth century garden.

The former gates and gateway of Wombelano are of regional significance for their elegance and craftsmanship as well as for providing a rare reminder of the many large mansion gardens once found in this area.

### FOOTNOTES

1 Information provided by Dr Miles Lewis in correspondence with the Malvern Historical Society Inc. dated 18 August 1992

2 City of Prahran Annual Report 1925-1926, p.66,