

## 24 LASCELLES AVENUE TOORAK

### INTRODUCTION

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This report has been prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd to investigate the significance of the property at 24 Lascelles Avenue, Toorak, in order to determine the appropriateness of its inclusion within the schedule to the Heritage Overlay within the planning scheme. The report builds on work carried out by Context Pty Ltd in the *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993.

The *City of Prahran Conservation Review* graded the building A2, although it had been graded A1 in the *Prahran Character and Conservation Study* 1992. 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

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This report finds that 24 Lascelles Avenue, Toorak is of regional 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.



*Illustration 1*

*24 Lascelles Avenue, 1997.*

*Source: Author's Collection.*

## HISTORY

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The area bounded by Toorak Road, Grange Road, Orrong Road and the Yarra River, sold at the First Crown Land sales on 10 June 1840. Lot 15 consisting of 73 acres, was purchased by Charles Norris.<sup>1</sup> Although Norris subdivided the land into large lots, Kearney's map indicates no development occurred in this area prior to 1855.

In 1867, on a mound near the corner of Toorak Road and Orrong Road, a 20 room Italianate style residence was built for Melbourne merchant George Stevenson. The mansion was later enlarged to 50 rooms for retired pastoralist John Simson of Trawalla near Beaufort. The architects were Powell and Whitaker.<sup>2</sup> Simson's Toorak mansion was named Trawalla and covered most of the block bounded by Toorak Road, Grange Road, Robertson Street, and Orrong Road. The entrance was located at the corner of Toorak and Grange Roads and the driveway led past the gate-house and sweeping lawns and gardens to the mansion, which boasted extensive bay views.

In 1922 the Trawalla Estate was subdivided and Trawalla Avenue created.<sup>3</sup> Allotments bounded by Robertson Road, Orrong Road, Trawalla Ave and Grange Road were made available for sale as well as several allotments facing Toorak Road. A later subdivision, which created Lascelles Avenue in 1928,<sup>4</sup> reduced Trawalla's land to its present size.<sup>5</sup> The area developed rapidly following this subdivision, with many fine houses being built in the 1920s and 30s. Several of these houses have since been replaced but Trawalla and Aberfeldie remain on much reduced allotments.

In 1931 a block of flats was erected for J. Dixon, to the design of architect Lewis Levy<sup>6</sup> on lot 33 of the Trawalla Estate, at the corner of Trawalla and Lascelles Avenues.

## DESCRIPTION

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24 Lascelles Avenue, also known as *Trawalla Court*, is an elegant three storey block of flats located at the corner of Lascelles and Trawalla Avenues. It occupies a steeply graded site in an exclusive, residential section of Toorak.

*Trawalla Court* is a freestanding building allowing access from both streets to car parking at the rear. The Trawalla Avenue frontage is largely obscured by a formal arrangement of coniferous trees which

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1 Betty Malone, Section 9, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.

2 National Trust citation Trawalla.

3 Trawalla Estate Subdivision Plan 1922, Prahran Archives.

4 Lascelles Avenue, Private street scheme, 1928, Prahran Archives.

5 Trawalla Estate subdivision plan 1930.

6 J. Dixon, owner, L. Levy, agent., 24 Lascelles Avenue, 13.1.'32. Drainage Plan, No. 00189149.

tower above the building. As a consequence, the unobstructed Lascelles Avenue elevation presents as the principle facade.

The building is founded on a face brick base used to level the sloping site and to provide an elevated aspect to the Lascelles Avenue facade. Entry is by way of broad brick stairs distinguished by decorative urns atop the piers leading to a formal entry. The building facade assumes a symmetrical, five-part arrangement. The entry and stairwell form the centrepiece of the group with slightly smaller wings at each side, and two still smaller, outer bays, all of which combine to produce a cascading arrangement of building masses. Detailing to windows is simple, but noteworthy for the subtle but complementary differences between the various bays of the building. Some windows are expressed as simple openings while others take the form of arches or balconies with black steel balustrades.

The patterns of fenestration are overlaid with an unobtrusive decorative scheme realised in render. The central bays feature a wave motif at the parapet level while the outer bays carry a zig-zag design to the parapets which is repeated above some of the second floor windows. The name of the building, *Trawalla Court*, is cast into the render above the entry. The facades of the building demonstrate a high level of resolution, achieving a balance between the freedom and ornament of earlier flat design and the austerity and precise repetition of the modern developments of the late 1930s.

A small outbuilding at the rear of the block appears to date from the original development. It features the same rendered finish and echoes the wave motif of the principle building. It appears to have been re-roofed and has suffered from the addition of a roller door and new fenestration. The main building of *Trawalla Court* remains in excellent condition and a high state of external integrity.

## ARCHITECT

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Lewis Levy was the architect of 24 Lascelles Avenue. The *Prahran Conservation Review* describes Levy as a well known architect and developer of flats, and Terry Sawyer has identified flats at 79 Park St, St Kilda (1926), cnr. Carlisle and Mitchell Streets, St Kilda (1929) and 79 Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda (1930) as examples of his work.<sup>7</sup> Little else is known of his output - he has no entries in the University of Melbourne *Australian Architectural Index*, a fact which suggests a relatively low profile within the architecture and building fields.

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7 Terry Sawyer, *Residential Flats in Melbourne*, p 106.

## ANALYSIS

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While generally conventional in form, adopting a rectilinear plan, these flats are of interest for their flat, geometric decoration, which draws upon the zig-zag tradition of what is broadly identified as Art Deco architecture. The building lacks the striking, multi faceted plans, or bold three dimensional geometric decoration of other examples found in St Kilda, Carlton and Fitzroy, nor is it noted for its innovative planning or commodity, but is nonetheless well composed to adopt a commanding appearance at the interesection of Trawalla and Lascelles Avenues and is certainly to be figured amongst the finest examples of Art Deco flat design in the City of Stonnington.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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Trawalla Court, the flats at 24 Lascelles Avenue, Toorak, are of regional archtiectural significance as a fine example of interwar flat design, especially within the context of the City of Stonnington, and in particular for their striking and substantially intact Art Deco exterior decoration.



*Illustration 2*

*Facade detail, 24 Lascelles Avenue, 1997.  
Source: Author's Collection.*

## REFERENCES

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- Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, Vol 4.
- Malone, Betty. Section 9, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.
- MMBW Drainage Plan, 24 Lascelles Avenue, No. 189149.
- National Trust citation, Trawalla.
- Terry Sawyer, Residential Flats in Melbourne - the development of a building type to 1950, unpublished research report, Architecture Department, University of Melbourne.
- Trawalla Estate Subdivision Plans 1922 and 1930, Prahran Archives.
- University of Melbourne *Australian Architectural Index*.