

'Carmel'

44 Mathoura Road, Toorak

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Villa

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian (1851-1901) Medieval Free Style (Picturesque Gothic)

Locality history

Toorak is situated on the elevated south side of the Yarra River, with views across the river to the city of Melbourne. Toorak has played a key role in Melbourne's social and cultural history, and is regarded Australia-wide as a symbol of wealth and influence. It has long been recognised as Melbourne's most affluent suburb. Although it was elevation and topography that established Toorak as a fashionable address, its name in fact comes from an Aboriginal word for 'reedy swamp'.

The first Crown land sales south of the Yarra took place in the 1840s and 1850s. 'Toorak House', built by merchant James Jackson, along with its extensive grounds, was acquired by the newly established Victorian government in 1851 as Victoria's first Government House. The creation of a vice-regal seat in 1851 set the tone for social exclusivity and was the foundation for Toorak's development as a desirable address.

As Melbourne developed and industrialised in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the wealthy middle-class – including merchants, industrialists, professional men, military men, politicians, and men and women of 'independent means' – sought to escape the bustle of the

city and to settle in a quieter, more spacious environment. Paddocks and native bush gave way to large estates and substantial homes. The approach to Toorak was via the Gardiners Creek Road (later Toorak Road), which was the chief east–west route; the drive along it was described as ‘very pleasant’ in 1879 (Whitworth 1879: 390). Toorak was also accessed from the private punt at Grange Road that linked the two sides of the Yarra and also, from 1879, via the Oakleigh railway line.

During the 1870s and 1880s, many large mansions were erected, usually to an architect’s plan. Many adopted the Italianate style of architecture and, like ‘Toorak House’, were surmounted with a decorative square tower. The scale and extravagances of these residences reached a peak during the land boom of the 1880s as merchants and others among Melbourne’s expanding *nouveaux riches* sought a prestigious address. Toorak’s mansions were often sumptuously and exquisitely decorated in the latest styles. Their owners could afford to ‘go Home’ to Britain, and to travel through Europe, and bring back art and other decorative pieces not easily obtainable in the colonies. Large estates also allowed for the establishment of impressive ornamental gardens, often incorporating a conservatory and a fernery, and these were often in keeping with prevailing good taste and in sympathy with the design of the house. In many cases, affluent property owners commissioned landscape designers.

At its height, from the 1870s and up until the dawn of the First World War, Toorak society represented an unusually high concentration of wealth, power and influence not seen elsewhere in Australia. This was home to many of Melbourne’s wealthiest and most influential families, including the Baillieu, Clarke, Grimwade, Fairburn, Fink, Miller and Myer families. The salubrious environs of Toorak also provided a seasonal base in Melbourne for wealthy landed families (predominantly Western District graziers).

The population of Toorak was dominantly British and overwhelmingly Protestant. St John’s Church of England was a lynchpin of Toorak social life in the Victorian era; it was the preferred venue for Society weddings and became a symbol of social aspiration. Other ‘English’ influences in the development of Toorak can be seen in the Tudor Revival style of a number of the interwar-era shopfronts along Toorak Road.

Some large estates were subdivided in the 1880s during the frenzied period of the property boom. Other parts of Toorak were developed with more typical middle-class homes of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. There was very minimal, if any, industry in Toorak proper, although many of its elevated homes had clear views across the Yarra of the factories with their chimney smoke that were concentrated on the Richmond flats.

Place history

The land on Mathoura Road became available for suburban allotments with the subdivision of the Brookeville Estate in 1885, although Mathoura Road had been in existence before that time, probably since the 1860s or 70s (Maddocks 2015). ‘Brookeville’ was a large mansion on the site of the Toorak Primary School (since demolished).

John William Foster Rogers and Letitia Catherine Rogers purchased the allotment in May 1888 and the following year the rate books record a 12-roomed brick house on the site (Maddocks 2015).

The architect may have been Arthur Edward Clarke, who let tenders for the erection of a two-storey brick villa on Mathoura Road in May 1888 (*Australasian Builder & Contractor’s News* 19 May 1888). Clarke was born in Exeter, Devonshire. He served his articles with John Hayward (nephew of Sir Charles Barry), and then worked for architectural practice Grainger & D’Ebro. In 1885 he commenced his own practice. Buildings by Arthur Clarke include a number of houses, as well as auction rooms in Surrey Hills (1888), the Nunawading Shire Hall, Box Hill Shire Hall Offices, and St Paul’s Anglican Church, in Inverleigh, all of 1889, and St John’s Anglican Church, Blackburn (1890) (Lewis 2013). He emigrated to Western Australia in the 1890s, and practiced in Perth and Kalgoorlie, where he designed the School of Mines in 1903 (HCWA 2003). By 1908 he was employed by the WA Public Works Department (architectural division) as the District Inspector of Works in Geraldton (*Western Mail* 5 September 1908).



Figure 1. Box Hill Shire Hall, Arthur Edward Clarke, 1889 (source: *Victorian Places*, John Young Collection)

The house was the residence of politician John Rogers and his wife from 1889 until 1899. Rogers served in the Victorian Parliament as MLA for South Yarra from 1894-97. He was the son of Thomas George Rogers, who is claimed to have been the model for the character of Rev. James North in Marcus Clarke's classic Australian novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (Malone 1998: 59). Rogers was also a man of strong Catholic faith and is thought to have named the house 'Carmel' in reference to Mount Carmel and the Carmelite Order. The family remained in the house until 1899, when they moved to 40 Mathoura Road. After this no. 44 was transferred to Letitia's son by her first marriage (Maddocks 2015).

The house is shown as 'Carmel' on the MMBW detail plan of 1899. It is shown as a double-storeyed house with a front bay window, recessed front verandah, and two upstairs baths.

For much of the twentieth century the house was leased to tenants. In the mid twentieth century it operated as a guest house.

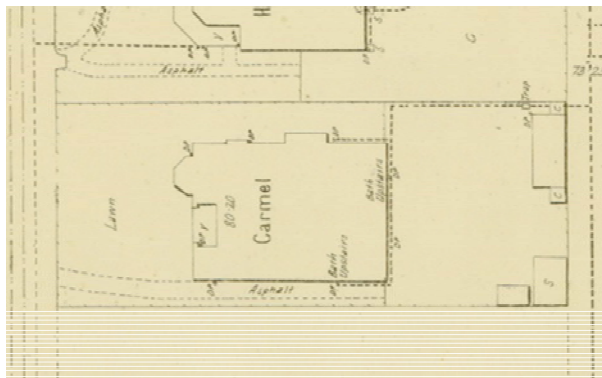


Figure 2. MMBW Detail Plan no. 980, dated 1899 (source: SLV).

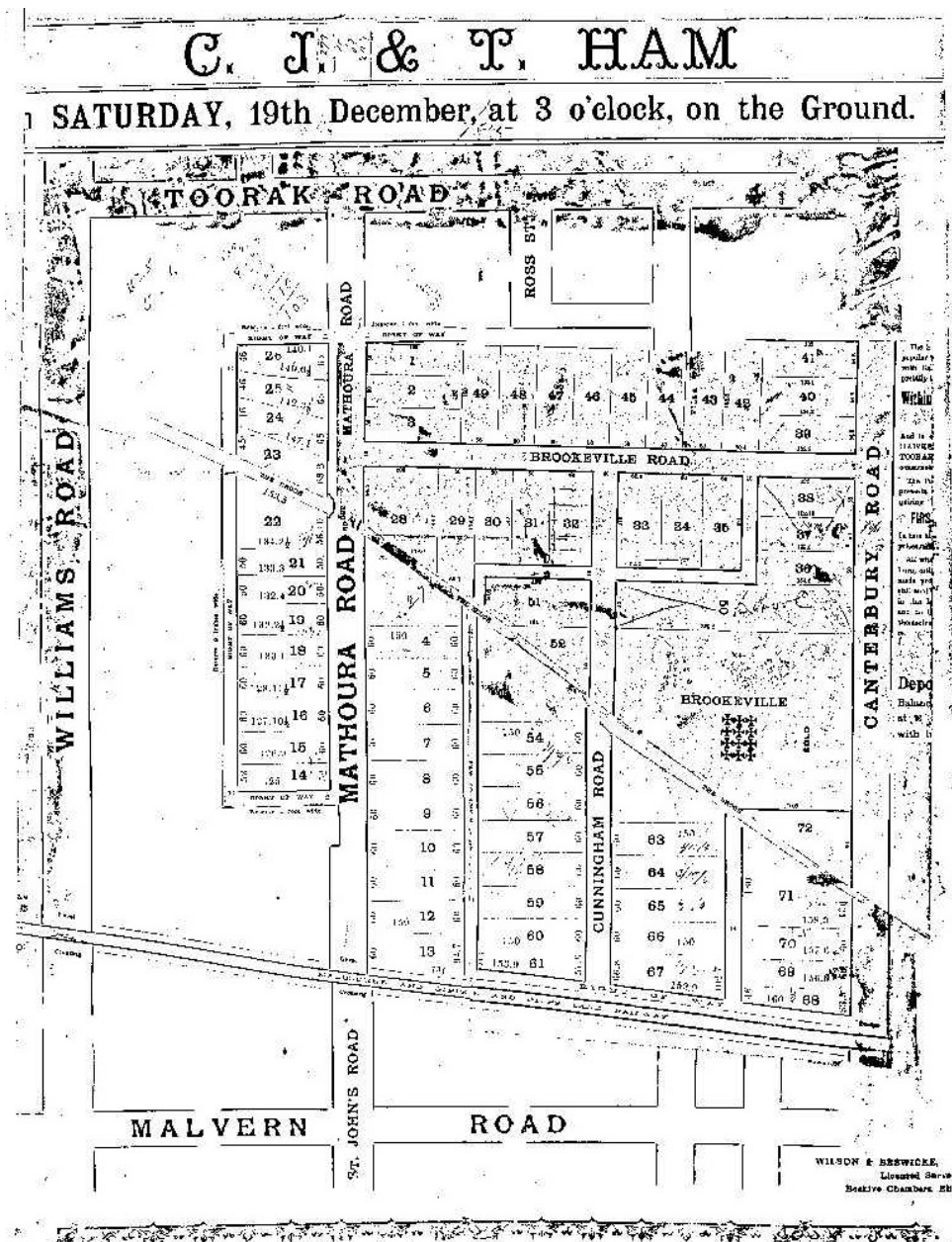


Figure 3. 'Brookeville Estate' subdivision plan, 1885, showing the creation of suburban allotments in Mathoura Road. Lot 8 on the above plan corresponds to the site of 44 Mathoura Road. (source: Stonnington History Centre, PH 11205).

Sources

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Physical description

'Carmel', at 44 Mathoura Road, Toorak, sits behind a medium-sized front garden on the east side of the street. Like other houses on the street, it has only modest side setbacks so massing is strongly oriented to the front.

The house is two-storeys in height with red brick walls with render dressings (overpainted to the façade), and a slate-clad roof. The roof shows a clear break from the low M-profile hipped roof of the Italianate style. Instead it comprises two tall transverse gable roofs, with a lower hipped roof to the rear third of the building. The front transverse gable is intersected by a jerkin-head gable which is a defining feature of the front façade, providing a picturesque medieval appearance. The side gables have decorative timber trusses, also medieval in origin. The three visible chimneys comprise a tall rectangular plinth and a slender shaft with chamfered cornices, both of red brick, terminating in a delicate cement render cornice.



Figure 4. First floor of the south elevation showing a chimney, the decorative gable trusses, red brick and window configuration (source: Context 2016).

The façade is asymmetrical in composition. The northern half sits beneath the jerkin-head gable which is ornamented by double bargeboards resting on brackets and a row of inset panels in the apex. Atop the gable is a finial, probably of lead. At ground floor level there is a canted bay window which terminates in a medieval-inspired parapet wall decorated with impressed rondels.



Figure 5. The front façade and a glimpse of the unpainted north elevation (Marshall White 2014).

The west side of the façade has a full-length verandah to the first floor with cast-iron posts and a Gothic Revival influenced balustrade in a trefoil pattern, along with solid brackets that may be of timber. At ground floor level, there is a recessed porch beneath a wide segmental arch.

The windows have margin glazing to the upper sash or highlight and cement render surrounds imitating quoining (seen clearly on the south elevation). A very unusual feature, in keeping with the medieval inspiration, are heavy masonry mullions that hide the meeting rails of the double-hung sashes. The front doorway has a segmental arch, echoing that of the porch. The highlights and sidelights feature pictorial leadlight windows and the door is four panelled.

The house sits behind a high brick front fence which partially obscures the ground floor. The only external alterations noted are the overpainting of the bricks of the front façade, and the addition of a single-storey room to the north-east corner of the house (not visible from the street).

Comparative analysis

There are few surviving Gothic Revival dwellings in the City of Stonnington, and the rest of Melbourne's suburbs, as it was a relatively early domestic style in Victoria which was largely supplanted by the Italianate by the early 1870s. One of the earliest and best examples in the state is 'Avoca', at 8 Gordon Grove, South Yarra (HO45), of 1845. In keeping with its ecclesiastical connotations, the style was also used throughout the Victorian period for church residences, particularly for the Church of England, such as St Martin's Vicarage, 27 Cromwell Road, South Yarra (Significant in HO379). By the end of the nineteenth century, medieval inspiration was more likely to be Tudor, as seen at the 1890 stone house at 1 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern (HO335).

Victoria's economic crash of the early 1890s creates an obvious boundary between the excesses of the ornate 'Boom-style' architecture, characterised by exuberant cement-coated facades and cast-iron detail which draw upon classical forms, and the simpler Federation-era houses with their more natural palette of face brick and timber fretwork influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement. In fact, some architects had already been experimenting with this materials palette and new forms of massing in the late 1880s.

The residential style known in Australia as Queen Anne Revival was dominant by the turn of the century, and formed the builder's vernacular by 1915. The origins of the Queen Anne Revival style, in its more traditional form as well as its transformation into the recognisably Australian Federation villa, were English Domestic Revival designs by English architects Richard Norman Shaw and William Eden Nesfield. They drew their inspiration from traditional English rural buildings and Tudor architecture (Tibbits 1989:52).

Early Federation houses of the 1890s show a continuing influence of the Gothic Revival style, when the faceted bay with a hipped roof of the asymmetrical Italianate house was supplanted by a gabled bay with decorative trusses or half-timbering. This interpretive style is variously referred to as 'picturesque Gothic' and 'Medieval Free Style'. There are examples of this type both in single-storey form, at 5 & 7 Myamyn Street (5 – HO331) and 12-16 Mercer Street, Armadale (HO328-330), as well as a large two-storey house at 190-192 Wattletree Road, Malvern (in HO156).

The closest comparison for 'Caramel' is the house at 190-192 Wattletree Road built in 1890 (Significant in HO156). Like 'Carmel', it uses the jerkin-head gable form to great picturesque effect. Walls are of Hawthorn brick with cream brick banding, with roughcast render in the gables, and the windows have a simple Gothic pointed arch form. The front façade sits behind a two-storey timber verandah with an unusual frieze to the ground floor (either intricately cut fretwork or very larger cast iron). Overall, 'Carmel' is a more elegant and sophisticated composition.



Figure 6. 190-192 Wattle Tree Road, Malvern (Significant in HO156). (source: www.ksou.cn).

The eclectic design approach using medieval forms can be compared with ‘Bona Vista’ at 59 Kensington Road, South Yarra (HO64). It was designed by the prominent Melbourne architectural practice Reed, Henderson & Smart in 1884. It is a very early house in the development of the red brick style generally referred to as Queen Anne Revival, but has a strong medieval influence seen in the Jacobean pointed parapet marking the entrance and the Scottish Baronial round corner tower with conical roof. The original verandah was removed in the 1920s. This A1-graded building is noted as an eclectic building with ‘an overall picturesque effect [is] achieved’ (Context 1994: 62).



Figure 7. 59 Kensington Road, South Yarra (HO64) (source: R.T. Edgar 2010).

In comparison, ‘Carmel’ is not quite as early (and thus as innovative) an example of this type, and is not as large as ‘Bona Vista’s’ original 14 rooms set on extensive grounds, but it is an equally successful picturesque composition.

Thematic context

This place illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, rev. 2009):

5.2 Governing Australia

'Caramel' is also of associative interest for its connection with its first owner, politician John William Foster Rogers.

8.2 Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

Assessment against criteria

Assessment of this place was carried out in relation to the HERCON model criteria as set out in the VPP Practice Note 'Applying the Heritage Overlay' (2015).

Statement of significance

What is significant?

'Carmel', at 44 Mathoura Road, Toorak, was built in 1888-89 for politician John William Foster Rogers, and his wife Letitia Catherine Rogers. The design is attributed to architect Arthur Edward Clarke.

It is a substantial two-storey red brick house with render dressings and a slate-clad roof. It has an asymmetrical façade with a two-storey verandah to one side and a projecting bay with a jerkin-head roof and ground-floor canted bay window.

The front brick fence and the small single-storey addition at the north-east corner of the house are not significant.

How is it significant?

'Carmel' is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, it is a highly successful example of a Medieval Free Style (or Picturesque Gothic) house which incorporates a range of Gothic, Tudor and Queen Anne forms and details into a picturesque composition. In keeping with this style, the roof is comprised of multiple steep gables. The finely detailed jerkin-head gable to the façade is a feature of particular note. While there is a small amount of light cast-iron decoration, seen in the trefoil-patterned verandah balustrade, the majority of the façade treatment is pleasingly solid, emphasised by the parapeted bay window to the ground floor and the segmental masonry arch of the ground-floor porch. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, the house is distinguished by the wide range of fine medieval-derived details, including the timber gable trusses, the doubled bargeboards of the jerking-head gable, the impressed ornament in the gable (panels) and the parapet of the bay window (rondels), the stylistically correct cast-iron balustrade, and the masonry mullions across the centre of the windows. (Criterion E)

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries.

HO Schedule controls: None

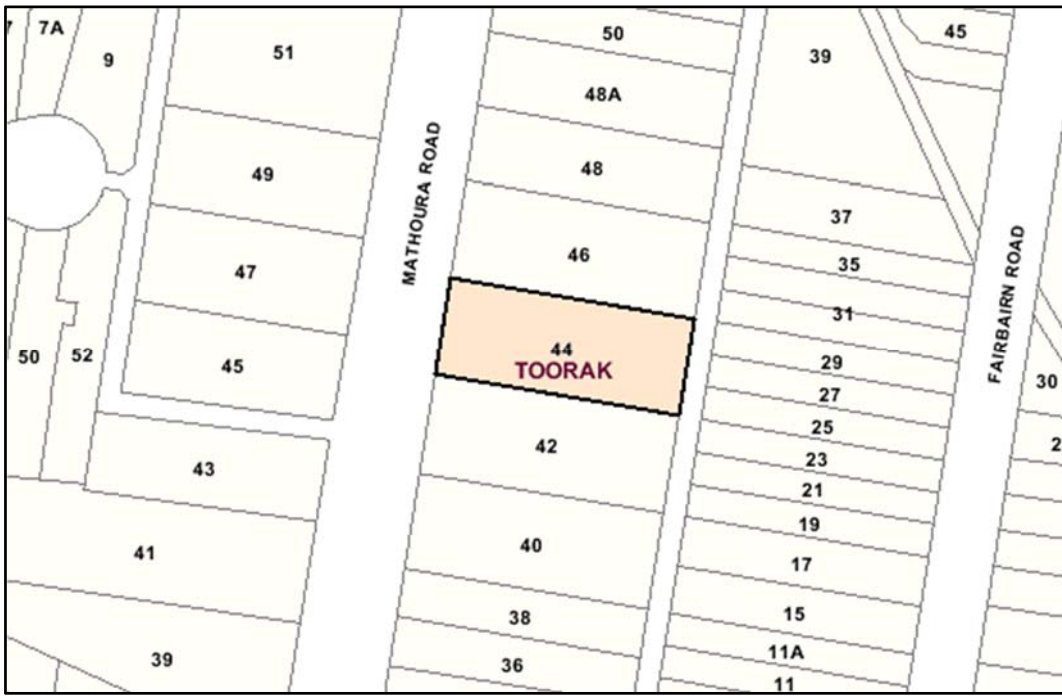


Figure 8: Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 44 Mathoura Road, Toorak (source: www.land.vic.gov.au)

Recommended grading: A1