'Beswicke'

49 Mathoura Road, Toorak

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Villa

Significance level: Local

Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Italianate

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.

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 first section of Mathoura Road, at the Toorak Road end, was formed in the 1850s. The southern section was created with the subdivision of the Brookeville Estate in 1885. Brookeville was a mansion owned by Hastings Cunningham (Maddocks 2015: 6-7). Initially the mansion was retained and the allotments were carved out around the small remaining mansion block (Ham 1885).

The mansion at 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak, was built in 1889 by William Meudell, who was manager of the Bank of Victoria. Meudell was no doubt riding the property-led financial boom in Melbourne in the late 1880s. Meudell was rated £15 for 'vacant land' in 1888 and the following year he was rated £150 for a brick house of 10 rooms (RB). The architect is believed to have been John Beswicke of Wilson & Beswicke (Marshall White 2011). The original source for this information is not known but was possibly conveyed by previous owners of the house.

Despite firm evidence about the architect's identity, it seems highly likely that Beswicke was responsible. Key factors in support of this include Beswicke's role in the subdivision of the estate for C.J. and T. Ham in 1885 (see Figure 2), and the strong likeness of 49 Mathoura Road to other Italianate villas designed by Beswicke in the 1880s, notably 'Thurston' at 11 Harcourt Street, Hawthorn (1885) (Boroondara HO151), and 876 Glenferrie Road, Kew (Boroondara HO150) of 1889. These houses have virtually identical façades to the house at 49 Mathoura Road.
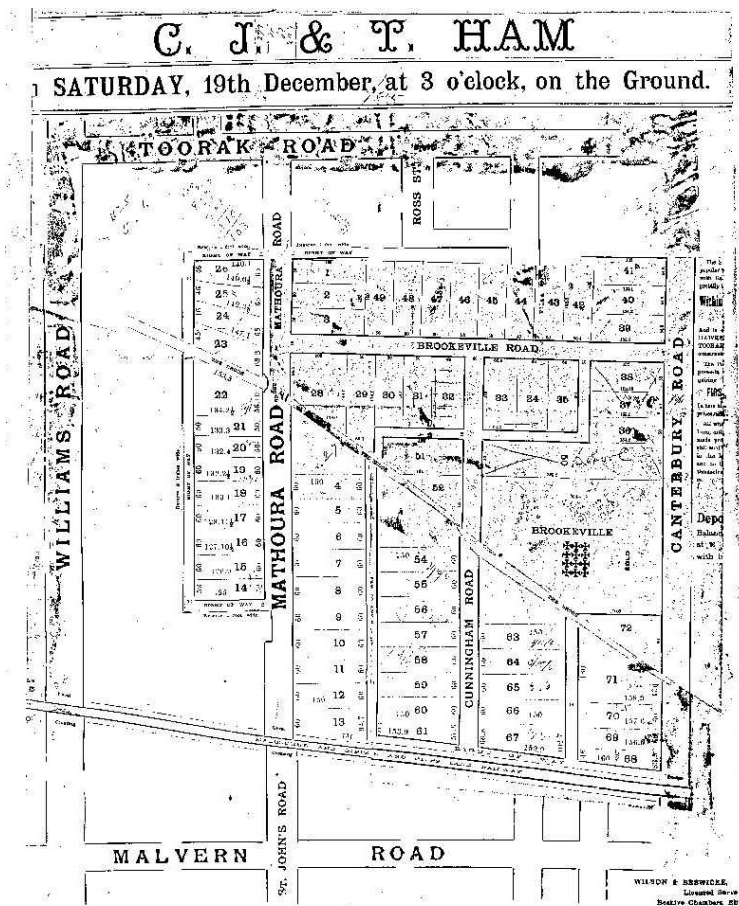
CONTEXT

Figure 1. 'Brookeville Estate' subdivision plan, 1885, showing the creation of suburban allotments in Mathoura Road (source: PH 11205, Stonnington History Centre).
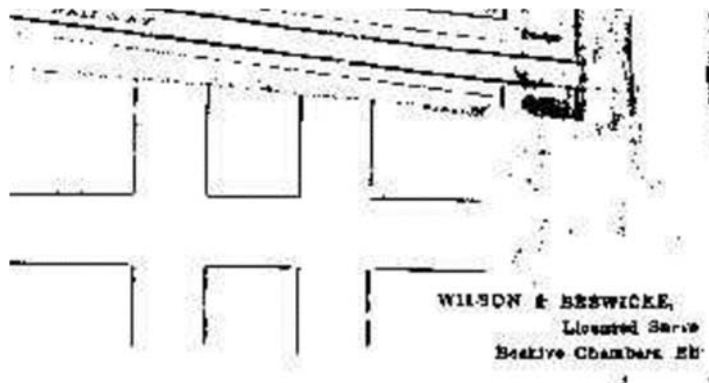

Figure 2. Detail of bottom right-hand corner of Brookfield Estate subdivision plan of 1885, indicating that it was prepared by Wilson & Beswicke (source: PH 11205, Stonnington History Centre).

In 1890, William Meudell is rated for the 10-roomed brick house at 15 Mathoura Road (as the address was at the time) as well as the adjacent vacant property, described as 13 Mathoura Road (RB). In 1892 William Meudell was the general manager of the Union Finance Guarantee & Investment Co., at 15 Mathoura Road, Toorak (S&McD). Meudell leased the house at 49 Mathoura Road for several years and then was listed as the owner-occupier from 1892 until 1900, when the property was sold to sharebroker Thomas Luxton (RB).
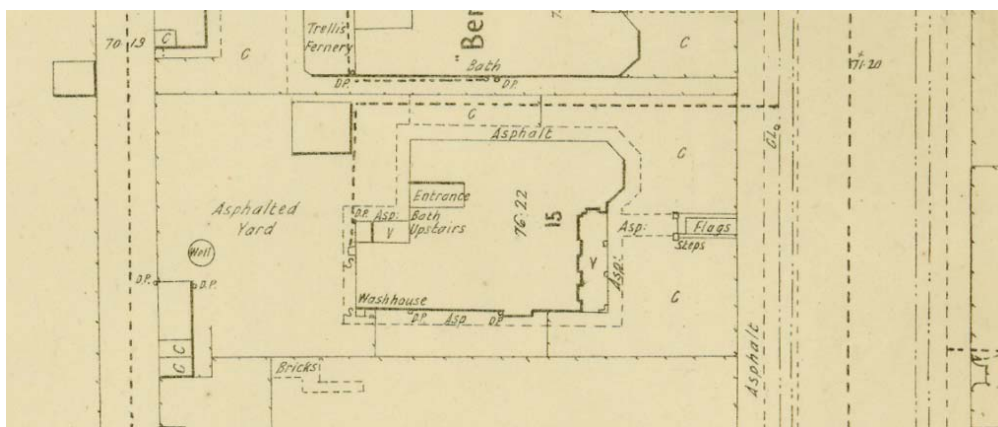
Figure 3. MMBW Detail Plan No. 981, dated 1898 (source: SLV).

The MMBW plan of 1898 shows a large double-story house at 15 (now 49) Mathoura Road with a bay window and front verandah. The house has the luxury of an upstairs bath. The central front path is flagged with stone and has several steps. There is a well and an outside toilet located in the rear yard. The block to the immediate south, which was also owned by Meudell at that time, is vacant.

A real estate advertisement in 2011 claimed the house was designed by John Beswicke in c.1888 (Marshall White 2011). The name 'Beswicke' appears etched in the glazing in the fanlight over the front entrance. It would be unusual however for a house to be named after the architect, and it is more likely – though not certain - that this naming was more recent. In 1890, the name of Meudell's residence was 'Craigmill', but as Meudell was not residing at 49 Mathoura Road until 1892, This is likely the name of another house.

From the 1950s, the house at 49 Mathoura Road was occupied by dentist Geoffrey Kaye who was a pioneer in anaesthesia. He worked in this field from his home (Eger 2014). In 2002 the house operated as the office of the Australian Dental Association (Victorian Branch).

John Beswicke, architect

John Beswicke was a notable Melbourne architect whose work spanned a period from the 1860s to the early 1900s. Beswicke was articled to Crouch & Wilson in 1864 until the partnership dissolved in 1881. At this time Ralph Wilson joined Beswicke in the partnership Wilson & Beswicke, and worked with him up until Wilson's death in 1886, after which Beswicke practised alone before a short stint in another partnership as Beswicke & Hutchins, between 1889 and 1890 (Lewis 2012:81). Beswicke's final partnership was with Francis James Coote – formerly Beswicke's draughtsman – under the style Beswicke & Coote, between 1890 and 1893, after which he practised alone (Lewis 2012:81).

Beswicke was responsible for some of the more unique domestic architecture of Melbourne's boom period in the 1870s and 1880s, both separately and in the various partnerships, as well as some prominent town halls and high-rise city blocks (Lewis 2012:81). He worked extensively in Kew and Hawthorn, notably on homes for his own family, but also designed a number of key buildings in the City of Stonnington, including the Malvern Town Hall (1885) and St John's Church, Malvern (1890). He was responsible for a number of villas in South Yarra and Prahran, and three residences in Toorak; while not identified by address in the Bethell biography of Beswicke one of the Toorak residences could be the house in Mathoura Road.

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Figure 4. 'Thurston', 11 Harcourt Street, Hawthorn, designed by Beswicke in 1885 (source: Bethell 2011)

Figure 5. 878 Glenferrie Road, Kew (Boroondara HO150), designed by Beswicke in 1889 (source: Context 2016)

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Physical description

The residence at 49 Mathoura Road is a substantial two-storey Italianate villa that occupies a relatively wide allotment on the west side of Mathoura Road in Toorak. The building is set back from the street behind a mid-sized front garden which is concealed behind a high contemporary front wall.

Constructed in 1889, the building adopts a common late-Victorian asymmetrical form with a two-storey canted bay to one side of a two-storey verandah. This asymmetrical form became popular during the 1880s, and in this respect the house at 49 Mathoura Road stands a large but relatively typical suburban Italianate villa. In this instance however, the more common two-storey cast-iron verandah is replaced by an arcaded verandah. The building has a hipped slate roof with a single rendered chimney with a moulded cornice.

The house is distinguished by the refined Italianate detailing including the use of the round-headed arch for all windows and the arcades, the elaborate front door and interesting keystones. At both levels, the arcade rests on oversized Corinthian capitals with slender fluted shafts separated at the first floor level by an arcaded balustrade. The run hood moulds are detailed with unusual cast keystones which contain an Aesthetic Movement pattern. At the ground floor level, the keystones are capped with unusual curved hoods. The building appears to have been re-rendered recently (c2009-2010) so it has lost the original ruled finish to the walls, but the cast and run details appear to remain intact (with the overpainting stripped off them). Other cast details include the elaborate eaves brackets with cricket-bat mouldings and rosettes.

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Figure 6. Detail of arcaded first floor balustrade (source: Context 2016)

Windows to the façade are rounded arch double-hung sashes which are full height to the ground floor canted bay and beneath the arcade. The elaborate front door is intact complete with rounded arch highlight and sidelights that retain decorative glazing. The etched glazing to the highlight incorporating the name 'Beswicke' may not be original. The verandah tiles may have been sympathetically replaced as part of works undertaken c2009 (Realestate.com.au, 2011).

The exterior of the house as viewed and appreciated from Mathoura Road is substantially intact despite the loss of the original ruled render finish and the extensive addition and basement garage constructed c2009 by Jackson Clement Burrows Architects. The high front wall was constructed in 2014.

Comparative analysis

Although many single-storey villas were built in Melbourne and its suburbs during the 19th century, after the 1840s the grandest houses were almost always of two storeys, or occasionally three as at Government House and 'Cliveden'. Towards the end of the century, there was an increasing tendency to prefer the higher status of a two-storey house over that of a single-storey one (Jordan 2003:117 as cited in Statham 2008).

The architectural expression of a grand two-storey Victorian house could reflect any one of a range of fashionable British antecedents drawing their inspiration from classical Greek, Roman or Georgian sources to the more picturesque, such as Gothic or Tudor. About a third of these grand Victorian houses adopted an Italianate style combining informal massing with a plain rendered expression enriched by classical motifs. The balance adopted a formal symmetrical classical expression. The Italianate was seen to combine the stateliness of a classical style with a picturesque and fashionable asymmetry (Jordan 2003:117 as cited in Statham 2008).

The Italianate style had its origins in the landscape paintings of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain over a century earlier. These two French artists were enamoured with the landscapes and architecture of rural Italy, depicting it as a vision of Arcadia. Their efforts inspired a broader pursuit of 'the Picturesque' in architecture.

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the Italianate style spread widely in Britain fuelled by the works of architects such as John Nash and Charles Barry and through designs promoted in pattern books such as Charles Parker's Villa Rustica (1832). In 1845, the style

received Royal endorsement when Prince Albert, working with architect Thomas Cubitt, designed 'Osbourne' on the Isle of Wight as a retreat for Queen Victoria and the Royal family. 'Osbourne' with its plain stuccoed expression and tall balustraded tower would become the model for many large residences throughout the Empire including Government House in Melbourne.

The style, which emerged as the preferred expression for Melbourne's grandest mansions of the mid-century, was quickly adapted to suit more modest suburban villas and terraces. As Hubbard (2012:357) notes:

> *Flexibility and adaptability were the secrets to the success of the Italianate style. It could range from the simplest of buildings to the grandest. It was not a precise style and could accommodate different levels of architectural sophistication. It could be formally symmetrical or informally asymmetrical. While towers were standard, they might be reduced to just a porch. The style was easy to copy and could be used by speculative builders buying stock items for decoration. Most importantly, the Italianate style used the vocabulary of classical architecture freely but sparingly, generally with relatively plain expanses of wall and hipped roofs with bracketed eaves.*

The Italianate house is so common in the Melbourne area that this is the standard image people hold of the 'Victorian house'. Condensed to its key features, they would be a hipped roof with an M-profile (i.e., having a central valley to the rear half, which allows a low ridgeline), bracketed eaves, chimneys with a cornice at the top (a run cement-render moulding), and a timber or iron-framed verandah with cast-iron ornament to all but the grandest houses. Common extras included a faceted (canted) bay used to create an asymmetric composition (or occasionally used symmetrically), and windows that had a round or segmental arched opening, some of which were embellished with run cement-render mouldings or delicate hood moulds.

There were three general types of cladding for Italianate houses. The most modest were clad in timber weatherboards or blocked boards emulating expensive ashlar. The two most common types were finished in cement render or face brick. Rendered houses could obtain a high level of run and cast ornament at an affordable price, leading to some highly embellished examples. All, even the most modest, had ruled render with incised lines to emulate the more expensive stone construction. Face brickwork was also common, usually dark brown Hawthorn bricks with cream brick dressings (bichrome) from the late 1860s, and later in the century with red brick accents as well (polychrome). Some architects and designer-builders created bold patterns with the coloured bricks. As good building stone was not common in Victoria, very few houses were built of stone. Early examples were of bluestone, such as the grand 'Bishopscourt' in East Melbourne.

The development of the former City of Prahran and the western part of the former City of Malvern coincides with the emergence of the Italianate forms of expression in Victoria. Consequently, the City of Stonnington retains a disproportionate number of Melbourne's better examples of the mode. A number of these, typically the grandest and most elaborate mansions or those associated with Victoria's most notable families, have been added to the Victorian Heritage Register. These include: 'Toorak House', 'Greenwich House' and 'Mandeville Hall', in Toorak; 'Stonington' in Malvern; and 'Malvern House' in Glen Iris.

Examples of substantial Italianate houses that are of individual significance in Stonnington's Heritage Overlay (both in individual HOs and HO precincts) can be divided into a number of groups according to architectural composition and plan form, their size, ornament and level of architectural sophistication.

Two-storey Italianate houses with a projecting bay used to create an asymmetric composition include examples such as 760-762 Malvern Road, Armadale (in HO130), the semi-detached pair of houses at 27-29 Wattletree Road, Armadale (HO251), 31 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 35 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), and 21 William Street, South Yarra (HO462, verandah replaced). Larger houses incorporate a return verandah set between two perpendicular projecting bays and include examples, 'Montrose House', 38 Huntingtower Road, Armadale (HO367, verandah demolished), 'Carrington', 58 Kooyong Road, Armadale (HO318), 29 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), the polychrome brick villa 'Dunrobin', 9

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Isabella Street, Malvern (in HO374), 72 Elizabeth Street, Malvern (HO309), and 'Glenayon', 19 Pine Grove, Malvern (HO278).

Less common are examples with arcaded front verandahs, often only used at the ground floor with slender masonry or cast-iron columns supporting arches. Examples include, 768 Malvern Road, Armadale (in HO130), 67 Avoca Street, South Yarra (in HO355, graded B) and 1 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra (in HO137). Masonry arcade verandahs were more commonly adopted for terrace-type rows (or detached houses) in the municipality.

In Stonnington, 'Beswicke' can most closely be compared to the grand two-storey villa at 1 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra, which incorporates an arcaded verandah, although in this instance to the ground floor only, with cast-iron posts and frieze to the first floor. This example is more audacious than 'Beswicke', expressed in the elaborate detailing of the rectangular projecting bay fronting Hawksburn Road and in the balustraded tower presumably centred over the entrance at the side (south elevation). In contrast, 'Beswicke' is a highly sophisticated example with refined and somewhat unusual Italianate detailing such as the Aesthetic Movement pattern to the keystones with unusual pointed hoods, and the arcaded first floor balustrade. They appear to share a similar level of intactness.

Figure 7. 1 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra, significant in HO137 (source: Google Streetview)

Closer comparisons can be found from within the body of Beswicke's work, particularly in examples in Hawthorn. In its formality and architectural sophistication, 'Beswicke' can be very closely compared to Beswicke's villa, 'Thurston', Hawthorn (in Boroondara HO151) (Figure 4) which employs very similar arcading, rounded-arch windows and regular eaves bracket spacing as seen at Mathoura Road. 'Beswicke' is also very similar to the Beswicke designed house at 876 Glenferrie Road, Kew (in Boroondara HO150) which in place of the Aesthetic patterned keystones adopts an unusual crane or heron (bird) design.

Figure 8. 'Beswicke' at 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak (source: Context 2016)

Figure 9. 878 Glenferrie Road, Kew (significant in Boroondara HO150) (source: Context 2016)

Figure 10. Detail of keystones to villa at 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak with aesthetic movement pattern and hood (source: Context 2016)

Figure 11. Detail of keystones to house at 878 Glenferrie Road, Kew with bird motif and similar hood (source: Context 2016)

In conclusion, 'Beswicke' is one of a limited number of substantial Victorian residences in Stonnington that varies the typical asymmetrical plan form with the addition of a masonry arcaded verandah to both levels in place of the more typical cast-iron verandah. The house is distinguished from others of its type by the refined Italianate detailing including the use of the rounded arch for all windows and arcades, the elaborate front door and creatively designed keystones.

Thematic context

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

3.3.3 Speculators and land boomers

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?

'Beswicke', at 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak is significant. It was built in 1889 for bank manager

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William Meudell, and designed by noted Melbourne architect, John Beswicke of Wilson & Beswicke.

'Beswicke' is a two-storey Italianate villa with rendered masonry walls and an asymmetrical plan form incorporating a projecting bay to one side of a two-storey masonry arcaded verandah with unusual detail.

'Beswicke' is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century form and fabric.

The modern alterations and additions, including the contemporary masonry front wall, are not significant.

How is it significant?
'Beswicke', at 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak is of local architectural (and associational) and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?
'Beswicke', at 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak is a fine and intact example of a substantial Victorian residence built for middle-class residents of Toorak during the boom years of the 1880s and 1890s. The house adopts strong characteristic features representative of the Italianate style, including the asymmetrical plan form, hipped roof with bracketed eaves clad in slate, round-arched windows, and refined classicising detail executed in cement render. It is also significant for its association with John Beswicke, who was an important late-Victorian architect, responsible for many villas in Toorak, Kew and Hawthorn, as well as Stonnington landmarks Malvern Town Hall (1885) and St John's Church, Malvern (1890). (Criteria D & H)

Aesthetically, it is distinguished by the addition of a masonry arcaded verandah to both levels and the refined Italianate detailing including the elaborate front door and interesting cast and run cement render details such as the run hood moulds that are detailed with unusual cast keystones which contain an Aesthetic Movement pattern, elaborate eaves brackets set between cricket-bat mouldings and rosettes and the Corinthian columns with slender fluted shafts. (Criterion E)

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries.
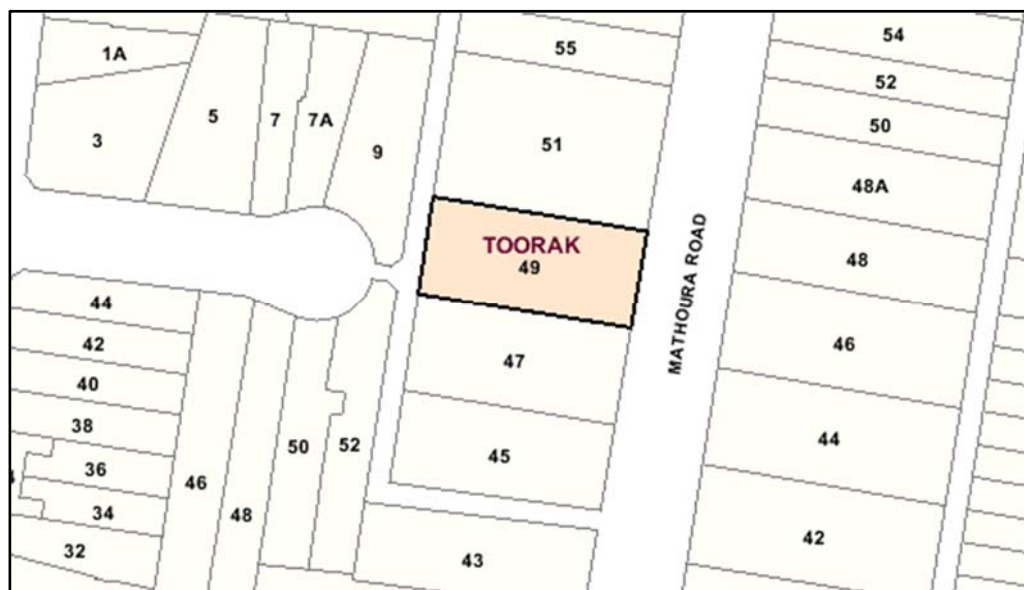
HO Schedule controls: None

Figure 12: Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 49 Mathoura Road, Toorak (source: www.land.vic.au).

Recommended grading: A2