

20 Wallace Avenue, Toorak

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), House

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Italianate with Swiss Chalet

Locality history

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

As Melbourne developed and industrialised, the wealthy middle-class 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 that linked the two sides of the Yarra and via the Oakleigh railway line that opened in 1879.

During the 1870s and 1880s, many large mansions were erected, typically with a large complex of outbuildings so that each one effectively constituted a self-contained entity. These included servants' quarters (for laundrywomen, cook, housemaids, nursemaid, etc.); a laundry; accommodation for gardeners and grooms, as well as toolsheds for their equipment; and stables and carriage house. Toorak in its heyday appeared as an impressive collection of large country estates within relative close proximity in a suburban setting. 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 c.1888-1891. The homes of the wealthy in Toorak were often sumptuously and exquisitely decorated in the latest styles. Owners could afford to 'go home' and bring back art and other decorative pieces not easily obtainable in the colonies. Large estates also allowed for the establishment of impressive gardens 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.

Toorak society at its height, from the 1870s and up until the dawn of the First World War, 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 provided a seasonal Melbourne base for many landed families (mostly from the Western District), but was also a sought-after address for the professional classes and the merchants and others of Melbourne's expanding *nouveaux riches* who had 'made it', and then often subsequently lost it, through over-investing during the boom years of the late 1880s. The population of Toorak suburb was dominantly British and overwhelmingly Protestant. St John's Church of England was a lynchpin of Toorak social life in the Victorian era and has become 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.

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.

In the 1920s and 1930s the fashion for flats saw mansion houses converted into multiple self-contained dwellings or demolished to allow subdivision. In the 1950s and 1960s many more of Toorak's mansions were demolished owing to the high cost of maintenance and changing lifestyles, including 'Heathmont', 'Nareeb', and 'Ellerslie'. Large blocks of flats were constructed amidst considerable outcry in the 1960s and 1970s in the case of the Domain Flats and Lansell Road. Many new subdivisions, through their layout and street-naming, reflected the earlier period of the 'big house', for example Montalto Avenue, Tintern Avenue and Brookfield Road, which were named after the mansions they replaced.

Place history

This site forms part of Crown portions 13 and 14, Parish of Prahran (plan, 1860, SLV). A house was erected in 1890, originally addressed as no. 4 Wallace Avenue. The land was vacant in 1889 and owned by Caroline Zeibel and Julius Stoffers. In 1890 Zeibel and Stoffers were rated £120 for a brick house of 9 rooms (RB). They remained the owners in 1900, and in that year the house was leased to Jane Hamilton (RB).

The MMBW plan of 1900 shows a large house at no. 4 Wallace Avenue with a symmetrical façade, return verandah to three sides, and a central entrance accessed by steps from the entrance path. The property back onto Toorak College (on Douglas Street).

From 1931 the house was occupied by William Dunstan (1895-1957), who won the Victoria Cross (VC) for his heroism at Gallipoli and became the general manager and a director of the *Herald* newspaper (Serle 1981). In the 1940s and 1950s this was also the residence of William's son, the well-known journalist Keith Dunstan OAM (1925-2013) (ER). Keith's son, historian David Dunstan, lived here with his grandmother Marjorie Dunstan in the late 1950s. The house was owed by the Fraser Smith family in the 1960s (Lemon 1999: 198).

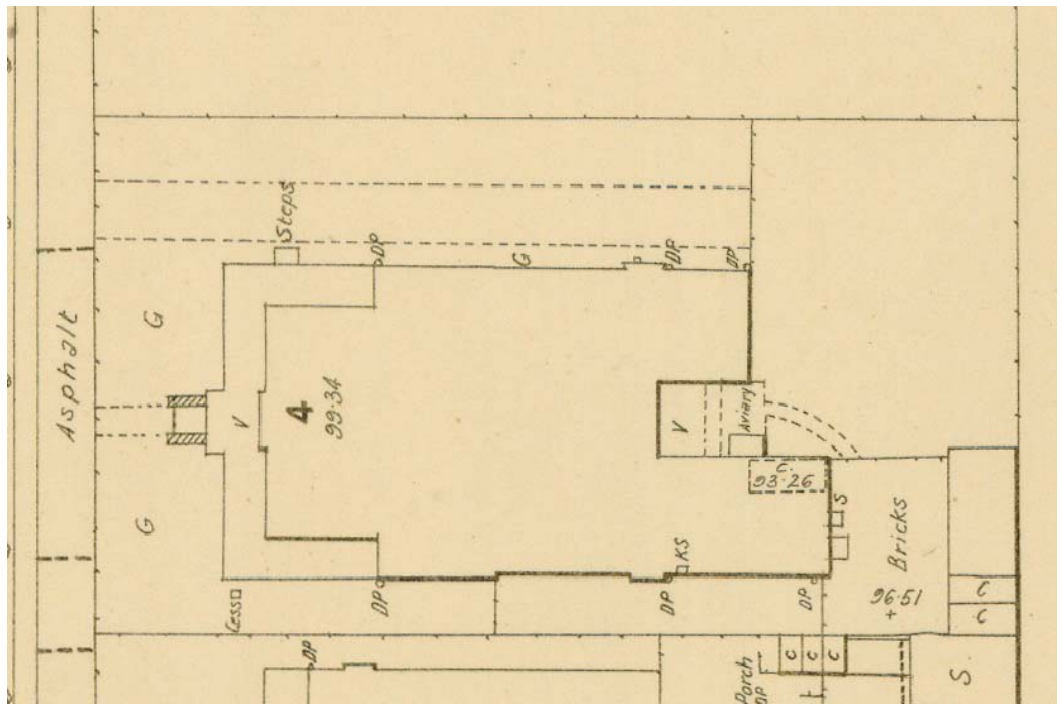


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan No. 938, dated 1900; no. 4 Wallace Avenue is now no. 20 Wallace Avenue (source: SLV).

The property was acquired for the adjoining Geelong Grammar School junior campus, known as Glamorgan, in 1964 (Lemon 1999: 199). Glamorgan was the name of the rented house (since demolished) further north on Wallace Avenue where the school began in 1887, under the formal title of Toorak Preparatory Grammar School. Once purchased by the school, 20 Wallace Avenue was initially known as the 'White House', and it served as the headmaster's residence. In 1994 it was extended to the rear and renamed the 'Sutherland Centre' (Lemon 1999: 306).



Figure 2. Photograph of the façade of 20 Wallace Avenue, from the north, 1984 (source: Malone 1984).



Figure 3. 20 Wallace Avenue, Toorak, taken c1970s (source: Committee for Urban Action, SLV).

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Physical description



Figure 4. Detail of front veranda gable and unusual timber brackets (source: Context 2016).

20 Wallace Avenue is a single-storey residence occupying an allotment mid-block on the east side of Wallace Avenue, between Douglas and Jackson streets in Toorak. It has shallow side boundaries and is setback from the street behind a mid-sized front garden and a modern fence. The former residence now forms part of the larger Geelong Grammar School Campus which takes up most of the block between Douglas and Jackson streets. The former front garden has been partially taken up by concrete accessibility ramps.

Constructed in 1890, the building is distinctive for its combination of a Victorian form with unusual detailing, illustrating the transition to eclectic Federation influences. It is symmetrically

massed to the front, with a central entrance marked by a small gable to the main hipped roof and a secondary trussed gable to the verandah. The shallow-pitched ogee-profile verandah, clad in corrugated iron, returns on both sides, terminating at projecting gabled wings on the side elevations. The slate-clad roof has a high hip with a flat top (the apex clad in metal). Both the main roof and the verandah have exposed rafter tails to the otherwise plain timber fascia. The tall chimneys are cement rendered with heavy cornices that are typical of the Italianate style, topped with terracotta chimney pots.

The front gable is dominated by a large circular vent with a geometric pattern incised into the surrounding render finish. It has lost the superimposed decorative truss and finial depicted in the c1970s photograph taken by the Committee for Urban Action (Figure 3). The side gables are steeply pitched and have a picturesque truss superimposed above deeply recessed openings that likely contain decorative glazing. The trusses visible to the south elevation may be incomplete.

Below the eaves, the return verandah appears to be intact and is a distinctive feature of the building. The timber posts have deeply chamfered sides and nail-head motifs at regular intervals. The deep eaves of the verandah gablet are supported on decorative timber brackets, suggesting a Swiss Chalet influence. Between the posts of the gablet and the rest of the verandah are intricate scrolled timber brackets. It appears that they were covered with timber weatherboards in the 1970s and 1980s (see Figure 2 and Figure 3), but have since been re-exposed. The segmentally arched double-hung sash windows have run hood moulds that sit on a continuous moulded stringcourse.

The elevated verandah has had new safety railings installed in a sympathetic manner. Beneath the verandah, the rendered walls have been painted. The rear wings of the house are painted brick.



Figure 5. View looking north-east showing the southern side gable (source: City of Stonnington 2016).

The former residence appears to be largely intact as viewed and appreciated from Wallace Avenue. Aerials in 2016 show a large addition to the rear of the building that was most likely constructed as part of the conversion to school use.

Comparative analysis

As discussed in the Stonnington Thematic Environmental History, section 8.2.2, the suburban house on a garden allotment was an aspiration of many middle-class Victorians:

Davison (1978:145) describes the Victorian cult of the home in the fresh air and tranquillity of the suburbs as a haven from the noise and dirt of the city - the ideal of rus in urbe (country in the city) which, through Victoria's prosperity and the growth of the public transport system, became possible for many working people. For most suburbanites this home was a single-storey detached house surrounded by its own garden. On a visit to Australia in the 1880s, Twopeny (1883:37) noted that this was the almost universal preference of Australians. During the boom of the 1880s many people found their ideal piece of rus in urbe in the Malvern municipality. Here streets of Victorian villas rapidly began to replace market gardens, especially in the vicinity of the railway lines.

The detached house was the typical Victorian house form in the middle-ring suburbs, in areas where the new tram and train lines facilitated travel and allowed lower density development. In this spacious suburban environment, they could be set in large gardens with side setbacks allowing for a return verandah on one or two sides. They were also built in inner suburban areas for better-off residents, but were usually restricted in form with a front verandah only and side walls near the boundaries.

The architectural expression of these small to medium sized houses ranges from quite simple to those lushly embellished on par with much grander houses. In keeping with the dominant style of the Victorian era, most of small to medium detached houses in Stonnington are Italianate in style. The simplest ones have a symmetrical façade with the front door in the centre. Many have added visual interest created by a projecting bay to one side of the façade, and a cast-iron verandah to the other, creating the classic asymmetrical Italianate suburban form. The more pretentious in this group might even adopt a small tower or the suggestion of one.

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 (Statham, 2008).

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).

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. One of the earliest (and easiest) elements to change from the Italianate model was the verandah detail. The iron-roofed verandah set below the eaves was retained from the Italianate, but slender cast-iron columns were replaced with chunky turned timber posts. Often the cast-iron verandah frieze and brackets were superseded by timber fretwork, though new flatter patterns of cast-iron that emulated fretwork were still used until the 1910s.

Examples of Italianate and transitional 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 the number of dwellings (attached or detached), their size, ornament and level of architectural sophistication.

There are a number of small to medium-sized Italianate houses that are individually significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, most of them in the western side of the municipality. Most of them are the asymmetrical type, with a projecting bay to one side of the façade creating additional visual interest. A smaller number of the Significant houses are the symmetrical type, with a double-fronted flat façade. Examples of this type include more modest houses set on suburban allotments that didn't allow space for a returning verandah: 39 Densham Road, Armadale (in HO130), 66 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 69 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 35 Woodfull Street, Prahran (in HO135), 14 Greville Street, Prahran (in HO456), 23 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (HO131), 36 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134), and 35 McIlwrick Street, Windsor (in HO138). The examples at 5 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130) and 13 Evelina Road, Toorak (in HO380) adopt a central gablet to the verandah, indicating the central entrance, as at 20 Wallace Avenue. The villas at 4 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 24 Cromwell Road, South Yarra (in HO379), and 11 Evelina Road, Toorak (in HO380) are slightly larger examples built on more generous allotments which allowed for a return verandah to one or both side elevations.

In its massing, 20 Wallace Avenue can be compared with the villa at 24 Cromwell Road, South Yarra which shares a symmetrical composition to the front and a return verandah to three sides. It is also raised on a prominent site with steps to the raised verandah, although in this instance to one side, corresponding to the side entrance. This example is much more clearly Italianate in its detailing than 20 Wallace Avenue, which has a more dramatically pitched hipped roof and extensive timber fretwork indicating the transition to the Federation era.



Figure 6. 24 Cromwell Road, South Yarra, individually significant in HO379 (source: Google Streetview).

20 Wallace Avenue can also be compared more generally with other houses of the 1890s that demonstrate a transition from the Victorian Italianate style and massing, as well as those that show a medieval influence in details such as timber trusswork. Comparable examples include: 5 Myamyn Street, Armadale (HO331) - 1896, 12-16 Mercer Road, Armadale (HO328, HO329, HO330) - 1898, 1 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern (HO355) – 1890, 13 Avondale Road, Armadale (in HO123) – undated, and 38 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134) - undated. 20 Wallace Avenue is not really similar to any of these houses in its massing or detail, and has far more interesting and unique detail – particularly in the verandah – than any of them.

The ‘Swiss Chalet’ or ‘Swiss Cottage’ style is a rare picturesque style that first appeared in Victoria in the late nineteenth century. It was introduced to the English-speaking world by American architect Andrew Jackson Downing in his 1850 book *The Architecture of Country Houses*. It was adopted by the British as a suitable style for mountainous locations, such as hill stations in India. The summer resort or ‘hill station’ at Mount Macedon in Victoria was influenced by this British precedent, with a number of such picturesque houses built there of timber. The only two that survive are ‘Karori’ (VHR H2281) of 1888; and ‘Braemar’ (VHR H2003) of 1890, both designed by architect Louis Boldini. Other examples of this time were located at the newly created seaside holiday resort of Mount Martha. They are the Mount Martha Coffee Palace of 1889-90 (now Mount Martha House, VHR H1901); and ‘The Chalet’ (VHR H1891) of 1890-91. The two may have been designed by the same architect, William Tappin, as the Coffee Palace is recorded as the work of practice Tappin, Gilbert & Dennehy, while ‘The Chalet’ is by Reed, Smart & Tappin. The Heritage Victoria citations for these places all note their rarity in Victoria.

In Victoria, most buildings in this style are timber, with high pitched roofs, asymmetric massing, and intricate timber fretwork especially exposed rafter and purlin ends, oversized brackets to wide eaves, decorative bargeboards and trusses, and pierced decoration. There is often a crossover with the Queen Anne style, with Swiss Chalet detailing added to an otherwise Queen Anne form.

No other examples of this style have been identified in the City of Stonnington. The most comparable example to 20 Wallace Avenue found in Victoria is ‘The Chalet’, at 12-22 Glenisla Drive, Mount Martha (H1891). Both houses have a high hipped roof (topped with a cluster of chimneys at ‘The Chalet’) though gabled roofs are most common for the style, a gablet marking the entrance (half-timbered in the case of ‘The Chalet’), and wide eaves supported on exaggerated decorative timber brackets. ‘The Chalet’ is a timber building, which is more common for buildings of this style.



Figure 7. 'The Chalet', Mount Martha, in 1994 (source: G Butler, *Mornington Shire Heritage Study*, 1994)

In comparison to 'The Chalet', 20 Wallace Avenue has rendered masonry walls and run mouldings to doors and windows that are typical of the Italianate style. Its chimneys are also typically Italianate. For this reason, it is properly considered a transitional building that adopts aspects of both the older Italianate style and the very new Swiss Chalet style. While not a full-fledged example of a Swiss Chalet, it is a rare example of a Victorian house exhibiting this style both in Stonnington and Victorian more widely.

Despite the loss of the timber trusswork of the front gable, 20 Wallace Avenue appears largely intact and compares well to the comparative examples.

Thematic context

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

8.2 Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

8.4.2 Functional, eccentric & theatrical - experimentation & innovation in architecture

8.10 The arts

20 Wallace Avenue, Toorak is of historical interest for its association with the Dunstan family. Firstly, Victoria Cross (VC) recipient, William Dunstan (1895-1957) and later his son, Keith Dunstan OAM (1925-2013).

9.3 Developing the private school system

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?

The villa at 20 Wallace Avenue, Toorak is significant. It was constructed in 1890 and comprises a single-storey house of rendered masonry which combines elements of the Italianate and Swiss Chalet styles. The facade is symmetrically massed and rendered with a high hipped roof, return verandah and gablets to mark the central entrance.

It was occupied from 1931 by William Dunstan (1895-1957) who won the Victoria Cross (VC) for his heroism at Gallipoli. Dunstan became the general manager and director of the *Herald* newspaper. It was later the home of his son, well-known journalist Keith Dunstan OAM (1925-2013). It remained in the Dunstan family for almost thirty years.

It is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century external form and fabric.

The modern additions to the rear and front fence are not significant.

How is it significant?

The villa at 20 Wallace Avenue, Toorak is of local aesthetic significance and rarity value to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Aesthetically, 20 Wallace Avenue is a very unusual and creative blend of the Italianate style with Swiss Chalet detailing, illustrating a transition from the Victorian period to the Federation. The treatment of the walls below the verandah is typical of the Italianate style, which so dominated the Victorian era, with rendered masonry, a moulded beltcourse at impost level, segmentally arched windows and doors with hood mouldings. The rendered chimneys with cornices are also typical of that style. The house departs from the Italianate norm, however, in its roof and verandah. Instead of the low-line M-profile hipped roof, typical of the Italianate, it has a striking high hipped roof with a flat top and exposed rafter tails, in keeping with the steep pitched roofs used for Swiss Chalet houses. Other Swiss Chalet features include the use of multiple projecting gables to mark the entrance and to side elevations, ornamented with exposed purlins and decorative eaves brackets. Of special note is the return verandah. The verandah gablet has decorative trusswork, as did the main gables (mostly lost). The timber posts have deeply chamfered sides and nail-head motifs at regular intervals. The deep eaves of the verandah pediment are supported on decorative timber brackets which are a particular identifying feature of the Swiss Chalet style. Between the posts of the pediment and the rest of the verandah are intricate scrolled timber brackets. While not a full-fledged example of a Swiss Chalet, it is a rare example of a Victorian house exhibiting this style both in Stonnington and Victorian more widely. (Criteria B & E)

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the house at 20 Wallace Avenue, as shown on the associated curtilage map.

HO Schedule controls: None

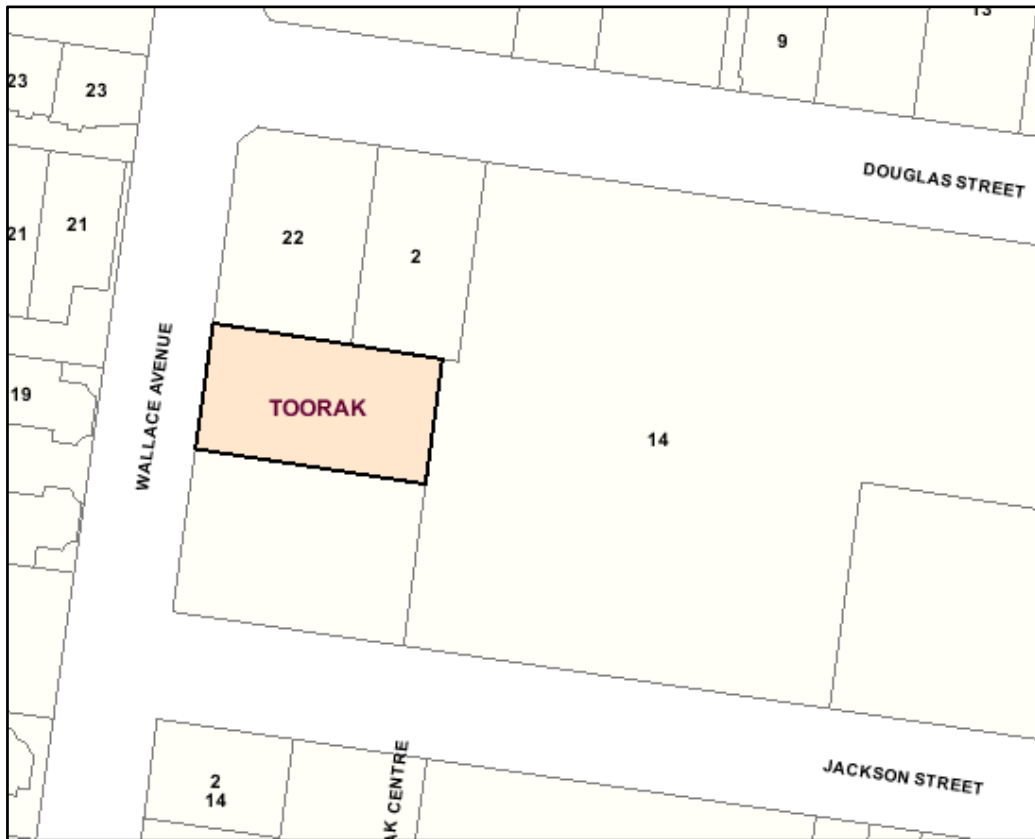


Figure 8. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 20 Wallace Avenue, Toorak (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2