

687-689 Orrong Road, Toorak
Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 687-689 Orrong Road, Toorak.

History and Historical Context

Thematic Context

The following is drawn from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006).

The End of an Era – Mansion Estates Subdivision in the Early Twentieth Century

Toorak has been described as ‘*the only suburb to acquire and keep a name which was synonymous in the public mind with wealth, extravagance and display*’.¹ The suburb’s climb to fashionable pre-eminence was due to its pleasing topographic features and the presence of the Governor’s residence from 1854 (Toorak House, after which the suburb is named). Toorak and the higher parts of South Yarra were settled by pastoralists, army officers, high-ranking professionals, and ‘self made’ merchants and traders. Their wealth was manifested in the construction of a suitably impressive mansion, usually set within expansive grounds. As Victoria’s land boom progressed into the late 1880s, the mansions became more elaborate, one of the best surviving examples being *Illawarra* (1 Illawarra Crescent), built by land-boomer Charles Henry James in 1891.

After the collapse of the land boom, many mansions were put to other uses, subdivided or demolished. The subdivision of the old estates of Toorak began to increase after World War I when the cost of maintaining these large properties became prohibitive. This process of subdivision created a unique pattern of development which can still be understood and

¹ Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-1880*, p.147.

interpreted today. Although new subdivisions imposed new road patterns within the original grids, in many cases new estates and streets bore the name of the old properties, while the original houses were sometimes retained within a reduced garden. Toorak nonetheless retained its appeal as a wealthy enclave.

Creating Australia's most designed suburb

Toorak is notable for the strong culture of patronage between architects and their wealthy clients, which existed from the earliest times of settlement. This has resulted in a much higher than average ratio of architect designed houses. In Albany Road alone, 47 of the 61 houses built since 1872 have been attributed to architects. The consequence of this is one of the strongest concentrations of high quality residential architecture in Australia, which provides an important record of all major architectural styles and movements since the earliest days of settlement.

Architects were particularly busy in Toorak in the boom years of the 1880s when newly prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators built mansions and grand villas that would stand as testament to their wealth, status and fashionable tastes. A great many examples of nineteenth century domestic architecture in the Municipality were lost through demolition, however many of these demolitions provided opportunities for twentieth century architects to create prestigious houses.

The subdivision of Toorak's mansion estates also allowed for the construction of purpose built apartment developments that were often architect designed in the most up to date styles, especially the Old English mode. In response to resident protest about flats destroying the character of Toorak, developers began building apartment blocks and maisonettes designed to emulate a large house. By the 1930s, the maisonette – that is, a large flat over two levels - was emerging as the 'Luxury' flat of choice for many Toorak residents.

Place History

The line of Toorak Road was first shown on a map drawn by surveyor Robert Hoddle in 1837, when Prahran was surveyed into sixteen main blocks. The block bounded by present day Orrong, Toorak, Malvern, Williams Road and Toorak (originally Gardiner's Creek) Road was divided in three lots (lots 30, 31 and 32) and first offered for sale in the Crown Land sales of 1849. Lot 30, consisting of 52 acres along Orrong Road was sold to W & J Payne and further subdivided into smaller lots of about 10 acres.² The southern end of lot 30 was swampy and prone to regular flooding. Higher ground in the north offered more attractive land and from early on became the site of prestigious residences on large estates. One of the early houses on lot 30 was Montalto, a 'pretty and modest' dwelling built c1856.³ Montalto appears to have been rebuilt as a much larger mansion in the 1880s.¹

In 1895, Montalto was sold to George Colman Kelly. An 1899 MMBW plan of the area shows Montalto standing hard up against the Orrong Road boundary with verandahs on the principal facades facing south and west. George Kelly's widow Agnes remained at Montalto after his death in 1909.

The Montalto Estate was surveyed in October 1927 by J G Gillespie and the plan lodged with the titles office on 28 February 1928.⁴ This distinctive subdivision was notable for its unusual geometric form. It's square design, it is said, '*not only thwarted the automobile but created an unusual village-like street pattern ideal for the construction of equally distinctive architecture and landscape design*'.⁵

² Betty Prahran, *Discovering Prahran: Area Five*, p. 32.

³ Miles Lewis Melbourne Mansions Database, No.1609.

⁴ Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review, Volume 3: Urban Conservation Areas*, p.84.

⁵ John Curtis, *Toorak Residential Character Study*, 1991, pp.2-5.

Montalto was retained in the north-east corner of the estate, occupying land at present day 681-689 Orrong Road. The mansion was demolished and the land subdivided shortly after Agnes Kelly's death in December 1931. The final rate book listing for Montalto occurs in November 1931.⁶ The same rate book has annotations that suggest that the property had been subdivided into four allotments, numbered 173-179. The next rate book (for the period 1932-33) records two 6 room brick dwellings at 179 Orrong Road, occupied by Lancelot Lloyd and Elise Riggall.⁷ The earliest MMBW plan for this site, dated 18 August 1932, shows two attached dwellings with a mirror image plan form. The MMBW plan identifies the owner as Mrs J N Webb and the agent as 'R B Hamilton' (architect Robert Bell Hamilton).⁸

The 1934 Sands and McDougall directories list Lancelot Lloyd at 179 Orrong and Elsie Riggall at 181 Orrong Road. These properties were renumbered as 687 and 689 Orrong Road in the early 1970s.⁹

Robert Bell Hamilton

The architect of 687-689 Orrong Road was Robert Bell Hamilton. Born in 1892 and educated at Scotch College, Hamilton served in the 14th Battalion of the AIF during WWI. After the armistice he studied in London to become an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Upon completion of his studies, Hamilton remained in London where he designed a housing scheme for the Slough City Council before securing a position as the assistant to the government architect in Bombay, India in 1920. Two years later Hamilton formed a partnership in Melbourne with F L Klingender.

Initially, Hamilton positioned himself within the Arts and Crafts vernacular vocabulary that had characterised architect Rodney Alsop's work throughout the previous decade, but in the subsequent years, Hamilton gradually eradicated the American influence from his work and by the late 1920s had become the foremost exponent of Tudor Revival styling in Melbourne. Hamilton's design approach drew upon Arts and Crafts principles, in particular the idea that architectural expression should extend beyond the built fabric and into individual components such as leadlight, fittings and furniture. The partnership with F L Klingender lasted until 1925 when Hamilton established his own practice.

Hamilton was active in Melbourne until WWII and worked alone and in partnership with other architects such as Marcus Norris to produce a large number of residences in a variety of styles throughout the inner eastern suburbs of Melbourne. These include a substantial villa in the restrained Georgian mode at 7 Landale Road, Toorak, completed in the early 1930s, and houses built at 8 and 12 Macquarie Road in 1929 and 1930 respectively.

Although Hamilton designed a number of large and impeccably detailed houses in the Tudor Revival mode, he is best remembered for his Tudor Revival flats, including Burnham at 14 Grange Road, Toorak (1933), Moore Abbey, 50 Marne Street, South Yarra (1934), Denby Dale, 422-426 Glenferrie Road, Kooyong (1938), and for a number of shops throughout Prahran and Malvern in the same mode. Hamilton's group of Tudor style shops in Toorak Village (at 476-478 and 541 Toorak Road) are particularly well known, and are commonly understood to set the character of this small shopping strip.

Robert Hamilton was elected Member of the Legislative Assembly for Toorak in November 1945. He was both a parliamentarian and a Councillor for Mornington Shire when he died on 15 May 1948.

⁶ City of Prahran Rate Books, 1931-32, No. 2329. p.7.

⁷ City of Prahran Rate Books, 1932-33. No. 2337/2338. p.7.

⁸ MMBW Plan of Drainage No. 190210. South East Water.

⁹ Sands and McDougall Directories, 1971-1972.

Description

The building at 687 Orrong Road is a double-storey English Domestic revival style pair of maisonettes with clinker brick walls and a terracotta tiled roof. It has a symmetrically composed façade with twin projecting gabled bays flanking a central verandah (since enclosed). The gable ends are clad in stained vertical boarding and have narrow slit vents. The main roof is a steeply pitched transverse gable with an 'eye lid' vent at the centre and tall chimneys at either end. The main roof also has stained vertical boarding to the gable ends to match the front gables. Windows are typically double hung sash frames with diamond pattern leadlight glazing characteristic of the English Domestic Revival mode.

The building appears to be substantially intact in terms of its presentation to Orrong Road. The canted bay window on the gable bay to no.687 is not shown on the original MMBW property service plan. It may not be original but is nonetheless sympathetic in form and detailing. The glazing in of the first floor verandah has also been carried out in a relatively unobtrusive manner.

Comparative Analysis

English Domestic Revival Styles

Sometimes referred to as Tudor, interwar Old English was an offshoot of the Arts and Crafts medievalism of the late nineteenth century, and shared that movement's values in terms of dark, natural colourings, a predominance of brickwork, the use of half timbering and a love of wrought iron and leadlight windows. Old English architecture was typified by the use of red or clinker brick, brick nogging and/or half timbering in gables or upper storeys, boldly modelled brick chimneys and terracotta tile roofs.

Steeply pitched roofs with gables rather than hips were a typical characteristic of the larger, two storey examples, though small suburban houses often had a combination of hips and gables. Walls were usually sheer rather than textured and ended flush with the gable of the roof. Sometimes manganese bricks or tiles or tapestry bricks were used to highlight openings and to decorate walls. Picturesque asymmetry was attained through double or triple fronts to the facade, arched porch entries, large, prominent chimneys and, in larger examples, oriel windows and towers.

Porches were generally small, and the traditional Australian verandah was not included except in some hybrid examples. Windows were of the sash or casement types, and often featured twelve panes or diamond pattern leadlight. Muted colours were appropriate to this style. Cream, off-white, buff, stone, terracotta and dark brown were most popular. Dark stained timber and red brick were the dominant materials, and cast iron painted black or a dark chocolate brown was also common.

A number of new economies in materials facilitated the rise of the English Domestic revival. The increasingly availability of seasoned hardwoods made possible the use of brick nogging and half-timbering, even in the most modest house. Added to this was the introduction of terracotta shingle tiles, manufactured by the Eureka tile company in their Ballarat kilns.

By the late 1920s, the inclusion of imitation half timbering in the black and white tradition declined although buildings continued to achieve medieval associations through picturesque massing of gabled and hipped roofs and through the application of elements such as leadlight windows. Architects also looked to the vernacular of Normandy for inspiration.

The use of an external expression drawing heavily from medieval precedents became a means of expressing the solidity and longevity of British traditions. Old English or Tudor styled houses were associated with a profound Empire consciousness. Larger houses of the type exploited the associations of the manor to convey wealth and social status. A large

Tudor house, no matter how new, somehow conveyed a sense that wealth, even recently achieved, was permanent. So common was the use of this idiom within the nouveau riche enclaves of Toorak and South Yarra that the essentially British term 'Stockbroker Tudor' gained popular usage.

Design in a true Old English mode runs right through the 1920s but it gained much greater momentum from the early 1930s as the bungalow and Spanish Mission began to wane in popularity. From this time it was taken up by a far greater proportion of the architectural profession, and began to appear as a builder's expression. Some of the more progressive designers in this mode, such as Edward Billson and Osborn McCutcheon, incorporated modern planning with careful zoning of spaces according to function. Few houses designed by either architects or builders took the opportunity to break away from revivalism in Old English design other than through the process of progressive simplification, the hallmark of late 1930s stylism. As the decade drew to a close the sentimentality and strong British associations of the academically detailed Old English style were replaced by an expression which drew ever closer to the post-war multi-fronted multi-hipped and unadorned Australian suburban vernacular.

A substantial number of residences drawing inspiration from the English Domestic Revival were built in the well-heeled suburbs of Stonnington during the interwar period. Houses in this style with individual heritage overlay controls currently include: 3 Hopetoun Road, Toorak (HO327), 429 Glenferrie Road, Malvern (HO313), 3 Illawara Crescent, Toorak (HO62), 8 Monaro Road, Kooyong (HO277), and the Robert Hamilton designed house 4 Struan Street, Toorak (HO168). 687-689 Orrong Road is not as grandly proportioned as the last example but has a similar character derived from strong gabled roof forms with vertical board cladding used in place of the more conventional appliqué of medieval style half-timbering. It is also the case that 4 Struan Street has been more heavily altered. In general, 687-689 Orrong Road is less dependent on ornament than many contemporaneous Old English style designs, and more concerned with form and simplicity of expression.

Thematic Context

The maisonettes at 687-689 Orrong Road, Toorak illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006):

- 8.1.3 - The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century
- 8.4.1 - Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion
- 8.6.3 - Architect designed apartments

Assessment Against Criteria

Assessment of the place was undertaken in accordance with the HERCON criteria and the processes outlined in the Australian ICOMOS (Burra) Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Significance.

Statement of Significance

Note that the relevant HERCON criteria and themes from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (TEH) are shown in brackets.

What is Significant?

The maisonettes at 687-689 Orrong Road, Toorak is a double-storey English Domestic Revival style building designed by noted interwar architect Robert Bell Hamilton. It was built c1932 following the demolition and subdivision of the nineteenth century mansion Montalto.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The original external form, materials and detailing of the building.
- The generally high level of external intactness.
- The unpainted state of the face brick and terracotta elements.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself).

Modern fabric, including the front verandah infill and front fence, is not significant

How is it significant?

The maisonettes at 687-689 Orrong Road, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The maisonettes at 687-689 Orrong Road are architecturally significant as a fine and largely intact example of residential building in the English Domestic Revival style designed by important interwar architect Robert Bell Hamilton (Criterion D). It has an imposing streetscape presence, and provides a good illustration of the propensity for maisonettes and flats in fashionable suburbs to be designed to emulate the appearance of a large single dwelling (Criterion E, TEH 8.6.3 - Architect Designed apartments,).

The building is also of some historical interest as evidence of a major phase of development that took place in the 1920s and 1930s when subdivisions of Toorak's grand mansion estates were developed as prestigious residential enclaves (Criterion A, TEH 8.1.3 The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century).

Additionally, the building illustrates the role of English Domestic revival style residences as symbols of wealth, status and taste for Melbourne's middle and upper classes of the interwar period (TEH 8.4.1 - Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion).

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries as shown in figure 2 below. External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended. It is further recommended that the building remain A2 graded.

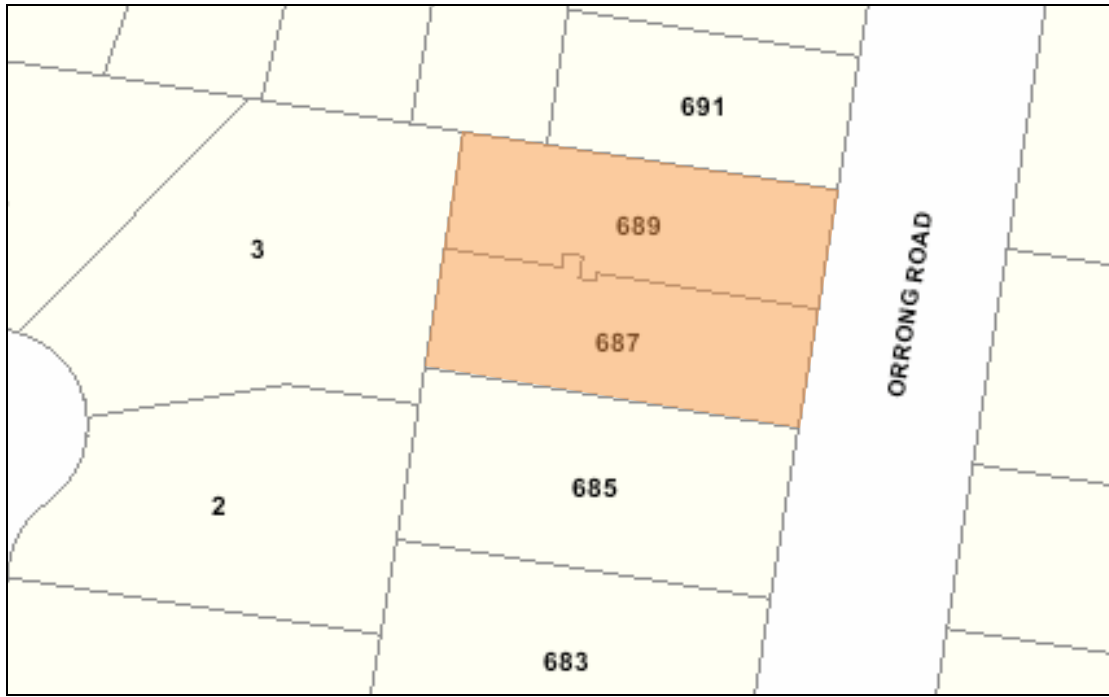


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay at 687-689 Orrong Road, Toorak.