

Tara, 749 Orrong Road, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 749 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 interpreted today. Although new subdivisions imposed new road patterns within the original

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

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 ever more prosperous merchants, businessmen and land speculators sought to create houses that would stand as testament to their wealth, status and fashionable taste. A great many examples of nineteenth century domestic architecture in the Municipality were lost through demolition, however many of these demolitions created opportunities for twentieth century architects.

After the turn of the century, architects continued to have a major influence on the wealthy suburbs in present day Stonnington. Walter Butler, Robert Hamilton, Marcus Martin and Rodney Alsop were among the notable architects whose work is well represented in Toorak. These architects built predominately in the fashionable architecture styles of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Georgian revival and Old English modes.

Place History

The area bound by present day Toorak Road, Grange Road, Orrong Road and the Yarra River was sold at the first Crown land sales in June 1840. 73 acres of land on the west side of Orrong Road was purchased by Charles Norris and subdivided into generous allotments. From the late 1860s, a number of larger houses were built facing Orrong Road, including Struan. On the south side of Struan Street, a gully cut across the centre of the allotment, and the land remained largely undeveloped in the 1890s.² In 1907, the large Walter Butler designed house, Warrawee was built near the north east corner of Robertson Road and Orrong Road.

In 1918, seven residential allotments on the Warrawee Estate on Struan Street and Grange Road were offered for sale.³ Warrawee was at this time owned by Jane Moore, widow of Charles Moore, owner of the Charles M Read emporium in Chapel Street, Prahran. Mrs Moore had a new house built nearby Warrawee on the west side of Orrong Road in 1924 to designs by architect Marcus Martin, at that time a partner in the firm A K Henderson, Alsop and Martin.⁴ Named 'Tara', the house was featured in the April 1926 edition of *Australian Home Beautiful* wherein it is described as a '*stately residence of distinctive design ... poles apart from either the austere or many gabled types, of which everyone is more than a little weary*'.⁵The reviewer continued:

Though holding a definite suggestion of the Italian school of architecture, the design is governed by a stateliness of line and proportion that link it with the classical, and in it Mr

²MMBW Detail Plan No. 936.State Library of Victoria.

³*Argus*, 18 September 1918, p.2.

⁴MMBW House Connections.Application No. 140202.

⁵*Australian Home Beautiful*. April 12, 1926, pp. 38-41.

Martin has once again expressed those capabilities that raise his work above the line of mediocrity...

... The external impression of the house is one of graceful, well balanced proportion, and its cream walls and dull green shutters are in refreshing contrast to the sombre coloring [sic] of surrounding dwellings. A dignified portecochere forms the central feature of the front elevation, while at the rear a distinctive note is struck by the terrace approached by curved white marble steps. Where emphasis is required the windows have segmental heads and moulded cement architraves and key stones.⁶

The *Australian Home Beautiful* also describes how the house was set in a carefully planned garden, with the most attention and space devoted to the western aspect, the rear garden, which was terraced, planted with native trees and shrubs, as well as flowers, and which contained a sunken garden under its rock faced southern wall.

Mrs Moore resided at Tara until her death in 1944.⁷

Marcus Martin

Marcus William Martin (1893-1981) was a key figure in Melbourne architecture in the interwar and early post war period. While active in commercial, industrial and institutional design, he was especially influential in terms of his residential work. After attending Melbourne Grammar School, Martin served articles with A & K Henderson and completed a year of the architectural diploma course at the University of Melbourne before enlisting in the AIF in 1915. He was wounded by shrapnel in Flanders and invalided home to Australia. Soon after this he established a practice with Rodney Alsop, subsequently merged with A K Henderson. This larger partnership was dissolved when Alsop embarked on a tour of Europe and Mediterranean. After a year in practice under his own name, Martin commenced a new firm with Walter Butler and his nephew, Austin Richard Butler. The union with the experienced and highly regarded Butler helped establish Martin at the forefront of domestic practice in Victoria, and from this time Martin became an influential and celebrated proponent of Georgian and Mediterranean influenced design. Throughout his career Martin specialised in a quietly historicist mode that achieved a fashionable compromise between the period revival styles of the early twentieth century and the trend towards a simpler, more modern architectural expression that gained momentum in the 1930s. Martin worked in a more or less consistent, predominately neo-Georgian mode from the late 1920s until his retirement in 1958, with the great bulk of his domestic work being located within Toorak, South Yarra and the Mornington Peninsula.

Description

Tara is a substantial double-storey house sited close to the Orrong Road frontage of a large property. It has a stately Georgian revival character with Mediterranean influences apparent in the complex massing and some of the rendered ornament. The exterior massing is complex with a balanced asymmetry. A formal entry statement is created by a portecochere with an elegant first floor Palladian window and rendered panels with a distinctive Italianate style circular ornament. The roof is hipped with terracotta tiles and has wide slatted timber eaves. The walls are roughcast render with smooth rendered dressings. Most windows are Georgian style twelve-paned and double-hung, but there are some arched windows at ground floor with keystone motifs. First floor windows are linked by a string course. The house's brick-paved forecourt has a double entry drive and a high rough-cast rendered fence, curving inward at the driveway entrances. The fence is presumed to be contemporary with the house.

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Argus*, 22 May 1944, p.4

The house appears to remain substantially intact externally. Council records show a terrace built in 2009 on the north elevation with a pergola and new door openings.⁸ Various internal works were also undertaken at this time. These changes have not impacted on the character of the house as it presents to the street.

Comparative Analysis

The interwar Georgian revival style is closely related to the Colonial revival and Mediterranean styles. It was particularly fashionable during the interwar period in the wealthy middle ring suburbs of Toorak, South Yarra and Armadale when it became synonymous with upper middle class concepts of good taste.

The interest in the Colonial Georgian resulted in part from a continued desire for the creation of a national idiom through a search for a local vernacular, which in Australia was equated with Colonial buildings of the early nineteenth century. Various factors prompted a re-investigation of Colonial and Georgian modes. A precedent had been set by British architects such as Edwin Lutyens of abandoning medieval inspiration of the Arts and Crafts style for a return to classicism and the international revival of interest in the classical modes. Australian architects also looked to the United States where a vigorous Colonial Georgian revival had been underway since the late-nineteenth century.

By the First World War, the revived Georgian style was well established in Britain, often being used for houses, blocks of flats and commercial buildings of modest size. In Australia, William Hardy Wilson is credited with a major role in popularising the Georgian revival idiom through his rediscovering and recording of early nineteenth century architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania, and through his admiration for American Colonial architecture encountered on his overseas travels.

Georgian revival buildings began to appear in Melbourne from about the end of the First World War, and are exemplified by the work of a few prominent local architects – Harold Desbrowe Anner, Fredrick Hawkins, Percy Meldrum and Marcus Martin, who was probably the most influential proponent of Georgian design. In the early 1920s Martin was experimenting with different styles, reflecting both the prevailing eclecticism of architecture in Melbourne at the time and the stylistic preferences of the architects with whom he was most directly associated. The house at 749 Orrong Road exemplifies Martin's early eclectically based forays into neo-Georgian and related styles in 1920s. It is broadly similar to Walter and Richard Butler's earlier, large-scale Georgian revival residence at 1 Linlithgow Road (1919), although Martin's design has a stronger Mediterranean character, anticipating the later widespread use of this style.

Thematic Context

Tara, 749 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

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.

⁸City of Stonnington Building File BL1160/2000900335/0

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?

Tara, 749 Orrong Road, Toorak is a substantial double-storey residence with an eclectic Georgian revival/Mediterranean character. It was built in 1924 to designs by noted architect Marcus Martin.

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 high level of external intactness.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden itself)
- The front fence.
- The absence of modern garages or carports in views to the house from the street.

How is it significant?

Tara is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Tara is architecturally significant as an impressive and highly intact interwar residence designed by noted architect Marcus Martin. It demonstrates a key transitional phase in Martin's career anticipating the refined neo-Georgian/Mediterranean expression that typifies 1930s domestic architecture in Toorak.

Tara is of some historical interest as evidence of a major phase of development that took place in the 1920s and 1930s when many of Toorak's large mansion estates were subdivided to create prestigious residential enclaves (TEH 8.1.3 The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century, Criterion A). Tara also illustrates the role of large architect designed houses as symbols of wealth, status and taste for Melbourne's 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. External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended. The place should retain its current A2 grading.

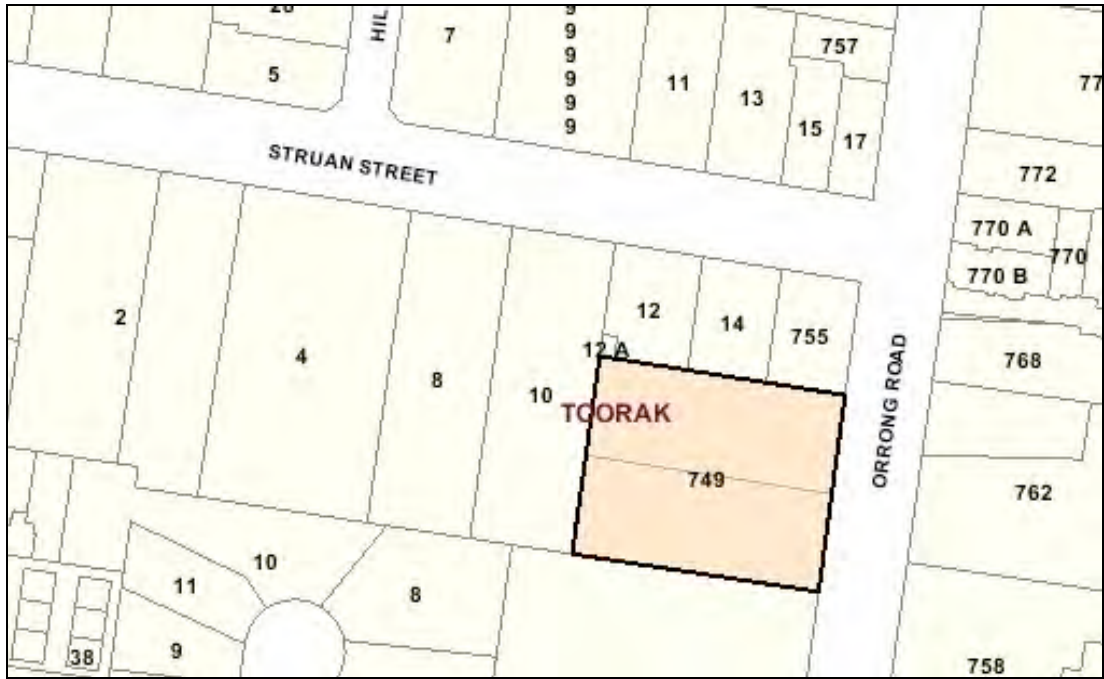


Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 749 Orrong Road, Toorak.