

4 Grant Avenue, Toorak Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 4 Grant Avenue, 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 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 that form part of present day Stonnington. Walter Butler, Robert Hamilton, Marcus Martin and Rodney Alsop were among the notable architects whose work is 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 property at 4 Grant Avenue originally formed part of Crown Allotment 28, first sold to James Jackson at the Crown land sales in 1849. In 1852, merchant Alfred Ross purchased Lot 28, which included 55 acres of land between Irving Road and Clendon Road. Orrong, the first house to be built in the area, was located midway between Gardiners Creek Road (Toorak Road) and Commercial Road (Malvern Road). Orrong's large estate was gradually subdivided and by 1890, John Horsfall had transformed the house, by then on 2 acres, into a forty room mansion. Grant Avenue was created through subdivision of Orrong's much reduced, although still large estate. The mansion remained for some years, standing midway along Grant Avenue.²

In 1936, architects Yuncken, Freeman & Griffiths designed the house at 4 Grant Avenue for Douglas Carnegie and his wife Margaret (who was to become an important collector of Australian art in the post war period). The garden was designed by Edna Walling.³ The house initially had the address 2 Grant Avenue.

The Carnegie family decided to move to a country property during the war, and subsequently sold their Grant Avenue house. Their new country residence was also designed by Tom Freeman, and constructed using rammed earth.⁴

In 1948, the house at 4 Grant Avenue was prominently featured in the important review of contemporary Australian architecture, George Beiers' *Houses of Australia: A Survey of Domestic Architecture*, which noted:

The general standard of Melbourne houses is well above that of the other cities of Australia. This house in Grant Avenue, Toorak, is an example of the high standard of

²Stonnington Local History Catalogue Reg. No. PH9411.

³Trisa Dixon and Jennie Churchill, *The Vision of Edna Walling*, p.140

⁴Interview with Lady Carnegie, August 1995.

*design of Melbourne domestic architecture. It is designed very much on the lines of houses of the Queen Anne period. The urns on the parapet and the detail of the front entrance are typical of this period. The external walls are stucco, painted white. The paintwork is also white...*⁵

From c1958, 4 Grant Avenue was the home of Baillieu Myer.⁶

Yuncken, Freeman & Griffiths

The architect of 4 Grant Avenue is understood to have been Tom Freeman of Yuncken, Freeman & Griffiths, a firm which in the post war era was to become one of the largest, most successful and most highly regarded architectural practices in Australia.⁷ The firm developed an early architectural reputation based on its interpretation of the refined Georgian mode in buildings such as the Lempriere house, Illawarra Crescent in Toorak (c1939), 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak (c1936) and 4 Grant Avenue. Yuncken, Freeman & Griffiths also produced work in the contemporary International Modern style, most notably the Smith House, Hopetoun Road, Toorak (demolished). After the war, as Yuncken Freeman Pty Ltd, the firm was responsible for landmark modernist works such as the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (1959) and South Yarra Library in Toorak Road, South Yarra (1960s) and ultimately became one of the most successful practices in Australia producing Eagle House (1970-71), BHP House (1972) and the former Estates House (1976) in the central business district of Melbourne.

Description

4 Grant Avenue is a double-storey interwar house in a Regency revival mode. It is positioned at the front of a generous block with a circular drive of gravel that contributes to the overall formality found in planning, massing, fenestration and landscaping. The house has a parapeted rendered masonry façade with restrained Classical ornament reminiscent of an elegant Regency era townhouse. The front facade of the house has regularly arranged multi-pane sash windows and a small semi-circular stepped porch in the centre with a simple curved metal balustrade. The corners and pilasters of the main double-storey envelope are quoined and the parapet is surmounted by urn finials. A smaller double storey wing and garage abut the east side of the house.

The house appears to remain largely intact is so far as it presents to the street. Various alterations and additions were made to the house in the 1950s and 1960s, some involving Yuncken Freeman architects.⁸ Council records also indicate that the garage was rebuilt in 1987 but the external character and appearance of the house has been handsomely maintained.

Comparative Analysis

Georgian architecture is understood as the style that developed in England during the reigns of the first three Georges. In general terms it is seen to have grown out of a re-examination of the work of Andrea Palladio, the noted architect of the late Italian Renaissance. The foundations of English Georgian architecture were laid by Sir Christopher Wren and others towards the end of the seventeenth century and developed over the following century into an accepted mode for both public and domestic buildings. The Regency style primarily relates to buildings erected under George IV (Prince Regent from 1811-1820). It follows closely on from the neo-classical Georgian style and is characterised by elegance and lightness of touch. Exterior stucco and

⁵ George Beiers, *Houses of Australia: A Survey of Domestic Architecture*, pp.36-37

⁶Sands and McDougall Directories, 1958/1960/1970/1974.

⁷City of Prahran *Significant Tree and Garden Study*, Vol 3, 4 Grant Avenue.

⁸City of Prahran Building Inspection Cards.

light ironwork decoration are other hallmarks of the Regency style. Architect John Nash was a key instigator of the style, notably through his Regent's Park and Regent Street terraces.

During the 1920s, buildings in the Georgian and Regency revival styles constructed in the United States and to a lesser degree the work of English revivalists, such as Edwin Lutyens, promoted a resurgence of interest in these modes amongst local architects. The interest in the Colonial Georgian also 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 era buildings of the early nineteenth century.

In Melbourne, architects Marcus Martin, Harold Desbrowe Annear, Rodney Alsop and Walter Butler all incorporated aspects of the Georgian style along with Californian and Mediterranean influences into their domestic projects. The arrival of Modernism in the 1930s did little to temper local enthusiasm for the style. Rather, elements of each were combined and the eclecticism foreshadowed in the 1920s was further heightened.

The Georgian revival idiom was particularly fashionable in the 1930s in the wealthy suburbs of Toorak, South Yarra and Armadale when it became synonymous with upper class concepts of good taste.

Yuncken Freeman, Freeman & Griffiths produced a number of houses in variously tempered Regency and Georgian revival modes at this time although they were often denoted as 'Colonial' in acknowledgement of the role of the style in Australian history. The Lempriere house, Illawara Crescent in Toorak (c1939), 202 Kooyong Road, Toorak (c1936) and 4 Grant Avenue are classic examples of their academic approach to the style, with symmetrical façade pronounced central entrances and multi-paned sash windows, often without shutters. The formality of these buildings and the extent of their period detailing makes them more emphatically Regency than most contemporary building. Their buildings were considered the epitome of refined taste and style in the 1930s in Melbourne.

Thematic Context

The house 4 Grant Avenue, 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

The house 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 grand nineteenth century 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). It also illustrates the role of Georgian/Regency inspired 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).

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 are shown in brackets.

What is Significant?

The house at 4 Grant Avenue, Toorak is a double-storey building with a graceful Regency inspired stuccoed façade. It was built c1936 to designs by architects Yuncken, Freeman & Griffiths, on land subdivided from the grounds of Orrong mansion.

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

- The original external form, materials and detailing.
- The high level of external intactness.
- The domestic garden setting.
- The legibility of the original form from the public realm

Post war additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The house at 4 Grant Avenue, Toorak is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, the house is significant as a fine and highly regarded Regency influenced design from the interwar period (Criterion D). It is perhaps the most celebrated example of the contemporary revivalist work of the distinguished architects Yuncken Freeman & Griffiths.

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. The building should retain its current A2 grading.



Figure 2 Recommended extent of heritage overlay 4 Grant Avenue, Toorak.