**HERITAGE CITATION REPORT**

**Name**  
GOWRIE COURT

**Address**  
716 ORRONG ROAD, TOORAK

**Significance Level**  
A2

**Place Type**  
Flat

**Citation Date**  
2013

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**Recommended Heritage Protection**  
VHR - HI - PS Yes

**Designer / Architect**  
Hamilton, RB

**Architectural Style**  
Interwar Period (c.1919-c.1940)  
Old English

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**History and Historical Context**

**Thematic context**  
This place is associated with the following themes identified by the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (2006; Update 1, 2009):

8. *Building suburbs*

8.6 Developing higher density living; 8.6.2 Developing apartment living; 8.6.3 Architect-designed apartments

**Developing apartment living**
The building of apartments or residential flats began in Melbourne in the first decades of the twentieth century and gathered momentum after World War I. The war affected patterns of living and social life within Australia and the population boom that followed led to a shortage of housing. Terrace houses were becoming increasingly unpopular, few houses had been built during the war and the building of flats was seen as one solution to the problem.

A particular impact of WWI upon what is now the City of Stonnington was the difficulty of retaining domestic staff, which meant that many of the older mansions in suburbs such as Toorak and Malvern could no longer be maintained as workable houses (Sawyer, 1982:33). Financial considerations were also an imperative. Wilde (1999:62) cites an article from the 18 October 1919 edition of the Prahran Telegraph:

*It was held to be no longer necessary to labour with a house and all the domestic drudgery that entailed when by borrowing Continental ideas, people who could afford it could live in flats. Land has become so valuable the villa of the Victorian days, in a crowded thoroughfare, no longer shows anything like an adequate return of interest on the land's present capital value. It is more profitable to pull the house erected thereon down, and to erect flats.*

In the early twentieth century the municipalities of Prahran and Malvern therefore possessed many sites ripe for flat development. Generally speaking, they were near to public transport and shops, in an area of 'character or atmosphere' and preferably enjoying views. Public transport, in particular, was viewed as crucial to the success of a development and this caused flat developers to pay particular attention to the 'well established boulevards of St Kilda Road and Dandenong Road' (Sawyer, 1982:36)

*The conquering flat - 1925-45*

By the late 1920s there was a boom in flat building as the last of the remaining big estates began to succumb to what Wilde (1999:40) describes as 'the combined pressures of probate, depression and profit'. For example, after the subdivision of the Trawalla Estate in Toorak four blocks of flats were built in the period from 1931 to 1934.

The extent of flat development during the inter-War period is demonstrated by the population growth in Toorak Ward of Prahran Council; between 1920 and 1940 the population of Prahran municipality increased by 12.5% and over three-quarters of that was in Toorak where the population nearly doubled. By 1934-35 there were 570 flats in Toorak ward, as many as in South Yarra and Windsor Wards combined. This growth continued until the late 1930s and by the outbreak of WWII there were almost as many flats in Toorak ward as houses (Wilde, 1999:64-68).

However, the boom in flat building eventually led to resident protests about flats destroying the character of South Yarra and Toorak and so in 1933 Prahran Council passed a by-law that placed controls over site coverage and building height, and construction standards in certain areas. Some new housing estates also introduced covenants prohibiting flat development.

While this slowed the rate of flat development - according to one article the number of approvals dropped by half in a single year - it did not stop it and approvals continued to increase year by year in the late 1930s (The Argus, 14 November 1934).

The most lasting impact was in the design of flats, which from 1933 until the post-war era were limited to two storeys in height and set within generous gardens. The effect of this change can be seen in the contrast in scale between the 'Trawalla Court' (built in 1931) rising to four storeys and covering most of its site and nearby 'Grange Lynne' (1933), two storeys with garden setbacks to both frontages.

*Mansion flats and maisonettes*

The design and layout of flats varied markedly due to factors such as changing social attitudes, location, overseas influences and the attitudes of local councils to flat development (Sawyer, 1982:60). Residential flats in Toorak and South Yarra were considered to be superior to those in St Kilda or South Melbourne flats and a defining characteristic of
flat development in the study area is the large number of what (Sawyer, 1982:60) describes as 'Luxury' flats:

'Luxury' or 'Mansion' flats (Often referred to by name - e.g., 'Fawkner Mansions', 'Tsoshaan Mansions;') were among
the earliest flat types in the study area and became fashionable for the wealthy in Toorak and South Yarra as a way of
living in a prestigious suburb without the bother of a large house and garden or large numbers of servants. The first
'Luxury' flats were large single-level flats in buildings designed to emulate large houses or mansions and a distinguishing
feature of was usually the inclusion of a 'maid's' or 'staff' room, which remained a feature at least until World War II.
For example, the four flats in 'Hillingdon' (1918) each contained a small maid's room and they were still included in
'Denby Dale' designed by Robert Hamilton over 20 years later.

By the 1930s the maisonette - that is, a large flat over two levels - was emerging as the 'Luxury' flat of choice for many
well-heeled residents. The attraction of maisonettes was due to them being perceived 'complete houses in miniature'. An
article in the Australian Home Beautiful noted:

That, however, does not mean that the rooms are small or pokily arranged. On the contrary, the 'maisonette' is
remarkable for its feeling of spacious seclusion - achieved by the elimination of superfluous walls and passageways.
(Australian Home Beautiful, 2 October 1933)

While 'Luxury' flats were designed by a number of architects in the study area, Robert B. Hamilton was the most prolific
designer of flats for the wealthy residents of Toorak and South Yarra. Throughout the 1930s Hamilton would design at
least 11 flat developments in Toorak and South Yarra. Most of them, such as 'Denby Dale' mentioned above, fit within
the category of 'Luxury' flats. He also contributed to several articles on the subject.

Architect-designed apartments
The strong culture of patronage between architects and their often wealthy clients, as described in section 8.4 of the
Stonnington Thematic Environmental History, also applied to the design and construction of residential flats. Employing
a leading architect to design the building was also a strategy to counter criticism that flats were destroying the character
of suburbs such as Toorak and South Yarra.

Just as houses in the City of Stonnington dominated the pages of contemporary journals of the inter-war period (e.g.
Australian Home Beautiful) so too did residential flats and no other area in Melbourne has so many notable flats designed
by prominent architects in this period. According to Lewis (1992:1) the resultant architecture constitutes 'one of the high
points in domestic design in Victoria'.

Architects of flats included, for example, Walter Butler, who designed the 'Studley' flats (1918, 1922) and Walter Burley
Griffin, whose 'Langi' flats were built on the corner of Toorak and Lansell roads in 1926 (Tibbits, 1983:38). Other
leading domestic architects who were prominent in the study area during the inter-war period include Robert B.
Hamilton, Arthur W. Plaisted, J.H. Esmond Dorney and Marcus Martin. Hamilton, in particular, is regarded as the pre-
eminent designer of Old English style apartments in Melbourne (Cuffley, 2007).

Place history
In the late nineteenth century the area surrounding the intersection of Orrong Road and Toorak Road was developed with
villas and mansions on large allotments and by the early 1920s it was ripe for redevelopment. For example, the extensive
grounds surrounding 'Trawalla', which occupied most of the block on the west side of Orrong Road between Toorak
Road and Grange Road, were reduced by two subdivisions in 1922 and 1928 creating Trawalla Avenue and Lascelles
Avenue. The area developed rapidly following the subdivision with fine houses, many designed by leading architects,
built in the 1920s and 1930s. The conversion by 1927 of the cable tram along Toorak Road to electric traction provided a
further stimulus to development and by the early 1930s there was a boom in flat development.

One of the pre-eminent designers of 'Luxury' flats in the 1930s was Robert B. Hamilton (see below). What is now 716
Orrong Road was once occupied by a large house known as 'Kinross'. By 1941 it was replaced by a complex of 10 residences comprising nine flats and one maisonette designed by Robert B. Hamilton (SM). The maisonette was situated at the front of the block facing Orrong Road. One of the flats was a 'bachelor' flat, situated above the garages.

The property remained in single ownership until 1982. After the property was sold the new owners in 1983 refurbished the flats and converted them to strata title, which were then sold off individually. The interior works included the creation of a new upper level for the first floor flats within the roof space - this required the creation of several new dormer windows in the main roof. The other major external change was the demolition of four carports on the west side of the garages, which were replaced by a new hipped roof addition containing four garages. A new driveway was laid and other landscaping works undertaken. The works were carried out sensitively using sympathetic materials and detailing. The architect for the project was Joyce Nankivell & Associates Pty Ltd (APN, City of Prahran). In 1996 the balcony above the entrance to the maisonette (Unit 1) was enclosed (City of Stonnington).

Robert B. Hamilton

Robert B. Hamilton was the pre-eminent designer of 'Luxury' flats, in his trademark Old English style, in Toorak and South Yarra in the 1930s. After studying and working overseas, including a position as assistant to the Government architect in Bombay, India he returned to Australia and formed a partnership with Rodney Alsop in 1921 before establishing his own practice in 1925. According to Cuffley (2007:114) while Hamilton possessed a deep affection for romantic styles in architecture he had a 'practical and inventive talent and was capable of working in a range of styles and to any scale'.

Despite this Hamilton is remembered best for his Old English style flats and commercial buildings constructed in Toorak and South Yarra in the 1930s. Cuffley (2007:115-6) cites a 1934 article in Art in Australia:

To those who seek the particular type of English domestic architecture that suggests comfort and romance ... Mr Robert Hamilton's outlook should appeal. Every detail is a matter of consideration, carefully selected and hand-made whenever possible.

Cuffley concludes that 'whether it was a small holiday bungalow, a country cottage, a Toorak mansion or a block of flats, Robert Bell Hamilton approached each work with equal concern for its integrity and with a great deal of artistry' (Cuffley, 2007:117).

This is one of at least 11 residential flats designed by Hamilton during the inter-war period (please refer to comparative analysis).

Sources
Australian Property News (APN), November 1983, p.54 'Gowrie Court refurbishment now complete'  
City of Prahran, Planning Permit no. 82/352 issued 13 December 1982  
City of Stonnington, Planning Permit no.8977/96 issued 8 November 1996  
Context PL & Lesley Alves, Stonnington Thematic Environmental History (2006; Update 1, 2009)  
Cuffley, Peter, Australian house of the twenties and thirties, 2007  
Lewis, Nigel & Aitken, Richard, City of Malvern Heritage Study. Appendix 1: Architects of Malvern, 1992  
Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan No.932, dated 1905  
Sands & McDougall Directories (SM), 1938-41  
Sawyer, Terry, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne. The development of a building type to 1950', 1982  
Tibbits, George, Prahran Conservation Study: History of Prahran, 1983  
Wilde, Sally, The history of Prahran Volume II, 1925-1990, 1999
Physical Description

Gowrie Court flats, 716 Orrong Road, Toorak, is a large, two-storey block of flats and a smaller garage and mews block. The L-shaped block and the garage/mews are situated around a long courtyard, which is open to Orrong Road. There are small garden beds along the flats building with brick edging and paths, but the rest of the courtyard is paved. The front of the property is bounded by a low brick fence and a wide vehicular entry at the centre with tall piers. On either side of the entry are curved benches integrated into the wall. The detailing of the fence is exceptional, with ‘gabled’ coping to the low piers and the back rest of the benches, and a band of narrow clay tiles at the top of the fence and low piers, and six bands in all on the tall gate piers. The piers retain carriage lamps at the top, which may be early.

The flats building has a high hipped roof with brown Marseille tiles and exposed rafter ends. Chimneys are massive with corbelling to the top. There is a variety of two-storey hipped and gabled breakfronts along the elevations to the courtyard, which mark the entries to the different flats. The gables have flush verges, corbelled ends and intricate brickwork vents at the apex.

The clinker bricks have some overburnt texture to them, and there are also simple diamond patters created by protruding headers, suggesting diaper work.

Entries are varied, and include round-arched brick openings with wrought-iron gates, segmentally arched openings, and a parapeted entrance tower in the inner corner at the rear of the courtyard. The window types and shapes are even more varied, with six-over-six double-hung sashes - both rectangular and segmentally arched, some with two-over-two sidelights, two-storey canted bay windows with board-and-batten cladding to the spandrels, a canted oriel window with a bell-cast roof and conical brick corbelling below, and tiny triangular oriel windows resting on a triangular timber bracket. The many projecting bays and the multiplicity of door and window types and shapes lends a pleasant picturesque character to the flats and effectively breaks up the building’s bulk.

The mews building on the north side of the courtyard is much simpler in massing and details, but shares the same wall and roofing materials. A small mews flat is located above a row of garages. At the west end is a parapeted bay, providing entry to the flat. Windows to the flat are six-over-six double-hung sashes with louvered shutters, lending it a Georgian Revival appearance. All garage doors are modern.

There is a recent bank of garages adjoining the west end of the mews building, which is sympathetic in design, with a high hipped and tiled roof, and clinker brick walls. Built in 1983, it replaced four carports of unknown date. Dormer windows were added to the roof of the flats building at the same time to create an upper level, designed by Joyce Nankivell Architects. A number of them face the courtyard, but were sympathetically and unobtrusively designed, with only one clearly visible from the public domain (on the western slope of the roof). In 1996 a small first-floor terrace at the front of the site, the north-west corner, was enclosed. This involved the creation of a new hip above it, and creation of brick walls and multipane windows to enclose it, both intended to match the original features.

Comparative Analysis

Old English Revival, which included Tudor and Medieval influences, reflected Australia’s allegiances to England during the interwar period. The style is characterised by the use of red and clinker bricks, brick nogging and half-timbering, tiled roofs with steeply pitched gables, and highly modelled brick chimneys. Massing and details are picturesquely asymmetrical, as were window types, ranging from arches, standard casements and oriels, with multiple panes (often with diamond leadlights). It was popular both for single-family homes and flats.

Leading Melbourne architects designed residential buildings in this style particularly during the 1930s, and it became
common in well-heeled suburbs such as Toorak and South Yarra. By the late 1920s, architect Robert Hamilton was recognised as the foremost practitioner in this style, designing large and impeccably detailed houses and luxury flats. Other architects strongly associated with Old English/Tudor Revival in the 1930s include Philip Hudson, Eric Beedham, Arthur Plaisted and Cedric Ballantyne.

Flats in this style on the Stonnington Heritage Overlay include:

- Denby Dale, 422 Glenferrie Road, Kooyong (Individually significant in HO181). Designed by Hamilton, 1937-8.
- Stonehaven, 692 Orrong Road, Toorak (Individually significant in HO143). Designed by Hamilton, c.1932-35
- Kings Lynn, 280 Williams Road, Toorak (Individually significant in HO155). Designed by PJ O'Connor, c.1933.
- Park Manor, 284 Williams Road, Toorak (Individually significant in HO155). Attributed to Hamilton, 1935.

Gowrie Court is an example of Old English flats. It compares favourably with Park Manor. Both flats exhibit a somewhat simplified and modernised use of the Old English style, with vergeless gables, inventive brick gable vents, and conical corbelling to support oriel windows. They also both have brick entry gates incorporating curve benches, and gabled tops to the piers. The gates at Gowrie Court are more intricate in detail - with the bands of clay tiles - and grander in scale.

**Statement of Significance**

**What is significant?**
Gowrie Court, 716 Orrong Road, Toorak as designed by Robert B. Hamilton and constructed by 1940 is significant. The significant attributes are the Old English style form, materials and detailing of the flats as designed by Hamilton, the garden setting and the brick front fence with semi-circular entry, which is typical of Hamilton's work.

Later alterations and additions are not significant.

**How is it significant?**
Gowrie Court is of local historic, architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

**Why is it significant?**
Historically, Gowrie Court is significant as 'Luxury' residential flats designed by Robert B. Hamilton who was the leading designer of this type of flat development in Toorak and South Yarra during the inter-war period. The mix of flat types - in this case a maisonette, large family flats and one bachelor flat - is characteristic of Hamilton's developments of the late 1930s. The inclusion of the 'bachelor' flat is of note as a rare example of a 'Luxury' flat specifically for single people or couples. (Criteria A, D & H)

Architecturally and aesthetically, Gowrie Court is a highly accomplished example of inter-war flats designed in a simplified Old English style. Picturesque variety is created for the L-shaped flats building by skilful modulation of projecting hipped and gabled bays, rectangular, round and segmentally arched window and door openings, and bay and oriel windows. The brickwork is of high quality, and the corbelled base to an oriel window is of particular note. In addition, the finely detailed front fence and curve benches contribute to its aesthetic significance. Gowrie Court demonstrates the skill of Robert Hamilton, Victoria's foremost practitioner of the inter-war Old English style. (Criteria E, F & H)
## Recommendations 2013

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>External Paint Controls</td>
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<td>Internal Alteration Controls</td>
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<td>Tree Controls</td>
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### Other 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 with HO schedule controls as listed above.

This information is provided for guidance only and does not supersede official documents, particularly the planning scheme. Planning controls should be verified by checking the relevant municipal planning scheme.