INTRODUCTION

The name ‘Toorak’ is now synonymous with wealth, prestige and first class residential real estate. This association was equally relevant one hundred and fifty years ago when James Jackson built his mansion on 148 acres of well-wooded land, and named it ‘Toorak House’. ‘Toorak House’ was not only the grandest mansion in the colony, but also became the vice-regal residence from 1854. The name ‘Toorak’, an Aboriginal word meaning ‘reedy swamp’ or ‘duckweed’ (originating from the amount of this weed found floating on the marshy flats between Toorak Road and the river), was an unusual choice for a prestigious house which in turn gave its name to a prestigious suburb. However the original meaning of the word has been forgotten, and today’s perception of Toorak is the result of one hundred and fifty years of European settlement.

In 1850 three miles of open country separated Jackson’s house from the town of Melbourne. Since that time generations of men and women have converted Toorak’s wooded acres into a suburb of grand homes and comfortable villas, tree-lined streets and leafy gardens. The ‘reedy swamp’ is now home to manicured sports grounds, exclusive private schools and one of Australia’s most prestigious tennis clubs.

Since Europeans sold the first bush blocks, the area which came to be known as Toorak has continued to attract those who can afford to purchase land in this highly desirable suburb. In examining the reasons for the district’s attraction, this thesis traces the development of the suburb from the first Crown land sales in 1840, when the newly-rich joined with the old to establish a social pattern that has continued to the present day. The following chapters show how Toorak’s residents have influenced the

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1 O’Callaghan, Thomas, Names of Victorian Railways, Victorian Railways, (Melbourne 1918), p.91.
development of the suburb and left an important legacy in its built heritage. Many have also played a significant role in the political, business and social development of Victoria. At the same time, certain themes inherent to the suburb and its inhabitants link the different chapters. These issues include the influence of Western District wealth, the impact of gold and rise of the ‘nouveaux riches’, social and leisure activities of the upper classes and changes in architectural styles.

The suburb of Toorak is located approximately five kilometres south east of Melbourne and forms part of the City of Stonnington. Toorak includes the area bounded by Glenferrie Road on the east, the Yarra River and Gardiners Creek on the north, Williams Road on the west and Malvern Road on the south. Prior to municipal amalgamation in 1994, Toorak was divided at Kooyong Road between the City of Prahran and the City of Malvern. Kooyong Road, a government road first surveyed in 1837, was first known as Macarthur Road. Sometime prior to 1858, Prahran named the road Boundary Road. The section of Toorak east of Kooyong Road, which includes four Crown allotments, will be taken as a case study and forms the focus of this thesis.

The suburb began its climb to ‘fashionable pre-eminence’ from the first land sales in 1840. It is from this period that the development of Toorak and the changes to the built environment will be traced. It is not the intention of this thesis to explore Aboriginal history as others have done. This thesis will show how the present day landscape and urban character of one of Australia’s most affluent suburbs has evolved since the land was first sold by Europeans.

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3 Refer map 1.
6 See Gary Presland, The Land of the Kulin: Discovering the Lost Landscape and the First People of Port Phillip (Melbourne 1985) and Presland’s second edition, Aboriginal Melbourne: The Lost Land of the Kulin People, (Melbourne 1994).
The century and a half of development has resulted in an area of outstanding heritage value, however this built heritage is now being threatened by development, which is seen by many residents as inappropriate. Grand homes are being demolished, leafy gardens are being destroyed and Toorak’s character is changing. Stonnington Council is proposing to introduce heritage controls and it is now a matter of contention whether residents will agree to these controls. The proposed controls will focus on the section of Toorak east of Kooyong Road, formerly part of the City of Malvern. It is this area that forms the subject of this thesis.

The study is presented in seven chapters. The four Crown allotments, divided as they are by main roads, will each be examined chronologically. Chapter one provides a brief overview of the area from pre-settlement to the first sales of Crown land. These early land sales set the pattern for development. Chapters two to four examine this development, from the gold years of the 1850s to the turn of the century and Federation. Chapter two will look at Crown allotments 19 and 20, located north of Toorak Road, and Chapters three and four will examine lots 25 and 26, south of Toorak Road. Throughout the twentieth century, subsequent subdivisions formed the street pattern. These subdivisions and the changes to the built environment will be explored in Chapters five and six. The present day landscape is now under threat from development, which has the potential to destroy the distinctive character of the area. The final chapter will examine the on-going debate between development and heritage protection.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive reference document, which can then be adapted to form part of a heritage study. The emphasis will be on the development of a section of Toorak, an area not previously studied in any detail. The ‘City of Malvern Heritage Study’
1992, identifies Toorak as an area of heritage significance. Yet, Malvern’s two published histories; Cooper’s History of Malvern, 1935 and Strahan’s Private and Public Memory, 1989, provide only passing reference to this part of Malvern. On the other hand, the Toorak area west of Kooyong Road, being part of the former City of Prahran has been the subject of several histories, including Malone’s manuscripts, Paxton’s illustrated publication and a number of heritage studies. Robb’s Early Toorak and District, provides a selective pictorial record of the suburb, before 1930.

To determine the cultural history and development of the suburb, municipal records, land sale registers and subdivision plans provide the primary source material. Manuscripts, journals and newspapers provide the social framework, and published histories place Toorak within the context of Melbourne’s development. Location maps will guide the reader and a fold out map will be found at the end of each chapter.

The study begins almost two hundred years ago.

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7 Nigel Lewis Richard Aitken Pty. Ltd. in association with the Malvern Historical Society Inc. ‘City of Malvern Heritage Study’, prepared for the City of Malvern, 1992, MA.
8 John Butler Cooper, The History of Malvern: From its First Settlement to a City, (Melbourne, 1935); Lynne Strahan, Private and Public Memory: The History of Malvern, (Melbourne 1989).
10 E.M Robb, Early Toorak and District, (Melbourne 1934).