

## 546 Orrong Road, Armadale Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 546 Orrong Road, Armadale.

### 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*

After the land boom of the 1880s and subsequent economic crash of the 1890s, an increasing number of mansions in the affluent suburbs of Toorak, Armadale and Malvern were converted to flats or rooming houses (or demolished entirely) and their large gardens subdivided into smaller suburban house lots. The subdivision of the old mansion estates 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, in many cases new estates and streets bore the name of the old properties, while the original mansions were sometimes retained within a reduced garden.

#### *Creating Australia's most 'designed' suburb*

The affluent suburbs of Stonnington are notable for the strong culture of patronage between architects (or designer-builders) and their often wealthy clients that has existed from the earliest times of settlement. Walter Butler, for example, was known as the 'society architect' for his long list of well-heeled clients. This has resulted in a much higher than average ratio of architect-designed buildings. The consequence of this is one of the most extraordinary collections of residential architecture in Australia, which provides an important record that illustrates the development of almost all major architectural styles and movements, since mid-nineteenth century through to the present day. While the architect or designer of the house at 546 Orrong Road has not been identified it nonetheless contributes to Stonnington's rich legacy of domestic architecture as a particularly fine and thoroughgoing example of the Spanish Mission style.

### Place History

The site at 546 Orrong Road originally formed part of the Elgin mansion estate. Elgin was designed by architect William Salway and built in 1883-1884 for David M Barry.<sup>1</sup> The Elgin Estate was subdivided in February 1927, creating 16 new residential lots with frontages to Orrong Road, Elgin Avenue and Hampden Road.<sup>2</sup> The mansion was retained on lot 12 of the estate and still stands (at 21 Elgin Avenue).



Figure 2 A c1885 painting, thought to be of the view from verandah of the Elgin mansion. The driveway and entrance gates in the left foreground may correspond to the location of present day 546 Orrong Road. Source: Stonnington Local History Collection.

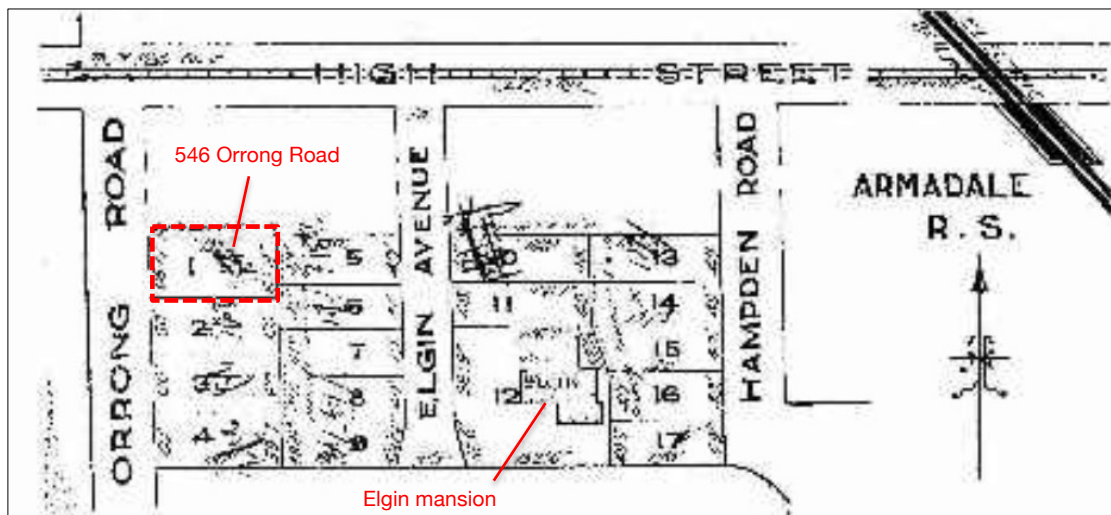


Figure 3 A 1927 plan of subdivision for the Elgin Estate. Note Lot 1 of the Estate is present day 546 Orrong Road. Source: Stonnington Local History Collection.

<sup>1</sup> Miles Lewis Melbourne Mansion Database Record No. 1698.

<sup>2</sup> Stonnington Local History catalogue PH11332.

The site at 546 Orrong Road is first recorded in the City of Prahran rate books in the period 1928-1929 under the address 34 Orrong Road. Thomas M Burke is listed as the occupant and owner of a six room house on the site with a net annual value of £200.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Myles Burke was the son of Thomas Michael Burke (1870-1949) a prominent property developer, real estate agent, philanthropist and racehorse owner, who resided in the Redcourt mansion, also on Orrong Road.

An MMBW plan of drainage was prepared for the house on 25 November 1927. The owner is listed as Thomas M Burke, but the agent is not named (noting that the agent was often the architect).<sup>4</sup> The plan shows the footprint of the house largely as it exists today, including the garage in the south east corner of the property. The MMBW plan indicates that the plumbing work was finished by 13 March 1928, this presumably meaning that the house was completed, or at least close to completion, by this time. Around 197-74 the street number was changed from 34 to 546 Orrong Road.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Myles Burke resided there until his death in December 1974.<sup>6</sup>

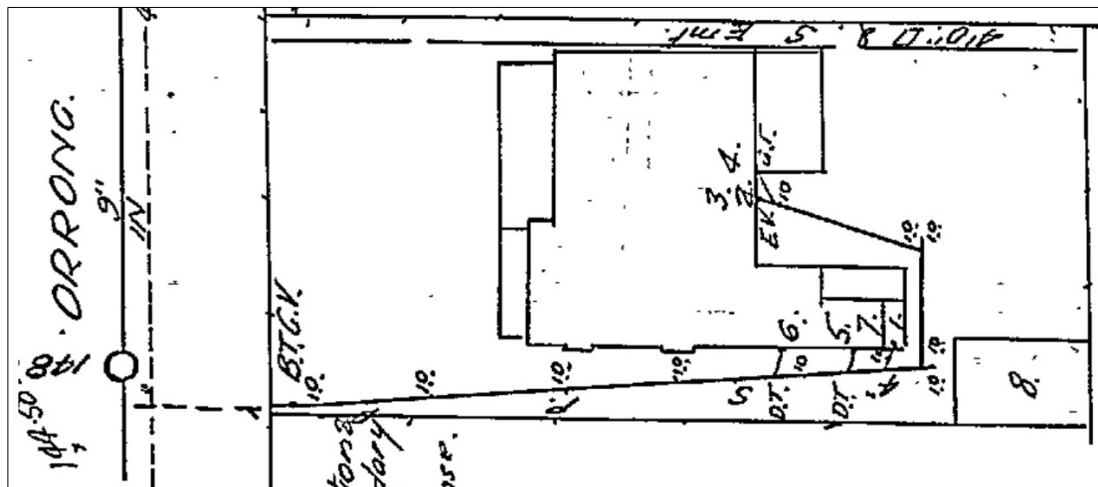


Figure 4 A 1927 MMBW plan of drainage for 546 Orrong Road. Source: South East Water.



Figure 5 Recent aerial photograph of 546 Orrong Road. Source: Google maps.

<sup>3</sup> City of Prahran Rate Books 1928-29, Windsor Ward, No in Rate 11353.

<sup>4</sup> MMBW Drainage Plan No. 166354, South East Water.

<sup>5</sup> Sands and McDougall Directories.

<sup>6</sup> *The Age*, 1 January 1975, p.15.

## **Description**

The house at 546 Orrong Road is single-storey interwar Spanish Mission style building. It has a generous garden setting with a low rendered brick and steel pipe front fence and a concrete paved driveway (both presumably original). The driveway leads to an original garage with Spanish Mission style detailing to match the house.

The house has rendered walls, resting on a red brick plinth, and a hipped Cordova tiled roof punctuated by tall rendered chimneys. The chimneys have decorative ceramic tile panels at the top and tiled gablets at the base of the shafts. The facade is asymmetrical with a triple arched loggia flanked by a stylised Baroque parapet. The façade also features a pair of timber framed French doors surmounted by arched ceramic tile panels and a Cordova tiled awning with decorative wrought iron brackets. The loggia has twisted 'barley sugar' columns with wrought iron railings and tile coping to the parapet. The front door and its arched fanlight, and the double hung sash windows to the façade, all have notably intricate leadlight glazing.

## **Comparative Analysis**

During the early interwar years a strong interest in Mediterranean and Spanish Mission architecture developed alongside a revival of neo-Georgian and Colonial idioms. The Mediterranean and Spanish Mission idioms are closely related, although the former is often perceived to be a more sophisticated 'up market' version of the latter. The Mediterranean expression typically avoids the more obviously Mission features of the Spanish Mission in favour of a subtle blend of Georgian and Mediterranean elements.

The rise of the Mediterranean and Spanish revival idioms gained impetus from two major sources - the influence of American journals advertising their interest in the Mediterranean and the Californian Spanish Colonial Revival, and the example set by those Melbourne architects and educators who, either through academic publications on the vernacular idioms of the different Mediterranean regions or through travel itself, realised the suitability of such idioms for coping with the light and climates of the major Australian suburban centres. The underlying theme of all contemporary writings on the style is its potential as the basis for the creation of a national style, climatically congenial and appropriately modern. The popularity of Spanish Mission inspired architecture was also boosted by the example of Hollywood movie stars who favoured the style for their luxurious Beverly Hills mansions.

By the mid-1920s the various Mediterranean/Spanish idioms had taken a vigorous hold on the domestic work of many of the more prominent architects in Melbourne. Beside the houses of Cedric Ballantyne, Irwin & Stevenson, Gawler & Drummond and Rodney Alsop one finds examples by Marcus Martin, Arthur Plaisted, Barlow & Hawkins and F L & R Klingender. It is apparent from contemporary advertisements of speculative building companies that the mode had spread to domestic projects by the late 1920s in which architects were to have little or no direct involvement. Such examples saw Spanish detailing such as parged stucco and arched porches merged with what was basically Californian bungalow form. Other examples took a more thorough approach to the style, with multi-angular Cordova tiled hipped roofs, above a triple arched porch with twisted 'barley sugar' columns. The walls of such buildings commonly had roughcast or rough trowelled render to provide a pattern or texture. Baroque parapets, ceramic tiles and ornamental wrought iron were also common on the facade.

Houses in the Mediterranean and Spanish revival idioms are well represented in Stonnington. Key examples with individual heritage overlay controls include architect Marcus Martin's own residence of 1926 at 6 Glyndebourne Avenue, Toorak (HO264); Rodney Alsop's residence 'Winster' at 17 Tintern Avenue, Toorak (HO518); 22 Hopetoun Road, Toorak, designed in 1932 by Blackett & Foster (HO497); and the large double-storey houses at 762 Orrong Road (by architects Irwin & Stephenson, HO90) and 48 Grange Road (by A & K Henderson, HO490). These examples tend towards the more restrained or academic approach to the Mediterranean/Spanish style. The house at 546 Orrong Road is notable for adopting a much more thorough approach to the Spanish Mission style that carries Mission detailing across all facets of the design. In this respect the house at 546 Orrong Road stands apart from the standard suburban villas in the mode in Stonnington which typically demonstrate a more superficial applique of ornament to achieve the Spanish Mission look.

### **Thematic Context**

The house at 546 Orrong Road, Armadale, 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 – Creating Australia’s most ‘designed’ suburb’

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). The house also contributes to Stonnington’s rich legacy of domestic architecture (TEH 8.4 – Creating Australia’s most ‘designed’ suburb’).

### **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 single-storey interwar Spanish Mission style house at 546 Orrong Road was built in 1928 on a lot formed through the subdivision of the nineteenth century Elgin mansion estate.

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 concrete driveway and original garage.
- The front fence and pedestrian and driveway gates.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden).

#### *How is it significant?*

The house at 546 Orrong Road, Armadale is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

#### *Why is it significant?*

The house is architecturally significant as a finely designed, thoroughly detailed and virtually intact example the interwar Spanish Mission style (Criterion D).

### **Recommendations**

Recommended for inclusion on the Heritage Overlay Schedule to Stonnington Planning Scheme to the extent of land defined as Lot 1 TP740684 and Lot 2 TP740684 (refer plan below). External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended.

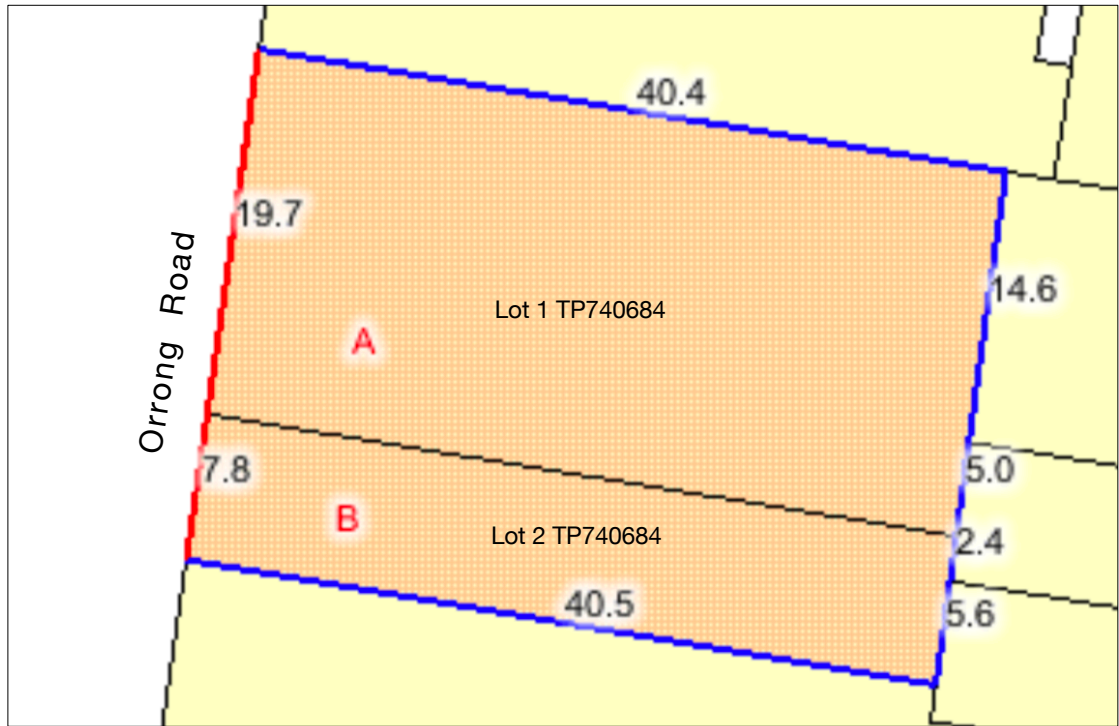


Figure 6 Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 546 Orrong Road, Armadale.