![gjm heritage logo]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wombalana – 704 Toorak Road, Malvern (HO343)

Figure 1. 704 Toorak Road, Malvern (GJM Heritage, July 2020).

DATE: June 2021

Place type: House	Architect: Not known
Construction Date: 1910	Builder: Not known

Historical Context Summary

The City of Stonnington stands on the Traditional Lands of the Woi wurrung and Boon Wurrung Peoples of the East Kulin Nations. Archaeologists believe that Aboriginal People have been in Victoria for more than 30,000 years. Throughout this long history their relationship with the landscape (where and how they live) has changed according to factors such as climate change, resource availability, and cultural change (Context 2006:10).

The first European settler in the Malvern district was John Gardiner in 1835, a pastoralist from New South Wales who was one of the first overlanders to Port Phillip. He pastured his stock near the junction of Gardiner's Creek and the Yarra River and is the namesake of Gardiner's Creek, Gardiner's Creek Road (now Toorak Road) and both the locality and the Shire of Gardiner (before they were re-named Malvern). The first recorded use of the name Malvern was in January 1854, when barrister Charles B. G. Skinner named his hotel on the corner of Malvern and Glenferrie roads the 'Malvern Hill' after a district in England. The name for the Shire of Malvern was derived from Malvern Hill Estate, a private subdivision in the area dating to 1856 (City of Stonnington [CoS]; Context 2006:34).

The first land sales in the area were held in 1854 and most original Crown grantees subdivided their allotments for resale (Context 2006:41; 2009:4). Gardiner's Road District was proclaimed in 1856 before Gardiner Shire was formed in 1871, which was renamed Malvern Shire in 1878 (CoS). The municipal boundary comprised the current localities of Malvern (previously Gardiner), Malvern East, Glen Iris (south of Gardiners Creek), Kooyong, Armadale (east of Kooyong Road), Toorak (east of Kooyong Road) and Chadstone (west of Warrigal Road). Early directories listed Malvern and Malvern East as the one locality, until 1910.

The former Malvern Shire saw slow population growth to 1881, by which time it totalled just under 2,000 people (Victorian Places). In 1879, the Oakleigh Railway Line was opened along the southern extent of the municipality, through Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and Hawksburn to join the existing line at South Yarra. The arrival of the Oakleigh railway coincided with the start of the land boom, which resulted in considerable urban growth. In the 1880s the district comprised substantial residences on large allotments, as well as pastoral and agricultural holdings (including market gardens and orchards) and commercial development (Context 2006:41, 65-6). During the 1880s boom period, the municipality saw a dramatic increase in population, quadrupling to approximately 8,000 by 1891, and steadily increasing to 10,000 by 1901 (Victorian Places). In the 1890s a number of timber houses were built in Malvern as an economy measure, but some residents complained that wooden houses would degenerate into slums. Concern about this development led to a slum abolition movement and subsequently, c1912, Malvern Council began to declare brick areas, where timber houses were not permitted. By 1916 the Council had also fixed a minimum area for individual housing allotments at 6000 square feet, with minimum frontages of fifty feet (Context 2006:128).

The railway line along the northern extent of the municipality was established in 1890 through the Glen Iris Valley from Burnley. Stations were established at Heyington, Kooyong, Tooronga, Gardiner, Glen Iris and Darling, however, expected residential development in their vicinity stalled during the 1890s following the economic collapse (Context 2006:66). The 1893 *Australian Handbook* (as cited in Victorian Places) described Malvern as 'an elevated residential suburb', served by a line of omnibuses from Prahran, with many leading merchants and professional men living in the area in pleasantly situated 'dwellings of a superior class'. The entry noted that a number of notable mansions had been erected by this date, and that the market gardens and orchards were 'steadily being reduced, and cut up into building allotments, on which [were] being erected

many handsome villas and business establishments' (Victorian Places). The municipality saw rapid development and urbanisation from 1900 and it was declared a Borough and then a Town in 1901. In 1911 the municipality was declared a City, with a residential population of 16,000 (Context 2006:86; Victorian Places).

The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust was established in 1908, with electric tramlines opening along High Street in 1910-14, Glenferrie Road in 1910-13, to the south along Wattletree Road in 1910-12, and Malvern Road in 1915. The arrival of the tramlines further drove the development of commercial centres in the immediate vicinity and residential development beyond. New train stations were built at Armadale, Hawksburn, Malvern and Toorak between 1908 and 1918, and at Malvern East in 1929 (Context 2006:70-2, 113; Victorian Places).

Residential development during the early twentieth century generally occurred on newly subdivided estates or on nineteenth century subdivisions that had remained partly or wholly undeveloped during the 1890s depression (Context 2009:5). In 1912 it was reported that 800 houses a year were being built in the (by then) City of Malvern, which boasted 'a progress unprecedented by any other suburb' (Context 2009:128). In the decade between 1911 and 1921 the population in the City of Malvern doubled, from 16,000 to 32,000 residents, and then increased steadily to 43,000 by 1933 (Victorian Places). This population growth saw development spread to the Glen Iris Valley and the outer reaches of the City, in Malvern East. The housing stock in this eastern part of the municipality was more characteristically uniform and unadorned in comparison to housing in Malvern. Kooyong's development was substantially completed by the end of the 1920s (Context 2006:128, 131).

By 1946 the Australian Blue Book (as cited in Victorian Places) stated that Malvern was one of the 'leading residential suburbs of the Metropolis'. It comprised the substantial homes of many of Melbourne's leading citizens, in what was termed 'The Garden City' due to the number of parks and public gardens. Development in the City of Malvern steadied from the 1930s, with the population averaging 45,000 until the 1990s (Victorian Places). The City of Malvern amalgamated with the City of Prahran in 1994, to form the City of Stonnington.

Place History Summary

Wombalana at 704 Toorak Road, Malvern was built in 1910 on the south side of Toorak Road, east of Glenferrie Road. Walter H Lewis owned a substantial allotment in this location, with a frontage of 225 ft (68.8 m), and in 1910 his daughter, Doris Luxton, acquired the western two thirds of his property (Malvern Rate Books). By the following year, Luxton had sold a third of her land and the 1910-11 rate books recorded an eight-roomed timber house 'in course of erection' on her retained allotment (the subject site) (Malvern Rate Books).[1] Doris and her husband Harold Luxton moved to their new house in Toorak Road in February 1911 (*Prahran Telegraph*, 18 Feb 1911:7) after marrying at St George's Anglican Church, Malvern in 1909 (*Melbourne Punch*, 25 Nov 1909:32). Numerous references made to the house in the 1911-1914 period refer to the house as 'Wombalana' (*Age*, 24 Jun 1911:8; *Argus*, 3 Feb 1912:13; Rate Book 1913-14). Harold served in World War I and after his return in 1917, the Luxton's sold the property.

Doris's father Walter H Lewis was Mayor of Malvern in 1904-05 (*Melbourne Punch*, 25 Nov 1909:32) and Harold Luxton was the son of MLC Hon Thomas Luxton. Harold stood for the Melbourne City Council in 1919

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[1] Lewis (1992:365) noted that architect W A M Blackett was recorded as the agent on MMBW Drainage Plan No. 15260 for the property, but comments that the plan appears to have coincided with later works and not the original construction of the house. No evidence was found confirming W A M Blackett as the architect of the house.

and in 1928 became the youngest Lord Mayor of Melbourne. He was subsequently knighted in 1932 (Dunstan 1986).

Wombalana was numbered 42 Toorak Road in 1920 and in 1934-35 was renumbered 704-06 Toorak Road (Malvern Rate Books).

Description Summary

The following description includes detail contained within 'City of Malvern Heritage Study', Lewis & Aitken, 1992.

Wombalana is situated on a large allotment on the south side of Toorak Road, to the east of Glenferrie Road. The house is located at the rear boundary of the property and has a substantial front garden and high front fence.

Wombalana is a single-storey bungalow style house with timber walls and a slate-clad roof. The front elevation is dominated by a wide gable, the upper section of which is clad in shingles, with eaves supported by strut-like bracket supports. The top apex of the gable has a slim horizontal band of double louvres. The jettied gable is supported on projecting ceiling joists. The roof is punctuated by tall roughcast rendered chimneys within elevated cappings. A deep recessed porch is located under the front gable with rectangular timber lattice frieze and infill between double timber posts. A triple set of double hung windows with multi-paned upper sashes is also evident on the front elevation.

Key Features:

- Federation bungalow style house which is elevated well above ground level

- Timber walls

- Slate-clad roof

- Simple overall massing with single broad longitudinal gable roof and secondary gables to either side

- Jettied gables with wall-hung shingle-clad apexes of bell-cast form, supported on projecting ceiling joists

- Narrow band of double louvres in front gable end

- Deep eaves and gable end overhangs, with exaggerated strut-like bracket supports

- Exposed rafter ends

- Tall rough cast rendered chimneys with elevated cappings

- Deep recessed porch under the front gable with rectangular timber lattice frieze and infill between double timber posts

- Triple set of double hung windows with multi-paned upper sashes to front elevation

- Rear hipped-roof timber wing with similar detailing, may have been an early addition to the house.

Intactness/Integrity

The house remains highly intact to its period of construction and retains a high degree of integrity. A rear hipped-roof timber wing with similar detailing, may have been an early addition to the house.
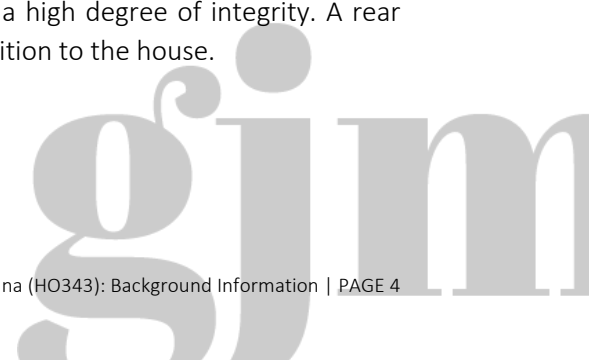
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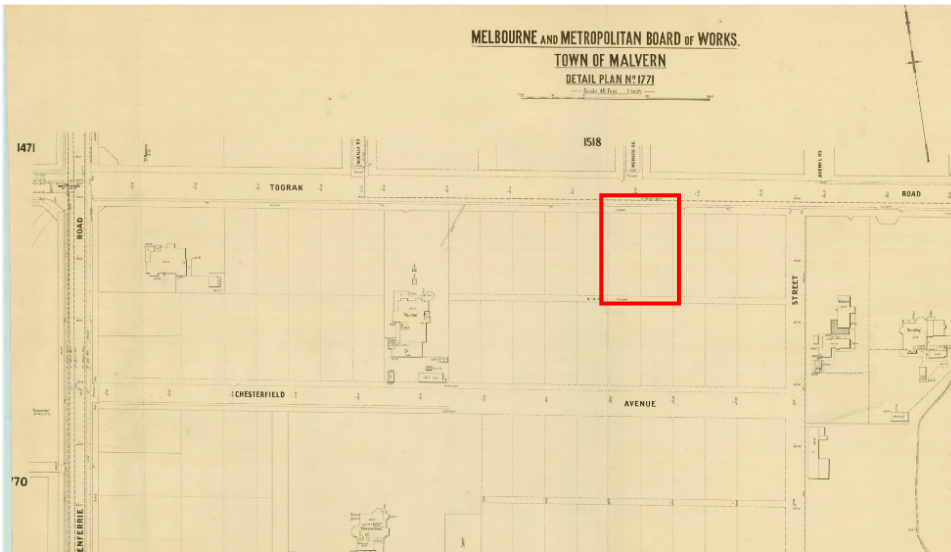
Historic Images and Plans

Figure 2. Detail of MMBW Plan No 1771, Malvern, dated 1907. Red outline shows the vacant subject site (Source: SLV).

Figure 3. House from the north-east in 1992; the bay on the right fronts Toorak Road (Source: N Lewis 1992, via SHC MP13063)