

‘Wurrong’

93 Brunel Street, Malvern East

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), House

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

Locality history

The suburb of Malvern East occupies gently undulating country along the Gardiners Creek Valley. It is bordered by Tooronga Road on the west, Dandenong Road on the south, Gardiners Creek on the north and Chadstone Road on the east. This land was first taken up in the 1850s and 1860s for dairying, orchards and market gardening. The farmhouses that were built to take advantage of the rich land fronting Gardiners Creek, such as ‘Nirvana’ (1858, demolished) have virtually disappeared, although a rare brick farmhouse from the 1890s survives at 558 Waverley Road. While most of Malvern proper was subdivided for suburban allotments by the early 1900s, the area of Malvern East retained much of its rural character into the early twentieth century.

Malvern East is distinguished from Malvern mainly by having, broadly speaking, a slightly younger housing stock. Whereas Malvern was largely developed during the Victoria and Edwardian eras, Malvern East was subdivided for suburban housing from the 1880s, but developed most significantly from the early 1900s and through to the 1950s. Its character is largely Edwardian and interwar in style, with a scattering of older remnant Victorian homes. Many of the earlier Victorian-era mansion houses in the area were demolished with the subdivisions of the large estates that began in the 1880s. Few have survived to the present-day; ‘Coronal’ (1890) in Lewes Street is a rare exception. The early suburban subdivisions have in turn left some fine Victorian villas, such as 133 Manning Road.

Malvern East is almost entirely residential, with very little industry (the former Nirvana Dairy was a notable exception; demolished 2016). Shopping strips developed along Waverley Road and Darling Road as did smaller neighbourhood shops, for example on Chadstone Road near

Bowen Street. The ever-expanding shopping centre at Chadstone, which opened in the 1960s, now services the retail needs of the area.

Large areas of land were subdivided as interwar housing estates after World War I, notably the Villiers-Bretonneux War Service Homes Estate, designed in a tasteful layout with elements of the 'garden suburb', with plantation 'squares' and a conscious mix of house styles to avoid commonplace uniformity. At the eastern extremity of Malvern East, there are newer post-war subdivisions, such as The Rialto, comprising cream brick veneer homes.

Malvern Road, which became Waverley Road, followed the course of Gardiners Creek, which in the 1960s was contained in concrete. The construction of the new South-Eastern Freeway (now Monash Freeway) by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works in the early 1960s necessitated the large-scale compulsory acquisition of houses in Malvern East which led to local protests.

Place history

Brunel Street was formed in 1888 and the current house was built in 1891 for Leo H Bibby, whose occupation was manager/clerk (Foster n.d.). The house was brick and comprised 6 rooms. Bibby resided there until 1895 when it was purchased by Eleanor Wright of Toorak, who leased the house out to tenants. Occupants included John King (1897), Mrs F.A. Hitchcock (1898-1906), police constable Frank Anglin (1907-08) and Presbyterian Minister, Rev. John Nicol (1912-14) (Foster n.d.).

Thomas and Mary Agnes Wright owned and occupied 93 Brunel Street from around 1915 until the 1940s. The house was referred to in the rate books as 'Wurrong' in the 1930s and 1940s. Later owners have included Knight (1944), Dive (1946) and Chomley (1949). In 1959, 93 Brunel Street was sold to Gove for £4,800, and in 1974 the property was sold to Betheras (Foster n.d.).

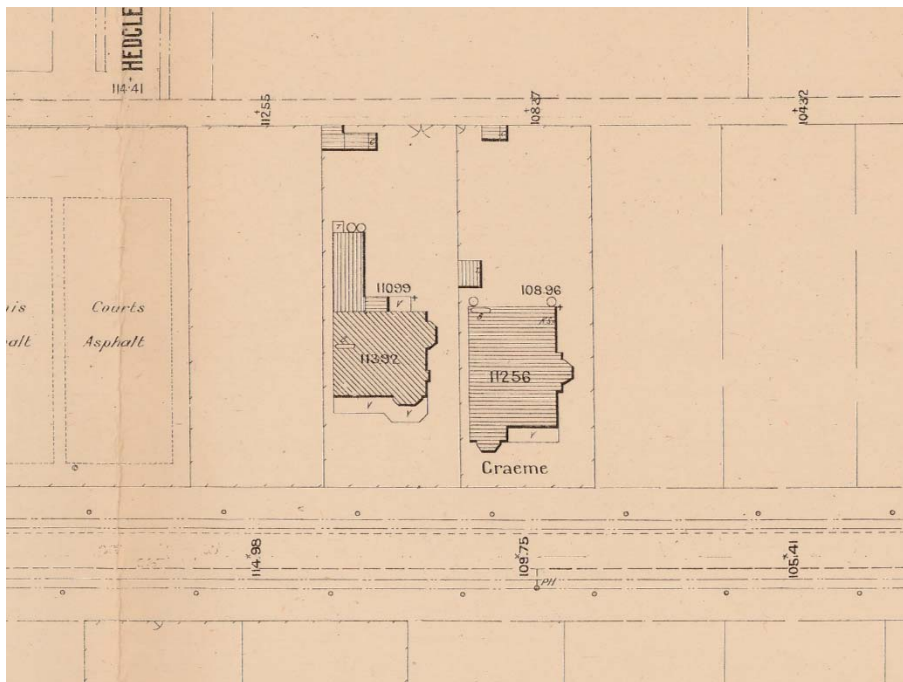


Figure 1. MMBW Detail plan no. 2504, dated 1917. 93 Brunel Street is to the left (source: SLV).

Sources

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Physical description

The residence known as 'Wurrong' at 93 Brunel Street is a single storey Victorian villa that occupies a deep allotment on the north side of Brunel Street mid-block between Watson Street and Darling Road in Malvern East. It is set back behind a generous front garden and a sympathetic reproduction timber picket fence.

Constructed in 1891 the house is an unusual variation of the single storey asymmetrical Italianate villa type which is distinguished by its bichrome brickwork and unusual detailing, including the use of the round arch for all windows and the deeply recessed entrance porch. The building has an M-profile hipped roof, clad in slate. It intersects with a steeply pitched front gable above a canted bay window. The bay window is parapeted and has a boldly moulded cornice. The gable has a simple scalloped timber bargeboard with a timber finial that illustrates the transition from Italianate to medieval influences.

The roof is dominated by the tall and imposing chimneys with heavy cement rendered cornices. There is a secondary canted projecting bay to the rear of the east elevation. The front verandah, as depicted in the MMBW plan dated 1917 which originally stretched across the entire façade, has been removed.

The bichrome brick patterning is highly contrasting. It is expressed by cream brick dressings against dark Hawthorn brick walls used to emphasise the rounded arch openings, the external building corners, and as a continuous band below the timber eaves brackets. The brackets are set between diamonds expressed in cream brick. The dressings to the parapet and window openings of the canted bay creates a striking pattern. Windows to the south (front) and east elevations are all rounded-arch double-hung sashes, and are paired to the west of the entrance porch. The porch is deeply recessed behind its own round arched opening. The timber front door is elaborate with fielded panels and a timber surround utilising glazed sidelights and

highlights. The highlight above the door contains an etched panel carrying the name 'WURRONG'. The porch retains its encaustic tiling and bluestone front steps.



Figure 2. Front elevation of 'Wurrong', 93 Brunel Street, Malvern East (source: Context 2016).



Figure 3. Detail of recurring round arch to all openings (source: Context 2016).



Figure 4. Detail of front entrance door (source: Context 2016).

The house has undergone a number of changes including the removal of the front verandah. A two-storey extension was constructed to the rear of the dwelling at an unknown date, with additional minor alterations undertaken in c2001. The rendered extension is mostly concealed from Brunel Street.

Comparative analysis

As discussed in the Stonnington Thematic Environmental History, section 8.2.2, the suburban house on a garden allotment was an aspiration of many middle-class Victorians:

Davison (1978:145) describes the Victorian cult of the home in the fresh air and tranquillity of the suburbs as a haven from the noise and dirt of the city - the ideal of rus in urbe (country in the city) which, through Victoria's prosperity and the growth of the public transport system, became possible for many working people. For most suburbanites this home was a single-storey detached house surrounded by its own garden. On a visit to Australia in the 1880s, Twopeny (1883:37) noted that this was the almost universal preference of Australians. During the boom of the 1880s many people found their ideal piece of rus in urbe in the Malvern municipality. Here streets of Victorian villas rapidly began to replace market gardens, especially in the vicinity of the railway lines.

The detached house was the typical Victorian house form in the middle-ring suburbs, in areas where the new tram and train lines facilitated travel and allowed lower density development. In this spacious suburban environment, they could be set in large gardens with side setbacks allowing for a return verandah on one or two sides. They were also built in inner suburban areas for better-off residents, but were usually restricted in form with a front verandah only and side walls near the boundaries.

The architectural expression of these small to medium sized houses ranges from quite simple to those lushly embellished on par with much grander houses. In keeping with the dominant style of the Victorian era, most of small to medium detached houses in Stonnington are Italianate in style. The simplest ones have a symmetrical façade with the front door in the centre. Many have added visual interest created by a projecting bay to one side of the façade, and a cast-iron verandah to the other, creating the classic asymmetrical Italianate suburban form.

The Italianate style had its origins in the landscape paintings of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain over a century earlier. These two French artists were enamoured with the landscapes and architecture of rural Italy, depicting it as a vision of Arcadia. Their efforts inspired a broader pursuit of 'the Picturesque' in architecture.

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the Italianate spread widely in Britain fuelled by the works of architects such as John Nash and Charles Barry and through designs promoted in pattern books such as Charles Parker's *Villa Rustica* (1832). In 1845, the style received Royal endorsement when Prince Albert, working with architect Thomas Cubitt, designed Osbourne on the Isle of Wight as a retreat for Queen Victoria and the Royal family. Osbourne with its plain stuccoed expression and tall balustraded tower would become the model for many large residences throughout the Empire including Government House in Melbourne.

The style, which emerged as the preferred expression for Melbourne's grandest mansions of the mid-century, was quickly adapted to suit more modest suburban villas and terraces. As Hubbard notes (in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, 2012:357):

Flexibility and adaptability were the secrets to the success of the Italianate style. It could range from the simplest of buildings to the grandest. It was not a precise style and could accommodate different levels of architectural sophistication. It could be formally symmetrical or informally asymmetrical. While towers were standard, they might be reduced to just a porch. The style was easy to copy and could be used by speculative builders buying stock items for decoration. Most importantly, the Italianate style used the vocabulary of classical architecture freely but sparingly, generally with relatively plain expanses of wall and hipped roofs with bracketed eaves.

The Italianate house is so common in the Melbourne area that this is the standard image people hold of the 'Victorian house'. Condensed to its key features, they would be a hipped roof with an M-profile (i.e., having a central valley to the rear half, which allows a low ridgeline), bracketed eaves, chimneys with a cornice at the top (a run cement-render moulding), and a timber or iron-framed verandah with cast-iron ornament to all but the grandest houses. Common extras included a faceted (canted) bay used to create an asymmetric composition (or occasionally used symmetrically), and windows that had a round or segmental arched opening, some of which were embellished with run cement-render mouldings or delicate hood moulds.

There were three general types of cladding for Italianate houses. The most modest were clad in timber weatherboards or blocked boards emulating expensive ashlar. The two most common types were finished in cement render or face brick. Rendered houses could obtain a high level of run and cast ornament at an affordable price, leading to some highly embellished examples. All, even the most modest, had ruled render with incised lines to emulate the more expensive stone construction. Face brickwork was also common, usually dark brown Hawthorn bricks with cream brick dressings (bichrome) from the late 1860s, and later in the century with red brick accents as well (polychrome). Some architects and designer-builders created bold patterns with the coloured bricks. As good building stone was not common in Victoria, very few houses were built of stone. Early examples were of bluestone, such as the grand 'Bishopscourt' in East Melbourne.

The development of the former City of Prahran and the western part of the former City of Malvern coincides with the emergence of the Italianate forms of expression in Victoria. Consequently, the City of Stonnington retains a disproportionate number of Melbourne's better examples of the mode. A number of these, typically the grandest and most elaborate mansions or those associated with Victoria's most notable families, have been added to the Victorian Heritage Register. These include: Toorak House, Greenwich House and Mandeville Hall, in Toorak; Stonnington in Malvern; and Malvern House in Glen Iris.

Examples of Italianate houses that are of individual significance in Stonnington's Heritage Overlay (both in individual HOs and HO precincts) can be divided into a number of groups according to the number of dwellings (attached or detached), their size, ornament and level of architectural sophistication.

Generally, 'Wurrong' can be compared to other small-to-medium sized Italianate villas in the municipality, of which there are a relatively high number that adopt the typical asymmetrical Italianate plan form. Examples include more modest houses set on suburban allotments, including: 59 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 22 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456), 71 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), and 50 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148). Those expressed with polychrome (or bichrome) brickwork include: 34 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 103 Kooyong Road, Armadale (in HO130), 14 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456), 69 Greville Street, Prahran (in HO456), 5 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (in HO131), and 48 Davis Avenue, South Yarra (in HO150).

In its scale and form, 'Wurrong' compares most closely with 103 Kooyong Road, Armadale which is also a polychrome brick house with a front gable, and a main hipped roof clad in slate. In this instance, though, the house does not have a canted bay window, but does retain its continuous verandah across the entire façade. The bichrome brickwork at 'Wurrong' is much livelier with bold cream-brick dressings to the unusual recurring round arch to all openings. It is less intact, having lost its front verandah.



Figure 5. 103 Kooyong Road, Armadale, individually significant in HO130 (source: Google Streetview).

The bichrome brick villa at 14 Donald Street, Prahran is a more modest example that shares a similar canted bay window. While it retains its ogee profile cast iron verandah, its brick dressings have been unsympathetically overpainted. The bichrome brick patterning is also very modest in design.



Figure 6. 14 Donald Street, Prahran, individually significant in HO456 (source: Google Streetview).

There are a number of examples on the HO that have undergone changes, particularly to their verandahs, including more modest houses in Windsor (all graded A2): 36 Gladstone Street (in HO134); 4-6 Frederick Street (in HO138), and 171 Dandenong Road whose façade has been extended after 1895 (in HO138). The villa, at 1257 High Street, Malvern (HO59) is missing its verandah entirely, although it is a grander example than ‘Wurrong’.

In conclusion, ‘Wurrong’ at 93 Brunel Street, Malvern East is an unusual example of one of the municipality’s collection of single-storey Italianate villas. While it is not known when the verandah was lost, ‘Wurrong’ continues to present as an unusual and otherwise intact Victorian villa to Brunel Street. It is distinguished by its boldly contrasting bichrome brickwork and unusual detailing including the use of the round arch for all windows and the deeply recessed entrance porch. The comparatively small number of Victorian houses in Malvern East further distinguishes the house.

Thematic context

This place illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, rev. 2009):

8.2.1 'Country in the city' - Suburban development in Malvern before WWI

Assessment against criteria

Assessment of this place was carried out in relation to the HERCON model criteria as set out in the VPP Practice Note ‘Applying the Heritage Overlay’ (2015).

