

‘The Willows’

**44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern**

Place type: Residential Building (private), Villa

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Italianate

**Locality history**

Malvern was originally named Gardiner after the early settler John Gardiner, but was renamed Malvern after the property ‘Malvern Hills Estate’, which had in turn been named for its perceived likeness to the Malvern Hills in Hertfordshire, England. This was pleasant, rolling country on the southern bank of the Gardiners Creek, or *Kooyong Koot*, which was its Aboriginal name. Many praised the picturesque character of the area in the early settlement period (Strahan 1989: 1-3). Journalist William Kelly wrote in 1858 of ‘the one-time undulating stretches of green bushland of Malvern’ (Art Portfolio Ltd 1911). Early settlers made use of a fresh water spring in High Street that inspired the naming of the Spring Gardens; in the 1880s this local water supply was encased in a rustic rockery and became an ornamental feature of the public gardens.

Like Prahran, Malvern was the name of a municipality as well as a suburb. The Shire of Malvern was established in 1876 from the earlier Gardiner Road District. In the 1870s the higher areas were taken up for gentlemen’s estates, while small farmers, market gardeners and orchardists occupied the lower land near the Creek.

The railway attracted new settlers to the area and land was subdivided at a great rate through the boom years of the 1880s and early 1890s. Large areas of open paddocks and market gardens were rapidly transformed into pleasantly sited homes and gardens. Malvern in the 1880s epitomised the ideal suburb, providing a pleasant refuge for the affluent middle class, away from the bustle and noise of the city.

From its foundation Malvern was regarded as solidly respectable. This was reflected by a consistency in good quality homes, ranging from Victorian to interwar styles. The famed Gascoigne and Waverley estates, developed from 1885, were some of the most celebrated subdivisions in the area. Housing was mostly detached and it was one of a group of new suburbs with a higher rate of home ownership compared to the older inner areas of Melbourne (Davison 1978: 181). Malvern was comfortably and solidly middle class. While there were several large mansions dating from the 1870s and 1880s, the suburb generally lacked the excessive wealth and flamboyance of Toorak. The north-west corner of Malvern, however, was comparable with Toorak in terms of elevation and grand homes. Here, on the east side of Glenferrie Road, John Wagner of Cobb & Co. erected the mansion 'Stonington' (1890). A short distance away was another mansion, 'Moorakyne' (1889). In 1901 'Stonington' became the official residence of the Governor of Victoria, after the newly appointed Governor-General took up residency in Melbourne's existing Government House in the Domain. This gave Malvern an added cachet of importance, and its residents valued proximity to wealth and influence.

Malvern was almost entirely residential, with major shopping strips established on Malvern Road and Glenferrie Road. There was barely any industry, though in 1879 there was a ropeworks and a tile factory (Whitworth 1879: 305). There was also a brickworks and clay pits near the corner of Elizabeth Street and Henderson Avenue. The population of Malvern was largely conservative and had a high rate of church attendance (McCalman 1995: 7).

Malvern's rapid rate of growth led to the Shire being replaced by the City of Malvern in 1911. The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust had been established in Malvern the year before. Large estates continued to be subdivided in the early 1900s, and many streets in Malvern are lined with Edwardian-era houses.

Several private schools in Malvern operated from large Victorian mansions, including Malvern Grammar School and Sacre Couer, as well as many smaller short-lived schools. Later private schools, including the Catholic secondary schools De La Salle and Kildara, also adapted Victorian residences for their schools.

### **Place history**

The house at 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern, was built in 1897 by local builder, Charles F. Wheatland. It was built following the subdivision of the Tooronga Railway Estate in 1890 (Figure 2), which was part of the development of Malvern from the 1880s as a fashionable and affluent middle-class suburb. The rate books for the Shire of Malvern record a six-roomed brick house here by 1897, occupied by Mrs Mary Wheatland (RB). Her relation, contractor Charles Wheatland, had been renting a workshop on Elizabeth Street the previous year, and is believed to be the builder of this house. Charles and his family occupied the house until at least 1931 (*Age* 12 October 1931). Later owners were Barker (in 1935) and Boston (1940-1973) (RB).

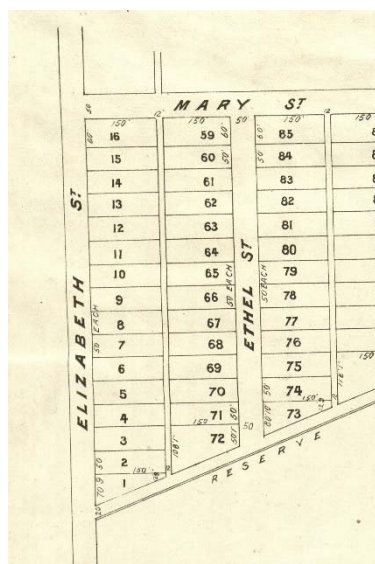


Figure 1. Detail of Tooronga Station Estate c1890 (source: SLV).

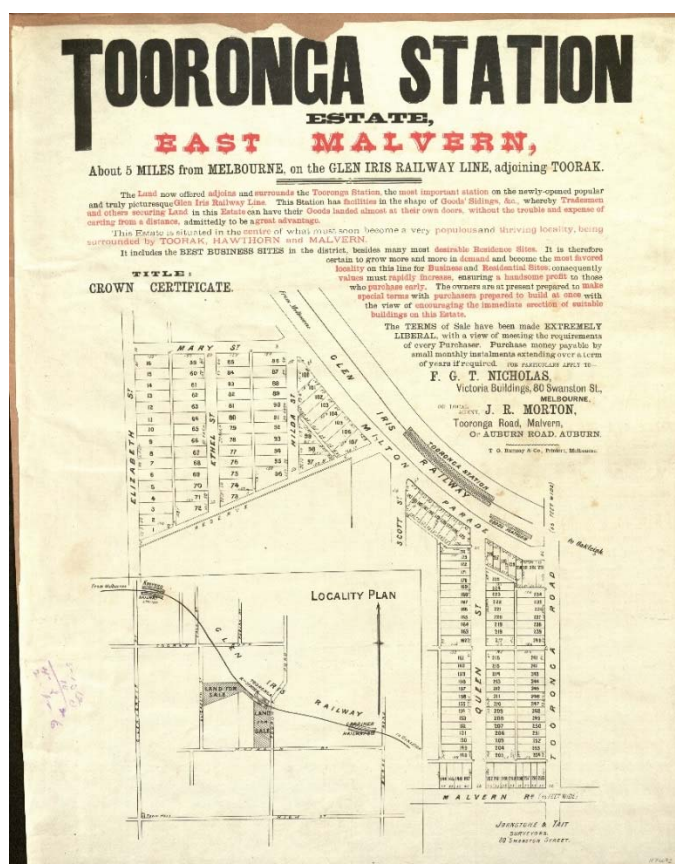


Figure 2. Tooronga Station Estate c1890 (source: SLV).

The house, as shown in the MMBW Detail Plan no. 1777, dated 1907, shows an elegant villa residence with three projecting bay windows and a return verandah to the south-west corner, taking advantage of the sloping site and views to the south (Figure 3).

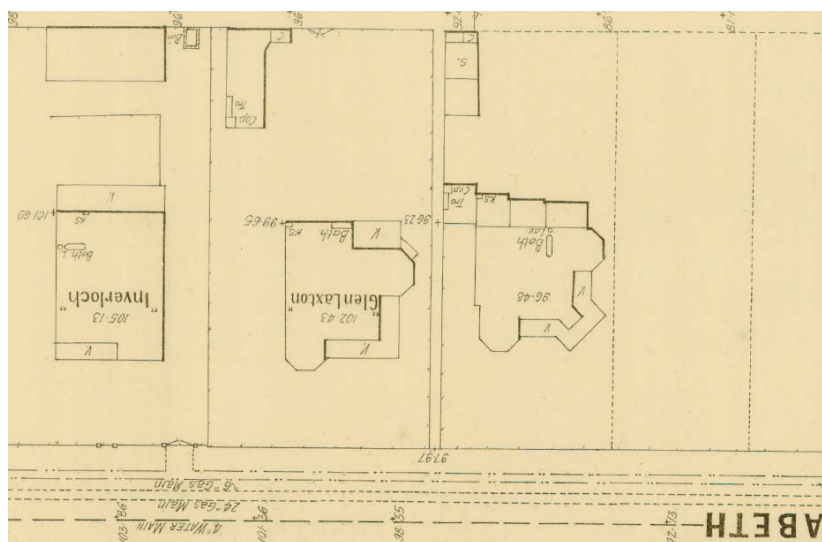


Figure 3. MMBW Detail Plan no. 1777, dated 1907, showing 44 Elizabeth Street at the far right (source: SLV).

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Age 12 October 1931

Argus 5 August 1930

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### Physical description

'The Willows' is an unusual example of a bichrome brick single-storey Italianate villa which occupies an allotment on the east side of Elizabeth Street, north of the intersection with Beaven Avenue in Malvern. The residence is set back from the street behind a generous sized front garden and a timber picket fence. The property slopes down away from Elizabeth Street towards the rear lane which provides vehicular access to Walnut Street.

Constructed by 1897, the late-Victorian villa is an unusual variation on the single-storey asymmetrical Italianate villa type which became popular from the 1880s. The type typically adopts a canted projecting bay to one side of the main entrance beneath a cast-iron verandah fronting the street. In this instance, the building is distinguished by its more complex massing. In addition to the projecting front bay, a rectangular projecting wing sits on the diagonal at the south-west corner. The more complex form, and diagonal planning foreshadows the transition

to Federation influences. The bullnose verandah encircles the corner bay and returns along the south elevation to a secondary projecting canted bay.



*Figure 4. Front canted projecting bay with interesting bichrome brick patterning at 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern (source: Context 2016).*

The building has a hipped roof, clad in slate, with three visible red brick chimneys with heavy cement rendered cornices and terracotta pots. The deep eaves have timber brackets of a pierced design set on a ground of roughcast render, which foreshadows the popular use of this material finish to the gable ends and chimneys of Queen Anne and Federation-era buildings. The walls beneath the verandah are of tuckpointed red brick with cream brick dressings expressed as quoining to the building corners and window openings. The pattern is particularly lively and unusual to the canted projecting bays with the quoins interlocking with the window dressings. Windows beneath the verandah and to the canted bay are segmentally arched double-hung sashes with unusual bulging and deeply raked rendered sills. The sills further indicate a transition to Federation influences, as does the margin glazing bars to the corner bay window. The elaborately panelled entrance door has lost its decorative glazing to the sidelights, and presumably to the highlight.



*Figure 5. Detail of replaced cast iron verandah and windows with bulging sills beneath the verandah (source: Context 2016).*



*Figure 6. Detail of complex slate clad roof with red brick chimneys with heavy unpainted cement cornices (source: Context 2016).*



The house as viewed from Elizabeth Street is substantially intact, apart from the reproduction bullnose verandah. Real estate photos of c2010 show a substantial two-storey addition constructed in matching bichrome brick with a two storey canted projecting bay to the rear of the property (Figure 7). It appears to date from the 1990s. The extension is not visible from Elizabeth Street. The plan also shows an interesting octagonal entrance hall in the centre of the original part of the house (Figure 8).



Figure 7. Rear view of 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern, c2010 (source: Realestate.com.au). The canted bay to the left is the original bay projecting to the south.



Figure 8. Floor plan of 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern depicting the octagonal vestibule connecting the various projecting bays (source: Realestate.com.au, c2010).

## 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 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.

Victoria's economic crash of the early 1890s creates an obvious boundary between the excesses of the ornate 'Boom-style' architecture, characterised by exuberant cement-coated facades and cast-iron detail which draw upon classical forms, and the simpler Federation-era houses with their more natural palette of face brick and timber fretwork influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement. In fact, some architects had already been experimenting with this materials palette and new forms of massing in the late 1880s. The residential style known in Australia as Queen Anne Revival was dominant by the turn of the century, and formed the builder's vernacular by 1915. The origins of the Queen Anne Revival style, in its more traditional form as well as its transformation into the recognisably Australian Federation villa, were the English Domestic Revival designs of architects Richard Norman Shaw and William Eden Nesfield, who drew upon traditional English rural buildings and Tudor architecture (Tibbits 1989:52).

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and new forms of massing in the late 1880s. The Italianate and newer styles such as Queen Anne Revival coexisted until the first years of the 1900s, and many houses combine the influences of both.

The early Queen Anne houses made use of decorative window treatments such as margin glazing and tiny square panes of coloured glass for highlight windows. By about 1900 this was supplanted by curvilinear Art Nouveau leadlight patterns.

More modest early examples displaying a Queen Anne Revival influence often retained the Italianate M-profile hipped roof and asymmetric façade, but the projecting hipped roof bay, typical of the Italianate, was replaced with a gabled bay with half-timbering or decorative trusses at its peak. One of the earliest (and easiest) elements to change from the Italianate model was the verandah detail. The iron-roofed verandah set below the eaves was retained from the Italianate, but slender cast-iron columns were replaced with chunky turned timber posts. Often the cast-iron verandah frieze and brackets were superseded by timber fretwork, though new flatter patterns of cast-iron that emulated fretwork were still used until the 1910s.

Examples of houses in the Italianate style, and those that exhibit transitional detailing, 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, 'The Willows' at 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern can be compared to other medium-sized Italianate houses in the municipality, of which there are many. 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 brickwork include: 34 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 103 Kooyong Road, Armadale (in HO130), 14 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456), 5 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (in HO131), and 48 Davis Avenue, South Yarra (in HO150).

'The Willows' can be better compared to other larger examples built on more generous allotments which allowed for a return verandah, often terminating at a second projecting bay to the side elevation (as at 44 Elizabeth Street). Examples include: 5 Royal Crescent, Armadale (in HO130), 11 Avondale Road, Armadale (in HO123), 860 Malvern Road, Armadale (in HO130), 46 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 15 Inverness Avenue (HO316), 34 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 5 Wynnstay Road, Prahran (in HO135), 'Otira' at 56 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148), and 46 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148).

In comparison to the examples listed above, 'The Willows' is closest in its massing and detail to the brick villas at 5 Royal Crescent, Armadale and 860 Malvern Road, Armadale. These examples also adopt the typical asymmetrical Italianate planning with a cast iron return verandah set between projecting bays. Their polychrome/bichrome brick patterning is somewhat different to 'The Willows' and they vary in their level of intactness. 860 Malvern Road, Armadale is highly intact with more elaborate cast cement render ornamentation to the eaves and its original cast iron verandah. Its design incorporates details that foreshadow the transition to Queen Anne influences such as the cream render dressings to red face brick walls. The villa at 5 Royal Crescent is less intact, with a reconstructed verandah that is missing its frieze and brackets. It features polychrome brickwork of red brick dressings against dark Hawthorn brick walls and a wide band of cream bricks at the eaves level.





Figure 9. 5 Royal Crescent, Armadale, individually significant in HO130 (source: Google Streetview).

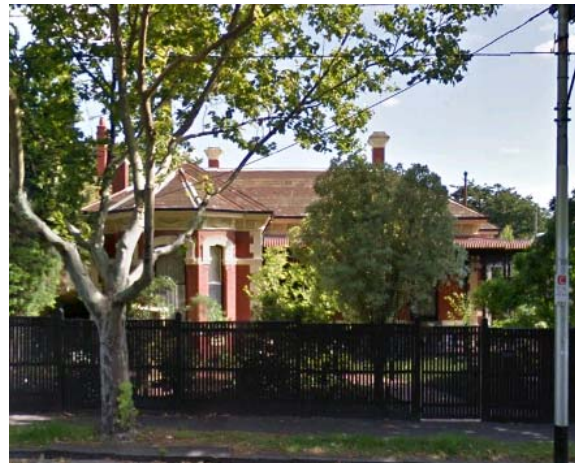


Figure 10. 860 Malvern Road, Armadale, individually significant in HO130 (source: Context 2016).



Figure 11. 15 Inverness Avenue, Armadale, individually significant HO316 (source: Context 2016).

‘The Willows’ is distinguished by the addition of a secondary projecting bay set on the diagonal between the two perpendicular canted bays. The feature indicates the transition to more diagonal planning, adopted by the Queen Anne style. Its unusual massing and distinctive bichrome brickwork compares well to the significant house at 15 Inverness Avenue, Armadale (HO316), although its composition is not precisely the same. Other transitional details to ‘The Willows’ include the eaves brackets set on a ground of roughcast render, and the unusual bulging rendered sills to the double-hung sash windows.

In conclusion, ‘The Willows’ at 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern is a distinctive and unusual example of one of the municipality’s collection of medium-sized single-storey Italianate villas. It is notable for its complex massing, bichrome brickwork and interesting detailing that illustrates a transition to Queen Anne influences, including the corner bay window placed on the diagonal, eaves brackets set on a ground of roughcast render, and the unusual bulging rendered sills to the double-hung sash windows with notable margin glazing.

Despite a reconstructed verandah, ‘The Willows’ appears otherwise intact, and compares well to the other examples listed above.

## **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).

## **Statement of significance**

### **What is significant?**

'The Willows' at 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern is significant. It was built in 1897 by local builder, Charles F. Wheatland as his family home.

It comprises a medium-sized late-Victorian Italianate villa with unusual asymmetrical massing with a cast iron return verandah and detailing that illustrates a transition to Queen Anne influences. The house is significant as viewed and appreciated from Elizabeth Street, and is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century external form and fabric.

The modern alterations and additions are not significant.

### **How is it significant?**

'The Willows' at 44 Elizabeth Street, Malvern is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

### **Why is it significant?**

Architecturally, 'The Willows' is a late representative example of a medium-sized Victorian Italianate villa built for middle-class residents of Malvern, of the sort that began to characterise the suburb in the 1880s and 1890s. The villa exhibits typical features of this type, including an asymmetrical plan form, cast iron verandah, a hipped roof clad in slate, and rendered chimneys with heavy cornices. (Criterion D).

Aesthetically, it is distinguished by its complex massing, fine bichrome brickwork and interesting detailing that illustrates the transition to Federation influences, including the corner bay window placed on the diagonal, eaves brackets set on a ground of roughcast render, the unusual bulging rendered window sills, and notable margin glazing of the double-hung sash windows. (Criterion E)

## **Recommendation**

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries.

HO Schedule controls: None

