

'Blairholme' (formerly 'Awbridge')

1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Mansion

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Italianate

Place history and context

In 1866, the successful Melbourne merchant William Bushby Jones purchased an 11-acre allotment facing Malvern Road in the Shire of Malvern; this land was part of Crown allotment 3 in the Parish of Prahran, County of Bourke. Jones had begun his career as a lighter-man and kerosene store-keeper, and had established a warehouse in King Street in 1858 and on the Yarra Bank from the 1860s. In 1866, Jones commissioned the noted Melbourne architect Lloyd Tayler to design a two-storey mansion at his newly acquired suburban estate on Malvern Road. He named the house 'Brocklesby'. In 1885, Jones acquired a further 12 acres of land abutting his existing holding on the western side and extending west to Kooyong Road. In 1886 this land was subdivided as 'Brocklesby Estate', which created 50 new suburban allotments and three new roads: Murray, Erskine, and Horsburgh streets (SHC catalogue item MP 14055). The following year, 1887, W.B. Jones's daughter Lillian Dawson Jones married John Charles Jesson (*Argus* 21 February 1887), and Jesson acquired a large section (comprising lots 51, 52, 55 and 56) of the 'Brocklesby Estate' subdivision (perhaps as a wedding gift) on which to build a new home (LV: V1947F343). This was situated at the corner of Malvern Road and Murray Street. Two years after his daughter and son-in-law's new residence was completed, W.B. Jones died, leaving property to the value of one-third of a million pounds (*Table Talk* 18 October 1889).

Two house sites on the Brocklesby Estate subdivision had already been sold and built on by 1887, including a 'villa residence' facing Malvern Road and bounded by Murray Road on the west (this is shown on the auctioneer's advertisement dated 1887). This house was Lillian and

John Jesson's 'Awbridge' (later to become 'Blairholme'). The house was most likely built that year and was described in the 1887 auctioneer's notice as one of the two 'handsome brick villas' ('Brocklesby Estate' 1887, SLV). Prospective buyers for the remaining allotments were reminded that the Brocklesby Estate was surrounded by 'the best Mansions in the District' in 'the cream of Armadale', and was only five minutes' walk from the new Armadale Railway Station ('Brocklesby Estate' 1887, SLV).

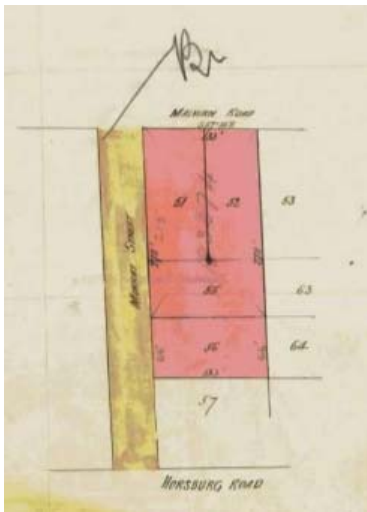


Figure 1. Land acquired by John Charles Jesson in 1887: lots, 51, 52, 55 and 56 (source: Certificate of Title vol. 1947 fol. 343)

The MMBW detail plan (dated 1902), shows a Victorian-style residence on the corner of Malvern Road and Murray Street. The house has multiple faceted bay windows and a fashionable 'rustic fernery' built on the south side of the house, and is roughly symmetrical (ignoring the fernery). There are bathroom fittings inside, indicating the house was plumbed. The plan shows a variety of garden features at this time, including a garden trellis shown at the rear of the house, suggesting a kitchen garden; a wide gravel carriageway with a splayed entrance at the corner of Malvern Road and Murray Street and carriage turning area at the front of the house. A narrower gravel drive along the south side of the house possibly accessed rear stables, although there are no stables marked on the plan). Although few substantial mature trees survive on the site today, the garden features shown on the MMBW plan dated 1902 indicate a substantial residential garden is likely to have been laid out by 1902. The mature Camphor Laurel *Cinnamomum camphora* located at the front of the residence is a particularly fine specimen which is likely to date from the period c1890-1900 and is the only tree which survives from the early garden.

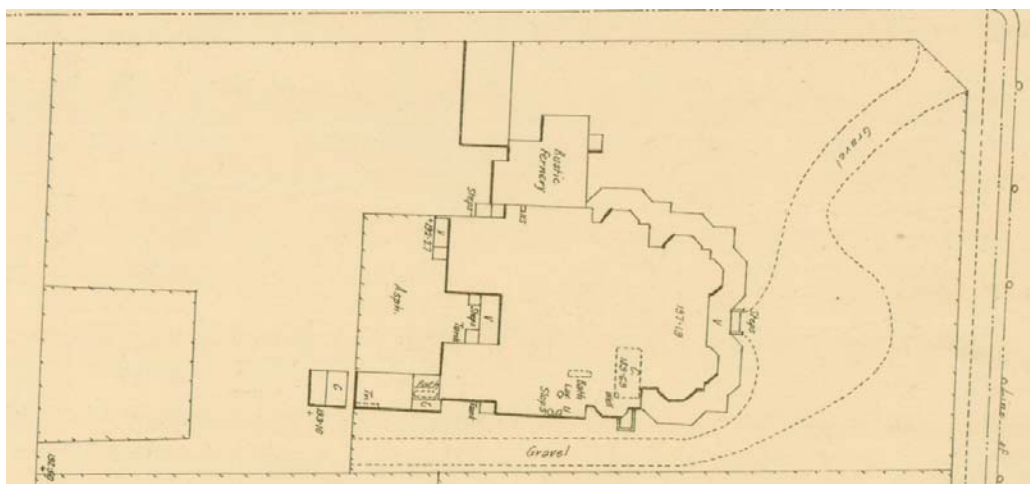


Figure 2. MMBW detail plan no. 1793, dated 1902 (source: SLV).

The architect for 'Awbridge' has not been confirmed, but given W.B. Jones's established relationship with Lloyd Tayler, it is likely that Tayler designed 'Awbridge' in 1887. Tayler had

designed Jones's own private residence 'Brocklesby' in 1866, and had also designed a large brick warehouse for Jones on the Yarra Bank in 1888; this was known as Jones's Bond Store (VHR H0828). Stylistically, there are clear similarities between 'Awbridge' and other Italianate villas in suburban Melbourne designed by Tayler. 'Kamesburgh' in Brighton (1876, VHR H1186), for example, has a similar balustraded tower, although more ornate than the tower at 'Awbridge'. Tayler's own home in Brighton, 'Pen-y-Bryn' (c1860), is of a comparable style and scale. There are also similarities between 'Awbridge' and Tayler's design for 'Thyra' in Brighton (1883) and 'Orrong' in Toorak (extended by Tayler in 1885).



Figure 3. Extract of photo showing tower at 'Blairholme' (formerly 'Awbridge'), Malvern, 1975 (source: SLV, J.T. Collins collection).



Figure 4. Extract of photo showing tower at 'Pen-y-Bryn', Brighton, designed by Lloyd Tayler, photographed c1860 (source: SLV).

In November 1891 John Charles Jesson transferred the title of the property to his wife, Lilian Dawson Jesson, probably to safeguard his assets as Melbourne's financial institutions steadily became insolvent that year (LV: V1947F343). The following year, 1892, Lilian and John Jesson suffered the deaths of two of their young children in the space of one week. By 1899, they had relocated to England; their furniture was auctioned and the house was let. At that time, 'Awbridge' was described as 'a beautifully furnished residence, replete with numerous pieces and examples of modern English art furniture of the best quality' (*Age* 16 December 1899). Also for sale was the Jesson's 'telescope table', which had presumably been used in the tower room, mounted with a telescope for star-gazing.

In 1900 a notice appeared in the newspaper, advertising for gardeners to 'start at once' at 'Awbridge', Malvern Road, indicating that the house had been let (*Age* 10 December 1900). The house appears to have been tenanted for several years.

Lindsay and Margaret Mildred purchased the house in 1929, probably taking advantage of low prices due to the Depression (LV: V1947F344). They renamed the house 'Blairholme'. Margaret and Lindsay Mildred died in 1973 and 1974 respectively.

In April 1975, Lauriston Girls' School (Lauriston) purchased 'Blairholme' for \$225,000. The building was used initially as Grade 2 and 3 classrooms in 1977. The school had used the tennis courts since the 1940s, but this may be a reference to the former Brocklesby tennis courts (Rasmussen 1999: 203, 204). Later a Suzuki-method music school, open to the public, commenced at Blairholme House (Rasmussen 1999: 213).

Lauriston Girls' School had many years earlier, in 1907, purchased the W.B. Jones residence 'Brocklesby' (1866) as their main school premises in Malvern Road. At that time the school

was run by the Irving sisters. When 'Blairholme' was purchased by Lauriston in 1975, it became the second Jones-Jesson family home to be acquired by Lauriston.

Other Lloyd Tayler villas

Lloyd Tayler (1830-1900) was a notable and successful Melbourne architect who arrived in Victoria from England in the 1850s. He designed a range of building types, including commercial, domestic, and ecclesiastical work. He completed a large number of notable homes in Melbourne's affluent suburbs, including Toorak, South Yarra, Armadale, Malvern and Brighton, including several grand mansions and many elegant villas in elaborate Victorian styles.



Figure 5. 'Orrong', Toorak, extended by Lloyd Tayler in 1885, photographed in 1934 (source: Robb, 1934).



Figure 6. 'Pen-y-Bryn', Brighton, designed by Lloyd Tayler, c1860 (source: SLV).

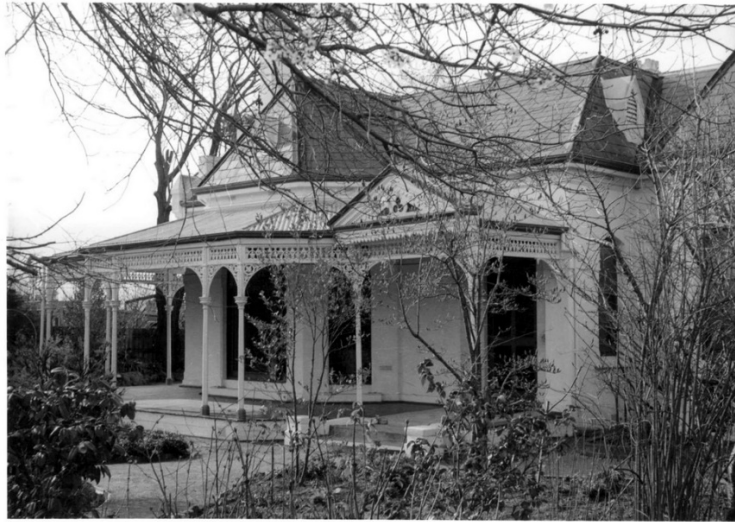


Figure 7. 'Thyra', Brighton, designed by Lloyd Tayler, 1883 (source: SLV).

Sources

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Age 10 December 1900.

Argus 21 February 1887

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Table Talk 18 October 1889.

Physical description

'Blairholme' (formerly 'Awbridge') is a grand single-storey Italianate villa with a central landmark square tower. The former residence occupies a large allotment on the south-east corner of Malvern Road and Murray Street in Armadale which now forms part of the Lauriston Girls School campus. The site is enhanced by a mature garden setting which incorporates typical school yard landscaping, set behind a sympathetic timber picket fence. A substantial specimen of Camphor Laurel *Cinnamomum camphora*, dating from c.1890-1900 is located immediately north east of the residence, and is the last surviving tree of the late nineteenth century garden. The height, canopy spread and trunk diameter of this specimen are particularly impressive, and accordingly, the tree is included on the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Register of Significant Trees.

Constructed in 1887, the rendered building has complex massing with a series of hipped projecting canted bays fronting Malvern Road which are accentuated by the encircling verandah that originally returned on three sides. The building is dominated by the central landmark square tower which has a tall balustraded parapet which terminates at moulded piers at each corner surmounted by orbs with tapered finials. Beneath the parapet is a moulded cornice with paired eaves brackets. The paired round arch double-hung sash windows are recessed between piers with elaborate impost mouldings with acanthus leaves which are set above a moulded stringcourse with dentils.



Figure 8. Entrance to 'Blairholme', 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale (source: Context 2016).

The main roof is clad in slate tiles with corrugated galvanised iron to the encircling verandah which incorporates a central pediment with elaborate cast iron work to mark the front entrance. The verandah is raised on a bluestone plinth, with fluted cast iron columns and a new safety balustrade. The heavy cast iron patterns to the frieze, brackets and pediment tympanum have been painted many times but appear to be highly intact.

Beneath the verandah full height square-headed windows are recessed between piers with elaborate impost mouldings with the same acanthus leaves seen between the tower windows. The elegant six-panel front door retains very wide sidelights and highlights with decorative etched and cut glazing. Further decoration is added by other cast cement details including rosettes and fleur-de-lis panels set between eaves brackets.

Research undertaken to date has not confirmed the architect for 'Awbridge' (Blairholme) as Lloyd Tayler, however the sophistication of the design and its unconventional detailing suggests the involvement of a skilled architect.



Figure 9. West elevation of 'Blairholme' showing the later extensions to the rear (south) (source: Context 2016).



Figure 10. Front view of property with mature garden setting and Camphor Laurel tree in the foreground (source: Context 2016).

There have been a number of changes to the building including those parts of the rear and side elevations that are visible from the public realm. However, the alterations have mostly been undertaken sympathetically. The earliest change appears to have been the construction of a rectangular projecting bay to the north-east corner of the building which has altered the mostly symmetrical presentation to Malvern Road, with the loss of two canted projecting bays as seen in the 1902 MMBW plan. This addition however continues the decorative palette of the other projecting bays, except for missing cast cement details between matching eaves brackets and ill-placed vents. A Planning Permit for the change of use from a residence to the Lauriston Girl's School in 1975 indicates that this change occurred prior to this date (Planning Permit & Endorsed Plan TP80-75, City of Malvern, 1975). A number of windows beneath the verandah retain the arched panes to their highlights while others have clearly been replaced.

Other changes occurred under the school's tenure throughout the 1980s and 1990s including timber classroom additions with distinctive window hoods, a new rear entrance, landscaping and the erection of portable classrooms to the rear property boundary. The most substantial of these changes was the construction of a new classroom extension to the rear of the former house in 1985. This extension was designed as a pair of canted projecting bays configured with an L-shaped plan (Planning Permit & Endorsed Plan TP123-85, City of Malvern, 1985).

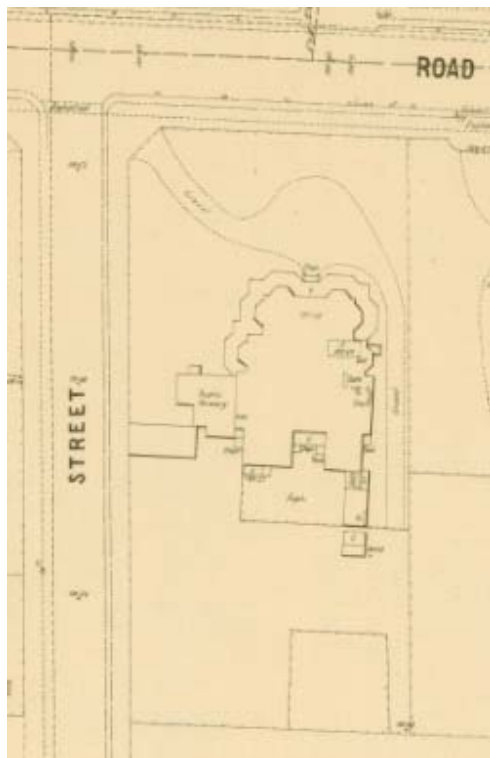


Figure 11. 1902 MBW Plan (rotated) showing 'Blairholme' (source: State Library of Victoria, Plan 1763).

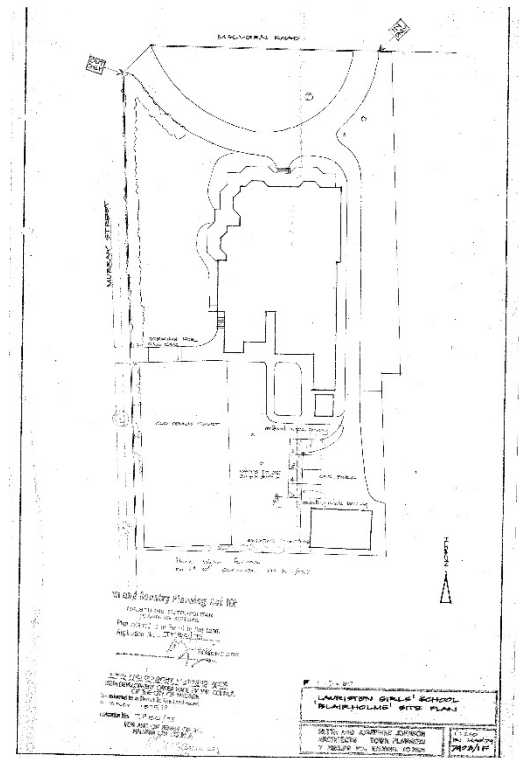


Figure 12. Planning Permit & Endorsed Plans TP80-75, 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale for Lauriston Girls School, City of Malvern, 1975 showing change to north-east corner of building (source: City of Stonnington).

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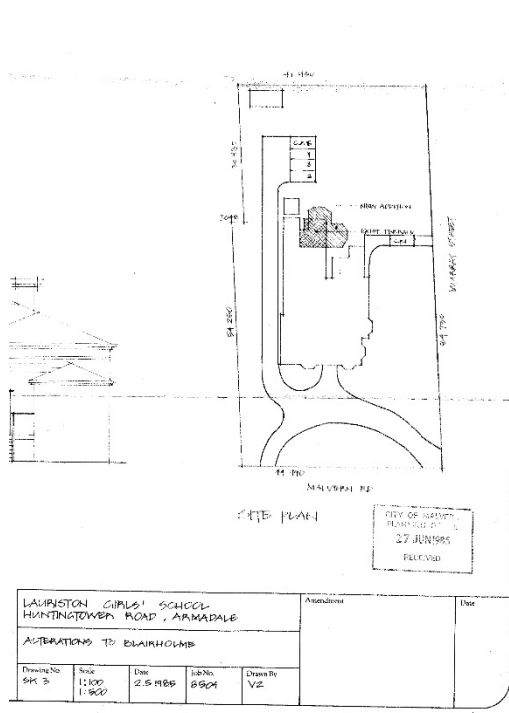


Figure 13. Planning Permit & Endorsed Plans TP123-85, 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale for Lauriston Girls School, City of Malvern, 1985 showing rear extension to building (source: City of Stonnington).

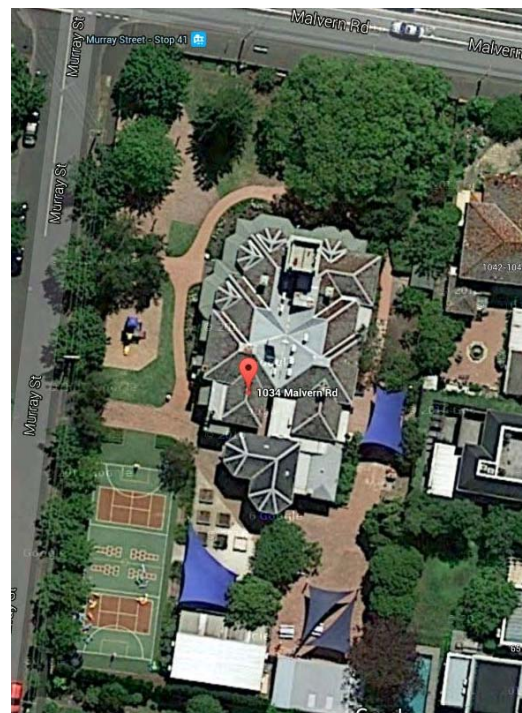


Figure 14. Aerial view 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale (source: Google Streetview, accessed May 2016).

Comparative analysis

'Blairholme' at 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale, is a large single-storey villa with a landmark central square tower, distinctive massing and Italianate detailing. It can be compared to other substantial single storey Italianate residences in the City of Stonnington.

Although many single-storey villas were built in Melbourne and its suburbs during the nineteenth century, after the 1840s the grandest houses were almost always of two storeys, or occasionally three as at Government House and 'Cliveden'. This was not always the case at Melbourne's suburban boundaries, where a grand house on a rural property might also be a sprawling single-storey mansion, often made more imposing by the addition of a decorative tower.

The architectural expression of a grand two-storey Victorian house could reflect any one of a range of fashionable British antecedents drawing their inspiration from classical Greek, Roman or Georgian sources to the more picturesque, such as Gothic or Tudor. About a third of these grand Victorian houses adopted an Italianate style combining informal massing with a plain rendered expression enriched by classical motifs. The balance adopted a formal symmetrical classical expression. The Italianate was seen to combine the stateliness of a classical style with a picturesque and fashionable asymmetry (Jordan 2003:117 as cited in Statham 2008).

The Italianate style had its origins in the landscape paintings of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorraine 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 style 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 (2012:357) notes:

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 a 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; 'Stonington' in Malvern; and 'Malvern House' in Glen Iris.

Other examples of large single storey Italianate villas in the municipality include:

- HO38 – 'Flete', 10 Flete Avenue, Armadale - a large single-storey Italianate mansion that is notable for the consistent elevational treatment and wide encircling verandah retained on a relatively large allotment in Armadale. The house is of considerable historical importance being firstly the residence of eminent Judge Sir Hartley Williams, later leased by the internationally acclaimed opera singer Dame Nellie Melba, and subsequently occupied by Judge Sir John Latham.
- HO240 – 'Wyuna', 116 Kooyong Road, Armadale – a large single-storey Italianate villa which has a square balustraded tower and a return cast iron bullnose verandah set between canted bays, with an additional section beyond the rectangular projecting wing. The building is located on a relatively narrow suburban allotment and has an extensive frontage to Horsburgh Grove.
- HO324 – 1043 Malvern Road, Armadale – a large single-storey Italianate villa with a tower, which is an unusual feature for the relatively modest scale of the house. The house is a

typical asymmetrical villa with a slate hipped roof and a canted projecting bay fronting Malvern Road. Other than the front verandah being removed and the high timber fence, the house is relatively intact.

- HO143 (Individually significant in Montalto Avenue Precinct) – 78 Clendon Road, Toorak – a large single storey Italianate villa with an asymmetrical plan and square balustrade tower over the entrance.
- HO143 (Individually significant in Montalto Avenue Precinct) – 3 Lansell Road, Toorak – a large single storey Italianate villa with a square tower on an asymmetrical plan. The house has been retained on a relatively large allotment, set back from Lansell Road within a mature garden setting.

In comparison to the other large single storey Italianate residences listed above, 'Blairholme' is closest in massing and detail to 'Flete', 10 Flete Avenue, Armadale, which illustrates the sprawling single-storey Italianate mansion type with encircling verandah set within a mature garden setting on a relatively large allotment. 'Flete' appears to be highly intact.



Figure 15. 'Flete', 10 Flete Avenue, Armadale – HO38 (source: www.smb.com.au, accessed 21 June 2016).

The house at 3 Lansell Road, Toorak is another example of a villa that has retained a mature garden setting on a large allotment; although the house expresses more Picturesque qualities in its asymmetrical plan and massing.

'Blairholme' has more complex massing than these two examples with the series of canted projecting bays arranged around the central landmark tower that are accentuated by the complex encircling verandah. The property's large allotment is readily visible due to the prominent corner location of the site.

The garden setting of 'Blairholme' is enriched by the mature Camphor Laurel tree which is notable for its canopy size and spread exceeding 20m across that is comparable to other trees of this species included on the National Trust Significant Tree Register.

The other examples listed above are single storey Italianate villas constructed with decorative towers. In comparison to 'Blairholme', these examples are less substantial Italianate residences on smaller curtilages. These examples typically adopt a more standard asymmetric plan form with one or two rectangular or canted projecting bays containing a cast iron return verandah. The landmark tower at 'Blairholme' is closest in detailing to the tower at 78 Clendon Road, Toorak which is also embellished with a balustraded parapet and paired round arched windows to each face, although offset from the main house. The tower at 'Blairholme' is grander in its size and boldness of detailing, with the paired round arch double-hung sash windows recessed between piers with elaborate impost mouldings with acanthus leaves.



Figure 16. 78 Clendon Road, Toorak - significant in HO143 (source: www.castran-gilbert.boxdice.com.au, accessed 21 June 2016)

In summary 'Blairholme' compares well to other examples of large single storey Italianate houses in the municipality with its sprawling plan accentuated by the encircling return verandah, set within a mature garden on a large allotment. The height and bold massing of the central landmark tower provides an example of a more exuberant approach to the Italianate style of the 1880s. The mature Camphor Laurel tree to the north of the house is an outstanding example of its species and compares well to other specimens in Victoria in terms of its canopy size and spread.

Thematic context

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

3.3.3 Speculators and land boomers

8.1.2 Seats of the mighty – Mansion estates in the nineteenth century

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

8.3.2 Gardens

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

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?

'Blairholme' (formerly 'Awbridge') at 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale, built in 1887 and comprising a large single storey Italianate villa with central landmark tower set in an expansive garden setting with a mature Camphor Laurel (*Cinnamomum camphora*), is significant.

The house was built for Lilian (nee Jones) and John Jesson shortly after their marriage in February 1887. Lilian Dawson Jones was the daughter of successful Melbourne merchant William Bushby Jones who created the 50-lot 'Brocklesby Estate' on the south side of Malvern

Road in the former Shire of Malvern in 1886, on which 'Blairholme' was built. The house was purchased by Lauriston Girls' School in April 1975.

'Blairholme' is significant to the extent of its intact pre-1975 external form and fabric. The legibility of the built form in views from the public realm and the building's mature garden setting (including the mature Camphor Laurel tree) contribute to the significance of the place.

Modern alterations and additions are not considered to be significant.

How is it significant?

'Blairholme' (formerly 'Awbridge'), at 1034 Malvern Road, Armadale, is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

'Blairholme' (formerly 'Awbridge') at 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale is a fine representative example of a substantial architect-designed Victorian Italianate villa residence built for a prominent Melbourne resident, of the sort that began to character the suburb of Armadale in the 1880s. (Criterion D)

The house is of aesthetic significance for its complex massing and elaborate detailing that distinguishes it from other houses in this idiom. This includes: the arrangement of canted projecting bays which are accentuated by the encircling cast iron verandah; the intricate and high-quality cast iron work including the heavy range of frieze, bracket and tympanum patterns; the central landmark tower with bold cement render detailing including the balustraded parapet with moulded piers and orbs and elaborate acanthus leaf impost mouldings; and the elaborate front entrance door. (Criterion E)

The mature Camphor Laurel tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*) located north of the building is of aesthetic significance as an outstanding example of its species in cultivation, and one of the largest examples of this species included on the National Trust Significant Tree Register. The canopy size and spread is particularly notable, and comparable to any specimen in Victoria, exceeding 20m across; the height, exceeding 16m, and the trunk diameter, exceeding 1m, make it an outstanding example of its species, with significant aesthetic values. It is likely to date from the period c1890-1900 and is the only tree which survives from the early garden. (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: Tree - Camphor Laurel in front garden.

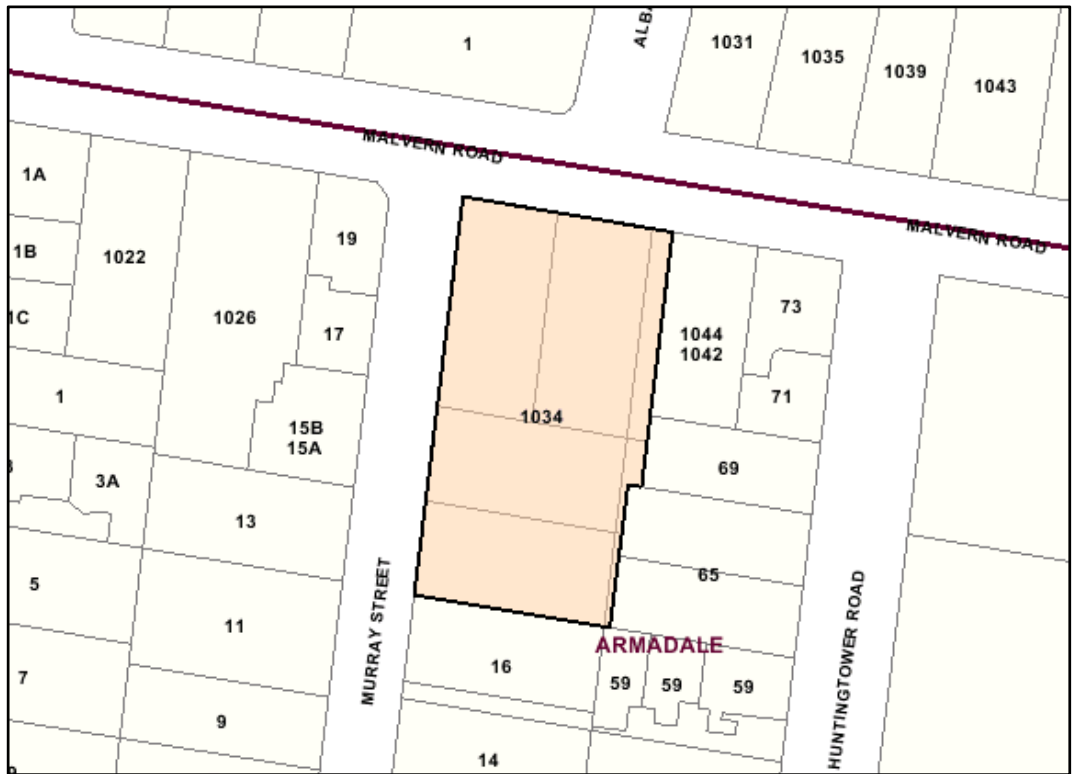


Figure 17. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 1034-1040 Malvern Road, Armadale (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2