

11 Nicholls Street, Malvern

Place type: Residential Building (private), House

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 11 Nicholls Street was erected in 1890. In 1889 the rate books indicate that the site was rated as land only for £12 (RB). The following year, Frederick Good of Richmond was charged rates of £20 for a timber house, with the rate book entry annotated with the note 'building in progress' (RB). The house was tenanted through the 1890s, when it was described in the rate books as a timber house of 7 rooms. It was owned and occupied from 1910 by Frank and Charlotte McLeod (RB).

The MMBW detail plan of 1902 shows a modest double-fronted residence with a return verandah and steps leading to it from the front garden. There is a washhouse and other outbuildings at the rear as well as a large garden trellis.

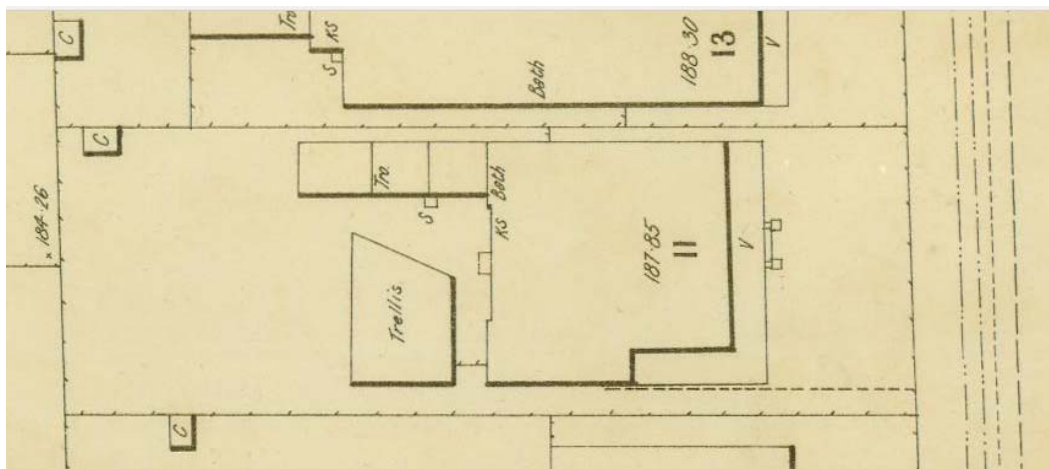


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan no. 1742, dated 1902 (source: SLV).

Sources

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Physical description

The residence at 11 Nicholls Street is a double-fronted single-storey Italianate villa that is highly intact. It occupies a relatively wide allotment on the west side of Nicholls Street, south of the intersection with Edsall Street in Malvern. The house is set back behind a generous and formally landscaped front garden and a sympathetic reproduction timber picket fence.

Constructed in 1890, the villa is notable for its unusually high level of detail that is illustrative of the beginnings of the transition between Italianate and Federation influences. The building has a hipped roof, clad in slate, with a return verandah clad in corrugated iron which incorporates a central pediment with superimposed timber trusswork to mark the front entrance. The return verandah terminates at the rear section of the house on the south (side) elevation. It retains a cast-iron Greek-key pattern frieze and solid timber brackets with pierced circle motifs.



Figure 2. View of entrance detail (source: Context 2016).

The walls beneath the verandah are clad in timber blocked boards to emulate expensive stone ashlar with bold fielded quoins. Other timber details include the fielded panels between the elaborate eaves brackets with pendants. Beneath the verandah the elaborately panelled front entrance door survives with an ornate timber surround with sidelights and highlights that appear to retain their decorative glazing panels. The door is flanked on either side by double-hung sash windows with wide sidelights. The visible chimney is finished in unpainted cement render with a simple moulded cornice and raised panel, and is typical of its era.

The surrounds to the front door and windows have an unusual relief pattern that imitates the silhouette of a turned timber post. It is likely that the original verandah posts were three-dimensional versions of this design, while the current square retrofitted posts are a later alteration. Apart from this, the house appears to be substantially intact as viewed from Nicholls Street, despite a large two storey addition to the rear of the house which is not readily visible from the street. The reproduction timber picket fence to the front is sympathetic.



Figure 3. View looking north-east showing the return verandah (source: Context 2016).

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.

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. 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 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.

There are a number of small to medium-sized Italianate houses that are individually significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, most of them on the western side of the municipality. Most of them are the asymmetrical type, with a projecting bay to one side of the façade creating additional visual interest. A smaller number of the Significant houses are the

symmetrical type, with a double-fronted flat façade. Usually it is the more modest single-fronted houses in the City of Stonnington that are constructed in timber, including the group of houses at 2-32 Cambridge Street, Armadale (HO125) and 70-80 Aberdeen Road, Prahran (HO121). In its high level of detailing, 11 Nicholls Street can be better compared to more prestigious examples finished in cement render or face brick.

Examples of this type include more modest houses set on suburban allotments that didn't allow space for a returning verandah: 39 Densham Road, Armadale (in HO130), 66 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 69 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 35 Woodfull Street, Prahran (in HO135), 14 Greville Street, Prahran (in HO456), 23 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (HO131), 36 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134), and 35 McIlwrick Street, Windsor (in HO138). The examples at 5 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130) and 13 Evelina Road, Toorak (in HO380) adopt a central gablet to the verandah, indicating the central entrance, as at 11 Nicholls Street. The villas at 4 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 24 Cromwell Road, South Yarra (in HO379), and 11 Evelina Road, Toorak (in HO380) are slightly larger examples built on more generous allotments which allowed for a return verandah to one or both sides.

In its massing and detailing, 11 Nicholls Street can be best compared with the villa at 24 Cromwell Road, South Yarra, which shares a symmetrical composition to the front and a return verandah, although in this instance to both sides. It is raised on a prominent site with steps up the verandah with a gablet to one side denoting the side entrance. This example is much more clearly Italianate in its detailing than 11 Nicholls Street, which incorporates elements, particularly the timber verandah frieze and brackets, that indicates a transition to Federation Queen Anne influences.



Figure 4. 24 Cromwell Road, South Yarra, individually significant in HO379 (source: Google Streetview).

In conclusion, the villa at 11 Nicholls Street, Malvern is distinctive as a timber Victorian house with high-quality detail, illustrating the transition to Federation Queen Anne influences. The front is symmetrically massed with a hipped roof, clad in slate, and a gablet roof to the return verandah that distinguishes the central entrance, in keeping with the Italianate style. Distinctive transitional details include the verandah that retains timber brackets with pierced circle motifs executed in timber and the central pediment with superimposed timber trusswork to mark the front entrance. The timber clad walls blocked to emulate ashlar blocks, with bold fielded quoins are also of note.

Despite the large additions to the rear, the villa at 11 Nicholls Street is highly intact from the front, apart from the replacement of its timber posts, 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 villa at 11 Nicholls Street, Malvern built in 1890 is significant. It comprises a single-storey Italianate villa with a hipped roof, cement rendered chimneys and a return verandah, presenting a range of non-standard decorative features illustrative of the transition from Italianate to Federation Queen Anne influences.

It is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century external form and fabric.

The modern alterations and additions to the rear and the reproduction picket fence are not significant.

How is it significant?

The villa at 11 Nicholls Street, Malvern is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Malvern.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, the villa at 11 Nicholls Street, Malvern is a fine and intact representative example of a single-storey 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 the symmetrical plan form, hipped roof clad in slate, and tall rendered chimneys with heavy cornices. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, it is distinguished by its combination of an Italianate Victorian form with an unusual use of detailing, illustrating the transition to Federation Queen Anne influences. The front is symmetrically massed with a hipped roof, clad in slate, and a gablet roof to the return verandah that distinguishes the central entrance. Distinctive transitional details include the timber verandah that retains its Greek-key pattern frieze and solid brackets with pierced circle motifs executed in timber and the central pediment with superimposed timber trusswork to mark the front entrance. The timber clad walls blocked to emulate ashlar blocks, with bold fielded quoins are also of note, as are the surrounds to the front door and windows with an unusual relief pattern that imitates the silhouette of a turned timber post. (Criterion E)

Recommendations

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

HO Schedule controls: None

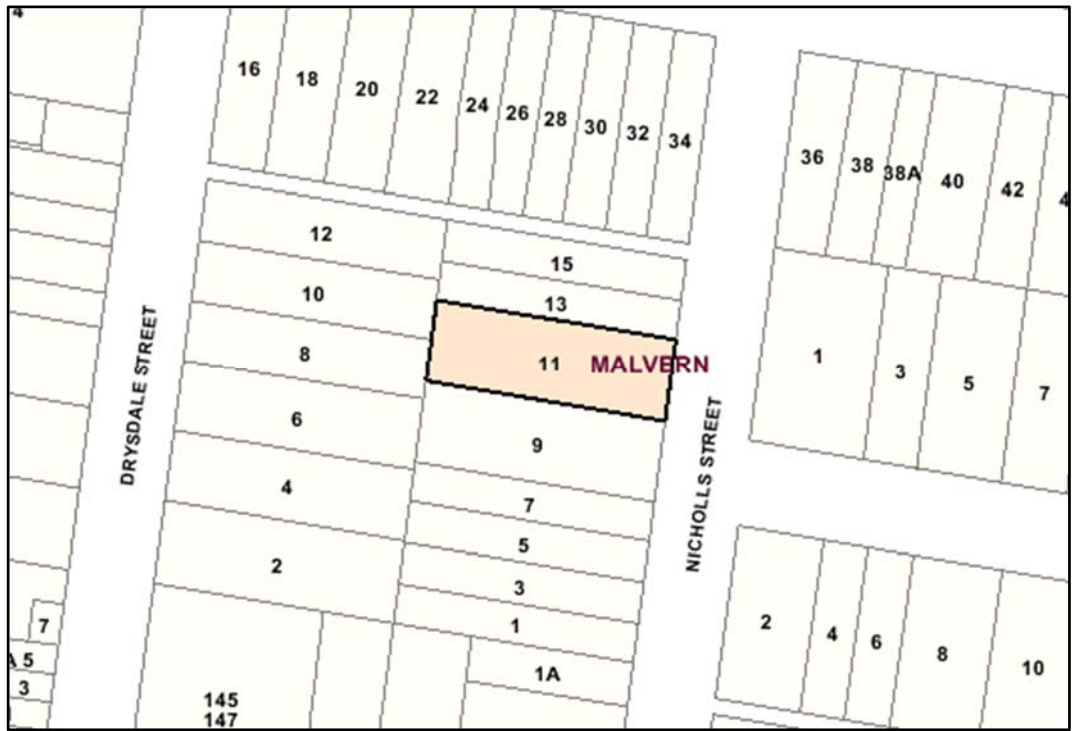


Figure 5. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 11 Nicholls Street, Malvern (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2