

‘Ilfracombe’

**40 Murphy Street, South Yarra**

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), House

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian (1851-1901) Queen Anne Revival / Free Style

**Locality history**

South Yarra, situated on the elevated south side of the Yarra River, emerged as a suburb of Melbourne in the 1850s. Before that, from the late 1830s and until the early 1840s, George Langthorne's Anglican Mission for the Aboriginal people was situated near present-day Anderson Street. The Botanical Gardens had been reserved in 1846 and the surrounding land began to be developed for large residential estates in the 1850s

Government House (1876) was situated close by in the Domain, and although situated outside the suburb of South Yarra, the vice-regal presence provided an influential social cachet to the area. On the elevated ground between the Yarra River and Toorak Road a number of mansions on large estates were established, including 'Como', 'Avoca', 'Redfern' and 'Airlie'. The Botanic Gardens, also outside South Yarra, lent a strong character to the area. Wealth enabled the development of extensive private gardens, and large properties were often laid out with gravel walks and beds, large expanses of lawn and orchards. Smaller villas were also embellished with garden beds, and also often sported a fashionable fernery.

South Yarra was accessed from the city via St Kilda Road, and also by a punt across the Yarra. The South Yarra railway station was first opened on Toorak Road in the 1860s, servicing the private Hobsons Bay railway, but was expanded in the 1880s when the station was added to the new Oakleigh line. The strip along Toorak Road and along Chapel Street (bordering with Prahran) developed into a busy shopping and commercial area.



Murphy Street, South Yarra, where they intend to settle down' (*Table Talk* 4 March 1926). When 'Ilfracombe' was advertised for sale in 1929 it was promoted as suitable for conversion into residential flats, and the newspaper report noted the vacant block of land next to the house could be developed for another residence (*Prahran Telegraph* 23 August 1929). This has happened since then, with the land at 40 Murphy Street subdivided and an apartment building constructed on the north side.

### Sources

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### Physical description

'Ilfracombe', at 40 Murphy Street, South Yarra, stands on the east side of the street near the crest of the hill. It has a modest front garden setback typical of this inner suburban street. Also typical of this street, the side setbacks are small (though the garden once occupied the block that is now 42 Murphy Street).

The house is two-storeys in height and is constructed of red face brick with cement render dressings and a slate-clad roof. The roof has a high hip with a ridge perpendicular to the street

indicating its rejection of the Victorian Italianate style and adherence to the newer trends from England. On the north side of the façade the high hip intersects with the semi-hexagonal roof of the broad two-storey canted bay window. The apex of the main roof and the semi-hexagonal roof terminate with a large finial, possibly of lead. There are tiny dormer windows on the front and side slopes of the roof with simple bargeboards, with a pierced circle in the lobes and simple timber brackets below the barge.

The two-storey bay window stretches across half of the façade, making it a dominant and sculptural feature. On the north side of the house, set back from this bay window, is the entrance porch, which has a parapeted roof. The top of the parapet is finished with a run cement-render cornice, which continues across the rest of the façade as a beltcourse. There are also narrow moulded stringcourses at the window lintel level to both floor, and heavy rendered or concrete lintels to the windows and doors. All of the windows and the front door retain geometric leadlight highlights, and have bold rendered lintels which contrast with the brick. The front door also has leadlights to the top four panels and the sidelights. The windows to the canted bay window are double-hung sashes with a top sash divided into two vertical panes. The windows to the projecting front room are in a bank of three, with a shared rendered lintel.

Apart from the leadlight windows, the house is nearly devoid of the applied ornament typically seen on Victorian houses, such as eaves brackets and cast-iron verandah detail. Instead it has a stripped back and sculptural form that was innovative for its time and related to the freer forms of the Queen Anne Revival introduced from Britain.

There was an early change to the façade of the house. The 1895 MMBW plan shows a small rectangular bay window on the south side of the front façade. This has been replaced with the current single-storey parapeted projecting room, providing a large balcony to the first floor. The brickwork and run render mouldings of this later section match seamlessly those of the original house and the pattern of the cast-iron air bricks match as well, suggesting a late 1890s date for this alteration. Rate book records from the 1890s through the 1920s have been checked, but do not indicate when this minor enlargement was made.

Views to the ground-floor are partially obscured by a high brick fence, which is modern but sympathetic in its adoption of the materials palette of the house. Minor alterations were made to the house and site in 1999 (Stonnington Planning Permit 753/99). These include the addition of a glass canopy over the front door, and the extension of a raised deck to the rear of the house (not visible from the front). A glass-roofed carport may have also been built on the south side of the house at this time, but it is not visible from the street. It is likely that the tops of the chimneys have been altered (shortened) as the plain rectangular shaft is very unusual for the nineteenth century. Most likely the chimneys were originally corbelled at the top. In addition, the house retains hardware to the first floor windows, indicating that they once had external shutters (probably louvered timber shutters as seen at the similar 20 Hawksburn Road). Finally, the tiny roof dormers with their Gothic Revival influence seen in the bargeboards are an unlikely element of this Queen Anne Free Style building. This may mean that they are a later addition.

### **Comparative analysis**

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 English Domestic Revival designs by English architects



Richard Norman Shaw and William Eden Nesfield. They drew their inspiration from traditional English rural buildings and Tudor architecture (Tibbits 1989:52).

The first Queen Anne Revival houses in Australia, dating from the late 1880s to mid-1890s, were mostly architect designed and show a more direct British influence as well as a greater stylistic eclecticism than the Federation Queen Anne houses that filled Melbourne's suburbs after 1900. These houses often had a pronounced vertical massing and gabled roofs, showing a strong medieval influence. This contrasts with later sprawling Federation bungalows with hipped roofs extending over encircling verandahs. Apart from medieval (mainly Gothic and Tudor) influences, architects of this period drew upon styles as diverse as Romanesque (with muscular round arches and banded voussoirs), Scottish Baronial (with its pointed towers and crow-stepped parapets), Anglo-Dutch (with curvilinear gable parapets), Art Nouveau (with its sinuous ornament), and Japanese design (with overlapping line patterns of verandah fretwork). A correct, 'academic' use of historical forms was rare, instead they were employed and combined to suit the architect's fancy in a manner often referred to as 'Free Style'.

One of the biggest changes from Victorian Italianate to Queen Anne houses was in the form of the roof and verandah. The low-line M-profile hipped roof was supplanted by high gabled and hipped roofs with complex forms, turrets and gablets at the top. Tall chimneys of corbelled red brick, often with roughcast detail, were another distinguishing feature. Eventually the separate verandah structure, set below the eaves, was replaced by an unbroken roofline that swooped down to incorporate the verandah. Another transition seen in the late 1880s and 1890s was in cladding materials, moving from brown Hawthorn and cream brickwork to simpler red face brick with render bands, and from slate roofs to terracotta Marseille tiles with decorative ridgecapping and finials. Red brick combined with lighter bands, of cream brick or smooth render, is referred to colloquially as 'blood and bandages'. Howells (1989:16) believes this wall treatment was derived from the polychromy of English Gothic Revival architects.

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.

Examples of these early Federation houses of the late 1880s and 1890s graded Significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay can be divided into several groups according to size and stylistic advancement. The largest are mansions such as 'Redcourt' at 506 Orrong Road, Armadale (HO166), 6 Mayfield Avenue, Malvern (HO275), 'Edzell' at 76 St Georges Road, Toorak (VHR H691), and 'Illawarra' at 1 Illawarra Court, Toorak (VHR H701).

The greatest number are large houses, some on tighter inner-suburban blocks and others on sprawling sites where the building could be designed 'in the round'. Significant examples include the duplex at 3 & 5 Mercer Road, Armadale (HO327), 15 Avondale Road, Armadale (in HO123), 190-192 Wattletree Road, Malvern (in HO156), 10 Manning Road, Malvern (in HO133), 92 Finch Street, Malvern East (in HO133), 3 Forster Avenue, Malvern East (HO260), 15 Forster Avenue, Malvern East (HO310), 33, 45 & 49 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 59 Kensington Road, South Yarra (HO64), 280 Domain Road, South Yarra (in HO122), 18 & 20 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra (in HO137), and 70 Clendon Road, Toorak (in HO143).

Finally, there are the modest single-storey villas that exhibit the transition from the Victorian Italianate to Edwardian Queen Anne. Often they still have an Italianate M-profile hipped roof, and cast-iron verandah detail, but with a gabled projecting bay to the façade instead of the hipped bay seen on Italianate houses and always with the newly fashionable red face brick. Significant examples of this type include 103 Kooyong Road, Armadale (in HO130), 12-16 Mercer Road, Armadale (HO328-330), and 38 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134).

'Ilfracombe' is very closely comparable to 18 and 20 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra. The three were likely designed by the same architect. All three have the same strongly sculptural massing with a wide two-storey polygonal bay to one side of the façade, a high hipped roof, and red face brick contrasting with rendered lintels and sills. Interestingly, 20 Hawksburn Road retains its louvered timber shutters, indicating what 'Ilfracombe' looked like originally, and suggesting an early Georgian Revival stylistic influence.



*Figure 2. 20 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra (Significant in HO137) (source: R.T. Edgar 2014)*

The two Hawksburn Road houses differ from 'Ilfracombe' as they were both designed with a verandah across their front façade (with a return for no. 20, as seen on MMBW Detail Plan No. 971, 1896). Only no. 18 retains its single-storey verandah, which is typical of the late 1880s, with cast-iron posts, frieze and brackets.



*Figure 3. 18 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra (Significant in HO137) (source: Marshall White 2012)*



Another, somewhat smaller, two-storey Victorian house, which was also designed without a front verandah is found at 1 Palermo Street, South Yarra (Significant in HO128). It is Italianate in style, with rendered walls and segmentally arched windows, and appears to date from the 1880s. It is distinguished by its massing, with a two-storey canted bay to one side of the façade and a square canted bay expressed as a 'tower' on the other. Atop the tower feature is a mansard roof. The remainder of the roof is hidden behind a corniced parapet. It appears to be highly intact.

The house at 1 Palermo Street is not as stylistically advanced as 'Ilfracombe' – remaining Italianate in all of its detailing – but has an equally interesting and unusual massing.



Figure 4. 1 Palermo Street, South Yarra (Significant in HO128) (source: Google Streetview, 2014)

In comparison with these three examples, 'Ilfracombe' shares bold massing with 1 Palermo Street which discards the front verandah seen on almost all Victorian houses. Its red-brick and render palette, shared with 18 and 20 Hawksburn Road, was architecturally advanced for its built date, and their very restrained ornament and use of shutters suggests an early Georgian Revival influence. In terms of intactness, 'Ilfracombe' sits in the middle of the continuum. It is a bit less intact than 1 Palermo Street, similar to 18 Hawksburn Road, and more intact than 20 Hawksburn Road which has lost its verandah.

In conclusion, 'Ilfracombe' is a striking example of the major changes in architectural design in the late 1880s, completely rejecting the applied cement and cast-iron ornament that typified Victorian Italianate houses and moving to a very modern, sculptural and stripped back form without even a verandah. The two-storey polygonal bay on the façade is the main decorative feature, as are the contrasting red face brick and render dressings. The design approach can be seen as a free form interpretation of the Queen Anne Revival from Britain, and is reflected in the geometric leadlight highlights. The use of louvered shutters (removed) and stripped-back detail also suggests an early Georgian Revival influence.

## **Thematic context**

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

*8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion*

*8.6.1 Sharing houses*

## **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?**

'Ilfracombe', at 40 Murphy Street, South Yarra, is significant. The house was built in 1889-90 for pioneer of the Australian accounting profession, Joseph Henry Flack, and his wife Marion. The Flacks resided there until their deaths in 1918 and 1924, respectively.

The house is two-storeys in height and built of red face brick with cement-rendered dressings. The main roof is a high hipped roof covered in slate. The façade is dominated by a wide two-storey projecting polygonal bay on one side, and a single-storey projecting room with a parapet on the other. The projecting room was an early addition. The house is entered via a small porch structure on the north side.

The front brick fence, side garage and glass hood over the front door are not significant.

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

'Ilfracombe' is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

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

Architecturally, 'Ilfracombe' is a striking example of the major changes in architectural design in the late 1880s, completely rejecting the applied cement and cast-iron ornament that typified Victorian Italianate houses and moving to a very modern, sculptural and stripped back form without even a verandah. The two-storey polygonal bay on the façade is the main decorative feature, as are the contrasting red face brick and render dressings. The design approach can be seen as a free form interpretation of the Queen Anne Revival from Britain, and is reflected in the geometric leadlight highlights. The use of louvered shutters (removed) and stripped-back detail also suggests an early Georgian Revival influence. (Criterion D)

## **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



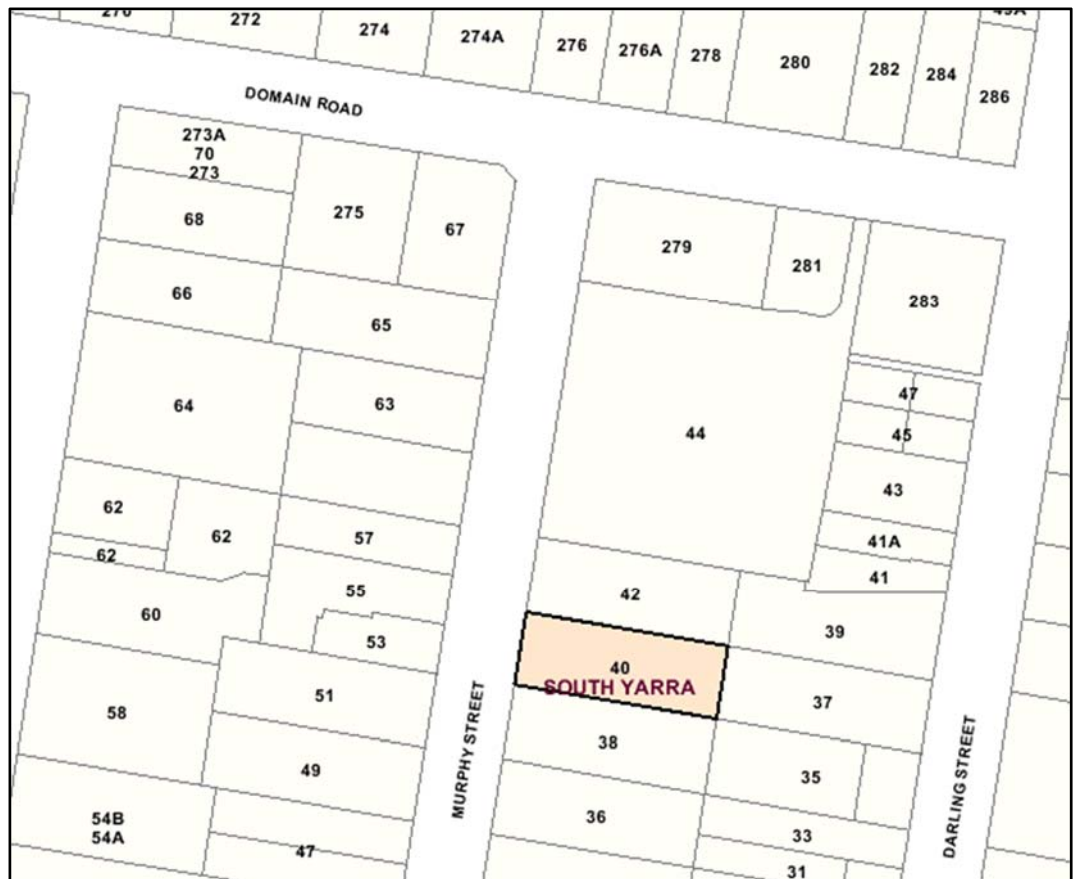


Figure 5: Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 40 Murphy Street, South Yarra (source: [www.land.vic.gov.au](http://www.land.vic.gov.au))

Recommended grading: A2