

14 & 16 William Street, South Yarra

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Duplex

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

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.

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.

South Yarra was home to many of Melbourne's wealthiest and most influential people, including businessmen and merchants, professionals, academics, retired graziers and diplomats; the close proximity to Victoria Barracks also attracted military men to the suburb. Well-known families that lived in South Yarra in the nineteenth century included the Armytages and the

Deakins. A number of fine churches and private schools, including Melbourne Girls' Grammar School (Merton Hall), and Melbourne Grammar School and Christ Church Grammar School (outside the municipality), were established in South Yarra in the mid to late nineteenth century.

Place history

The residences comprised of 14 and 16 William Street, South Yarra, were erected in c.1877 as double-storeyed terraces. The original numbering was no. 8 for 14 William Street and no. 10 for 16 William Street. In 1877-78 Henry Everest owned no. 14 and Robert Fulton owned and occupied no. 16. Both houses were described at this time as 7-roomed brick dwellings, and rated at £84 each (RB). Henry Everest was a Toorak builder who erected several residences in William Street, South Yarra, after acquiring land there in 1876. The other residences he built were the two-storey villa at 10 William Street and a house, since demolished, at 12 William Street (Porter 2013: 2).

In 1899, James H. Turner of 176 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, was the owner of both houses at 14 and 16 William Street (RB).

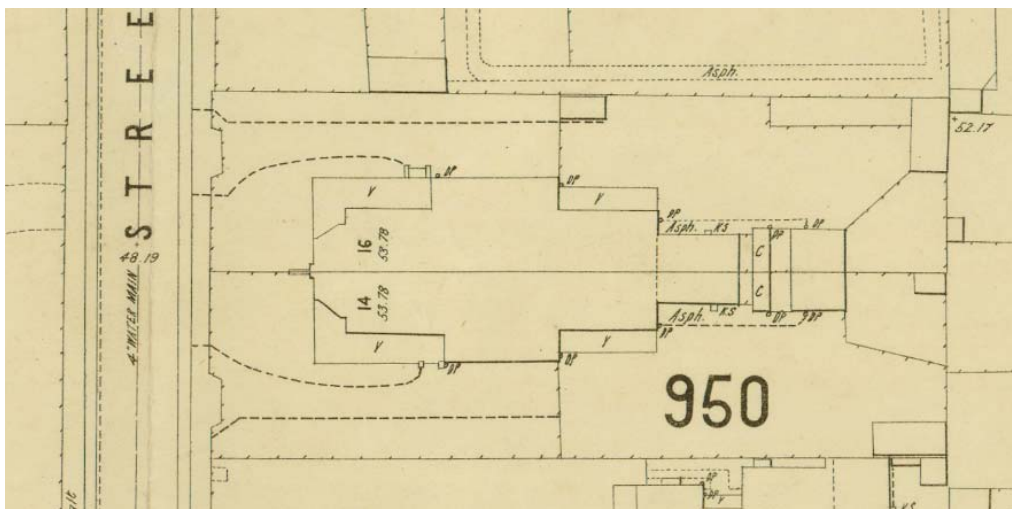


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan No. 950, dated 1895. (SLV)

The MMBW detail plan of 1895 shows the two terrace houses each with a return verandah at the front, and a rear side verandah; they are identical in terms of the layout of the house and outbuildings.

The house at 16 William Street was extended at the rear in the c1940s (*Age* 1 May 1993). By 2016, there was also a single-storey extension to the rear of no. 14 as well, visible in aerial views but not from the street.



Figure 2. 14 & 16 William Street, South Yarra. Note: the original balustrade cast-iron to no. 16 is visible here. (source: National Trust file B4391)

Sources

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Physical description

The houses at 14 and 16 William Street, South Yarra, are a pair of two-storey Italianate semi-detached houses. They are carefully massed to resemble a single mansion house, with symmetrical return verandahs terminating at a massive two-storey canted bay window in the centre of the (shared) façade. Each dwelling is entered via the side elevation, as part of a very three-dimensional composition.

The hipped roof is covered in slate and retains red brick chimneys with cement render cornices. The roof form is shared over the two dwellings, with no projecting party wall. Overall it is T-shaped in plan with a narrower front section surrounded by two return verandahs, and a semi-hexagonal hipped roof above the large canted bay window that spans most of the front façade. The eaves have brackets of a bold design and pierced holes set on a ground of red brick. The walls beneath the verandahs are of red brick with beltcourses of cream and black (tinted) bricks as well as cream bricks to the round-arched window and door openings. They are set on rock-faced bluestone foundations. The polychrome brickwork stands out against the cement-rendered sections around it.

The central canted bay window is a bold and highly modelled design feature. In contrast to the two wings that flank it, the walls are rendered, apart from the eaves. Windows to the ground floor have round-headed arches set between pilasters and below a moulded arch. Above the ground floor is a deeply moulded and dentilated cornice. Windows to the first floor have segmental arched heads and the associated mouldings and pilasters, plus a blind balustrade below each. The central window is also framed in full-height pilasters with Corinthian capitals.

To either side of the canted bay is a two-storey verandah. The verandahs terminate at the projecting rear wings, which are rendered. The verandahs each have a shallow convex roof and slender cast-iron columns and brackets used on both floors (with shorter first-floor columns). At ground floor level there is a rinceaux frieze within a chamfered timber frame. At the front corner is a cluster of three columns at each floor level, with an arched insert between them. No. 14 retains its original heavy floral cast-iron balustrade panels.

The two houses are highly intact, with the only alteration noted being the replacement of the first-floor balustrade cast-iron to no. 16. The retention of unpainted face brick is unusual among large Victorian houses in South Yarra. Both have modern rear extensions, but these are set well back and single-storey in form.

Both houses stand behind high modern fences, but are visible down wide driveways.

Comparative analysis

The terraced house form was introduced from Britain and characterises inner suburban development from the 1850s to the 1890s in Australia's capital cities. A terrace house is defined as a dwelling with blind boundary walls, designed to fit on a narrow building block. While the most common type of terrace house in Melbourne is the terrace row, of three or more houses sharing party walls, the terrace house was also built in pairs (semi-detached) and even singly where more space was available (Tibbits & Goad 2012:695).

The prevalence of attached housing types is very clearly related to the subdivision and settlement patterns of the different suburbs. For example, all terrace rows assessed in the Victorian Houses Heritage Study are located in Windsor.

While Windsor had by far the densest 19th-century development in Stonnington, inner-suburban South Yarra also had a number of semi-detached terrace house pairs, which was an intermediate density. Further to the east, in Armadale and Malvern, as well as Windsor and South Yarra, we see large single terrace houses on wider blocks with space between them. While not attached, they were often built in rows.

Almost all Victorian terraces could be described as Italianate in style, though some lean toward the more substantial Renaissance Revival. There are also a very small number of Gothic Revival examples.

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 (Statham, 2008).

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.

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.

The houses at 14 & 16 William Street are one of a number of substantial semi-detached pairs in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, such as 21 & 23 and 38 & 40 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra (both Significant in HO137).



Figure 3. A more typical substantial semi-detached pair at 21 & 23 Hawksburn Road, South Yarra (Significant in HO137). (source: Google Streetview)

The use of the massive canted bay at the centre of the composition of 14 & 16 William Street, however, is a very unusual and creative design solution. It suggests the melding of two typical asymmetrical Italianate villas, with half of the façade occupied by a canted bay window and the other half set behind a front – or more rarely, a return – verandah.

The quality of the cement-render detail of the façade is comparable to that seen on substantial houses such as 80 Williams Road, Prahran (Significant in HO155), and across the street at 21 William Street, South Yarra (HO462).



Figure 4. 21 William Street, South Yarra (HO462). The verandah is a sympathetic reconstruction. (source: Context 2016)

While quite different in its overall form and massing, the creativity and sophistication of the design of 14 & 16 William Street can be compared to the two-storey terrace at 131-135 Williams Road, Prahran (Significant in HO155), a substantial structure which uses a parapeted terrace house as a centrepiece and towered houses with return verandahs to either side.

In conclusion, 14 & 16 William Street displays a very creative and successful design solution to the massing of semi-detached dwellings, which creates a sculptural building which is read as a whole. The modelled render ornament to the massive front canted bay is of the highest quality. The contrast of the polychrome brickwork with the rendered parts of the building is an unusual and striking. While the designer of the pair has not been identified, their skill is self-evident.

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

8.2 Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

8.4.2 Functional, eccentric & theatrical - experimentation & innovation in architecture

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 semi-detached pair of two-storey houses at 14 & 16 William Street, South Yarra, are significant. They were built by Toorak builder, Henry Everest, c.1877 along with houses at 10 William Street and 12 William Street (demolished).

The semi-detached pair are massed to look like a single mansion, sharing a very wide two-storey canted bay at the centre of the front façade, which is flanked by return verandahs with cast-iron detail. The projecting bay is finished with cast and run cement render detail, as are the rear wings which sit behind the return verandahs. The walls beneath the verandah, however, are of polychrome brick.

The front fences and rear extensions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The pair at 14 & 16 William Street is of local aesthetic and technical significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Aesthetically, the pair is distinguished by modelled render ornament to the massive front canted bay of the highest quality. The contrast of the polychrome brickwork with the rendered parts of the building is also unusual and striking. (Criterion E)

Technically, the design of 14 & 16 William Street displays a very creative and successful solution to the massing of semi-detached dwellings, using a massive two-storey canted bay window at the centre of the shared façade, which creates a sculptural building read as a whole. This form has not been identified elsewhere in Stonnington, but suggests the melding of two typical asymmetrical Italianate villas. (Criterion F)

Recommendations

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

HO Schedule controls: None

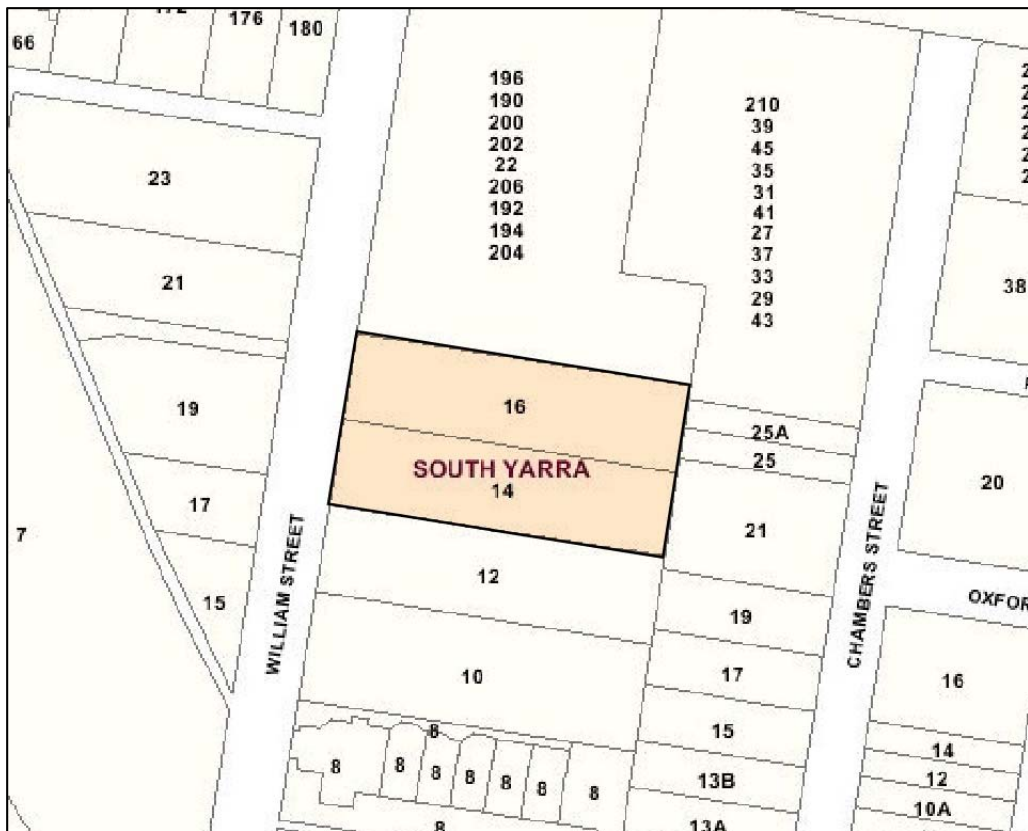


Figure 5. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 14-16 William Street, South Yarra (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A1