

36 High Street, Windsor

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), House

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

Locality history

Windsor lies in the south-west corner of the former City of Prahran, bounded by Punt Road, High Street, Dandenong Road and Williams Road. Windsor developed as a distinctive pocket of smaller, more affordable housing for the working-class (servants, labourers, skilled tradespeople) and the lower middle class (shopkeepers, mechanics, salesmen). Following the first land sales in the 1840s and 1850s, small timber and brick cottages were erected along either side of narrow streets. In 1855 there was not a single large house within the bounds of Windsor (Kearney, 1855). An early suburban railway station was opened in Windsor in 1859, as part of the private Hobsons Bay line, which encouraged housing development in the immediate vicinity.

The small houses of the working-class in Windsor were rudimentary, and families lived cheek by jowl in narrow streets. Cottages had minimal land and there was little public open space. Community life was lived on the streets, as well as in the churches, schools and other places of learning. Local men and women (and children over 14) were employed in local shops and factories and in service positions for the big houses, as well as all manner of occupations, for example with the railways, as labourers in construction work, and as carters and delivery men. Many women and girls were employed as outworkers in the textile industry and as off-site whiteworkers (women who washed white clothes and manchester) for the big houses. Women with little financial support often took in boarders to help make ends meet.

The busy commercial strip of Chapel Street provided a focal point for Windsor, though the quality of commercial buildings at the Windsor end were somewhat inferior to the South Yarra end. All manner of traders operated along Chapel Street and a tramline was constructed in 1888, which brought more shoppers. There were also a number of hotels, both on Chapel Street and in small side-streets.

Unlike other areas of the City of Stonnington, Windsor contains a predominance of working-class housing. Examples can be seen in the small narrow streets on the east side of Chapel Street such as McIlwrick Street (formerly Hanover Street, but renamed during World War I),

and the block of streets between Chapel Street and Punt Road. A handful of early cottages from the 1850s and 1860s survive.

Housing development continued through the boom years of Melbourne in the 1880s and early 1890s, with many small cottages improved and replaced by larger dwellings. The suburb was reduced in area in the 1960s when the new road Queensway was built in the 1960s and a slice of south-west Windsor was taken off; the area on the south side of Queensway became part of St Kilda (Wilde 1993: 142).

Place history

The first house on this site was erected c1864. Bootmaker Edward Attfield was rated £30 for a timber house of 5 rooms on this site in 1864 (RB). Attfield was also rated for land which may refer to the block next door (now no. 40). In 1873 he was rated at the same address for the same amount for a 5-roomed timber and brick shop (RB). In 1880, the rate books describe Attfield as a builder and he is charged rates of £32 for a 5-roomed brick house and shop (RB). This c1880 brick building was likely the first stage of the current house.

Attfield owned the property at 36 High Street for over 20 years and presumably ran his boot-making shop from the shop section. Following that, Jessie Taylor owned the house from 1886 to 1890, during which time she converted the building into two dwellings. In 1889 the rate books list two dwellings for the first time, no. 36 with 4 rooms and rated at £32, and no. 38 with 3 rooms and rated at £28 (RB). Jessie Taylor rented out both dwellings.

This was a big jump in value from the previous year, when the combined property was rated at £36, and may indicate rebuilding or a large extension. Looking at the building today, there is no separation lengthwise (with two front doors and a party wall down the middle), but the complex roof form does suggest that the front and back halves may have once been separate tenancies.

In 1891, the new owner James Cook converted the building back to a single dwelling, as he was rated £56 for a brick house of 7 rooms (RB).

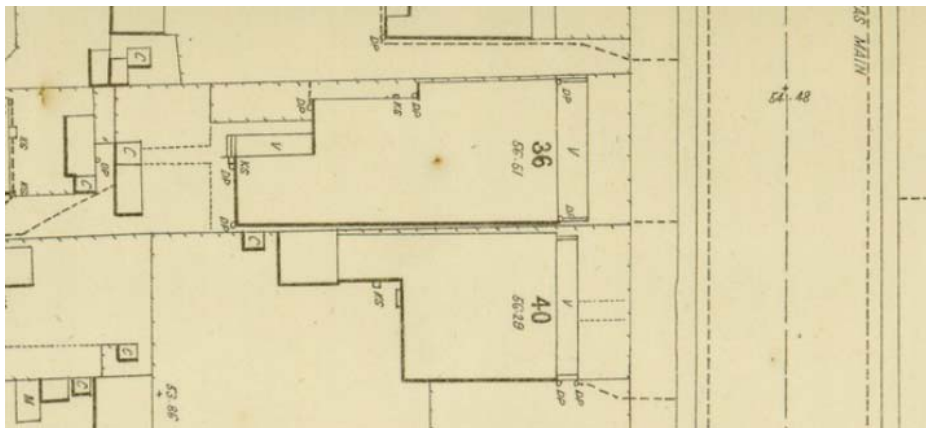


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan no. 963, dated 1896 (SLV).

The next owner was architect William Espenett, who bought it by 1896 (RB). The MMBW detail plan of 1896 shows a modest house built to the side boundaries with a shallow setback and front verandah. The overall footprint of the house is the same as we see today apart from the replacement of the back verandah with a larger lean-to or patio area, and changes to the front verandah.

The masonry piers of the front portico are not shown on the MMBW plan (which would have been based on measurements taken c1895). Considering Espenett's profession, and the sophistication of the portico's design, it is likely that he was responsible for this improvement. Certainly the portico had been built by the interwar period, as it is visible in an aerial photo of that time (see below).



Figure 2. Detail of aerial photo showing 36 High Street with its front portico and large rear wing. (source: Pratt, Charles D (c1925-40) 'Aerial view along Malvern Road, Prahran', *Airspy Collection of Aerial Photographs*, SLV)

The house was advertised for sale in 1966, described as a 'Charming Victorian Villa' of solid brick, comprising 5 bedrooms, 2 good kitchens... (Age, 9 April 1966). The existence of the extra kitchen may relate to the former use of the building for two dwellings, but more likely was a later addition in the twentieth century when it was again used for dual occupancy.

Sources

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Physical description

The house at 36 High Street, Windsor, is a double-fronted single-storey Italianate terrace house. It sits behind a modest front garden and the side walls are built to the boundaries. It has a hipped roof and symmetrically placed rendered and corniced chimneys, as well as bracketed front eaves, all typical of the Italianate style. Walls are finished in cement render.

The façade is dominated by a fine classical portico, which is unusual in its size and formality for a house of this scale. To either side of this portico is a length of more typical front verandah. As the house is built to the side boundaries, it has party walls on both sides, higher than the house itself which are stepped down for the verandah wing walls. Each side of the verandah rests on cast-iron posts and has a heavy cast iron frieze and brackets.



Figure 3. 36 High Street during the 1970s before the current front wall was built. (source: CUA collection, SLV).

The central front door has a segmental arched highlight. To either side are paired segmental arched sash windows. The portico is also of rendered masonry, with round-arched openings on three sides with expressed keystones, and pilasters. The front arched opening is framed by pilasters, above which is a cornice and triangular pediment resting on boldly modelled modillions. The tympanum of the pediment is defined by a circular and two triangular panels.

The party walls are also highly decorated, though in a less academic manner than the portico. On their face, beside the verandah are engaged Corinthian columns, above which is a panel and the base for an orb or urn. The transition between the lower verandah wing walls and the taller house party walls is made by two scrolled corbels.

The roof has been reclad with terracotta tiles, while the original cladding was likely slate, as seen in the c1970s photos above, and the front door was replaced c1960s. The current high masonry front fence impedes views to the house.

Comparative analysis

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 this study are located in Windsor. As noted by the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context, 2009) in the first land sales in the 1840s:

At Windsor on the south-west corner of the study area, the blocks were smaller and brought the highest price per acre, presumably because of their proximity to the already developing suburb of St Kilda, from which settlement was expected to flow. This corner was soon subdivided for working-class housing and small shops.

This early subdivision pattern has had a lasting impact on Windsor, with small allotment sizes leading to development of denser dwelling types than elsewhere in Stonnington. Both early examples of terrace rows with unbroken roofs and eaves are seen in Windsor, as well as later examples with expressed party walls.

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.

As the style evolved to accommodate less substantial residential types, the deliberate asymmetry and rambling form inspired by the Picturesque massing of wings and towers of buildings such as Osbourne became less central to the mode. So much so that the Italianate terrace forms of the 1880s were not substantially different to their forebears of a generation earlier apart from an appliqué of 'Italian' detailing.

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.

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.

Stylistically, the house at 36 High Street is a typical example of the Italianate style applied to a modest dwelling, with characteristic features including the low M-profile hipped roof, ruled rendered walls and chimneys, moulded cornices to the chimneys, bracketed eaves, and cast-iron posts and frieze to the front verandah. In terms of its building type, it is massed like a typical free-standing house, but adopts terrace-like wing walls as it is built to the side boundaries. The classical portico at the centre of the façade is the most distinctive feature. It appears to be a later addition, as it is distinguished from the rest of the façade by the classical

correctness of its details as well as the different form of the modillions to the eaves brackets on the main part of the house.

There are a number of small to medium-sized Italianate houses that are individually significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, most of them in 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. Examples of this type include the restrained polychrome brick 36 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134), the polychrome brick 35 McIlwrick, Windsor (in HO138), the timber 29 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456), and the row of bichrome brick houses at 12-20 Greville Street, Prahran (in HO456). There is a clear favouring of houses with interesting detail, such as multi-coloured brickwork, among those graded Significant. Significant Italianate houses with rendered walls are seen on The Avenue, Windsor, but these have more complex designs featuring various projections and ornament. The use of party walls to otherwise typical Italianate houses is also seen elsewhere in these suburbs, such as the rendered asymmetrical pair at 20 & 22 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456). No party walls were identified, however, with a similar level of ornament as seen at 36 High Street.



Figure 4. A typical polychrome brick Italianate house at 35 McIlwrick Street, Windsor (Significant in HO138). (source: Google Streetview).

With the addition of the classical portico, most likely in the late 1890s, the house at 36 High Street can also be compared with a more sophisticated class of Italianate villas that adopt a masonry portico. One example is 52 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148), where the portico has a balustraded parapet, typical of the Boom style. Another, even grander example, is 'Northbrook' at 1257 High Street, Malvern (HO59), which also has a parapeted portico, but has lost its return verandah.



Figure 5. 52 *The Avenue, Windsor* (Significant in HO148). (source: Google Streetview).

In conclusion, 36 High Street is a typical example of an 1880s Italianate house of modest size, which is distinguished by the fine classical portico added to its façade after 1895, and also by the high level of ornament applied to its wing walls.

Thematic context

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

8.4.3 Architects and their houses

8.5.1 'Struggletown' - working-class housing in the nineteenth & early twentieth century

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?

The house at 36 High Street, Windsor, is significant. It was built in several phases, beginning with a timber house in 1864, to which a brick shop was added in 1873, owned and occupied by bootmaker Edward Attfield. The current house appears to date from c1880. The masonry front portico was added after 1895, probably by owner-occupier architect William Espenett.

It is a single-storey Italianate house with a symmetrical façade. Typical features of this style include the low M-profile hipped roof, ruled rendered walls and chimneys, moulded cornices to the chimneys, bracketed eaves, segmental arched openings, and cast-iron posts and frieze to the front verandah. Due to its narrow inner-suburban block, it has wing-walls along the side boundaries.

The masonry front fence and the terracotta roof tiles are not significant.

How is it significant?

The house is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Aesthetically, the house at 36 High Street is distinguished by the fine classical portico added to its façade after 1895, and also by the high level of ornament applied to its wing walls. The portico is of rendered masonry, with round-arched openings on three sides with expressed keystones, and pilasters. The front arched opening is framed by pilasters, above which is a cornice and triangular pediment resting on boldly modelled modillions. The tympanum of the pediment is carefully defined by one circular and two triangular panels. (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

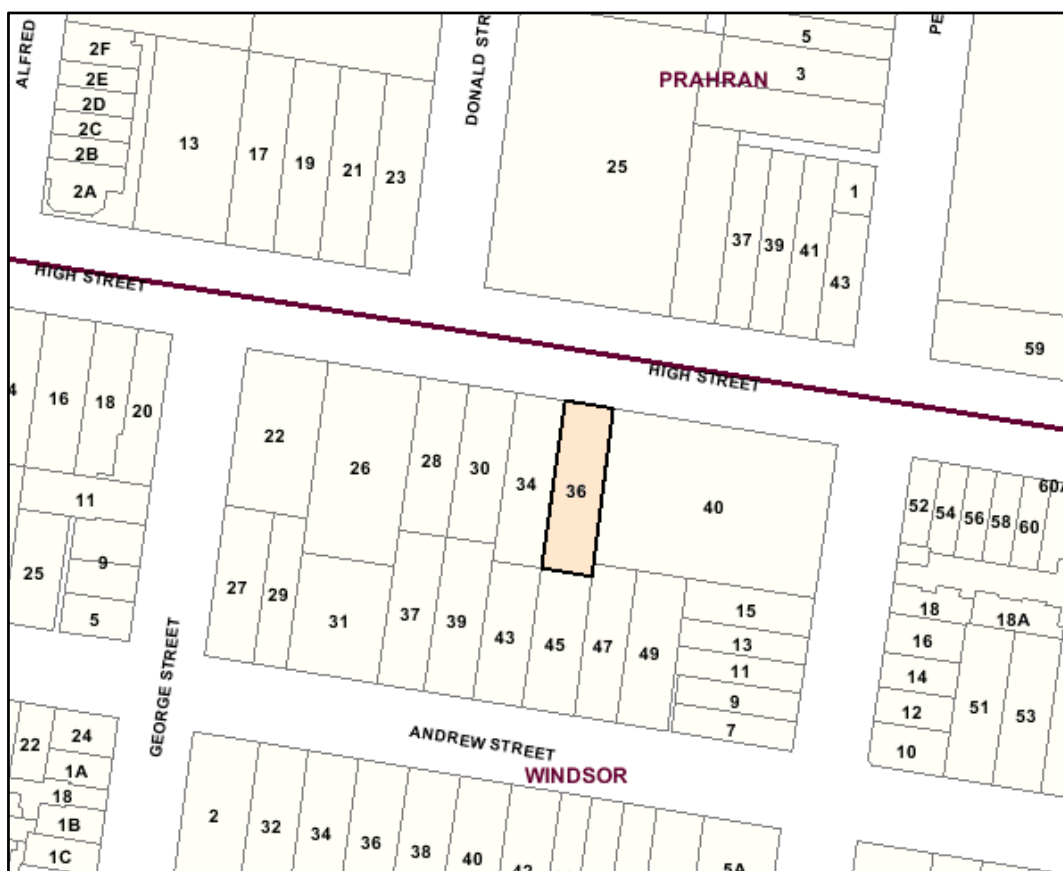


Figure 6: Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 36 High Street, Windsor (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2