

'Benyeo'

35 Bruce Street, Toorak

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Villa

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

Locality history

Toorak is situated on the elevated south side of the Yarra River, with views across the river to the city of Melbourne. Toorak has played a key role in Melbourne's social and cultural history, and is regarded Australia-wide as a symbol of wealth and influence. It has long been recognised as Melbourne's most affluent suburb. Although it was elevation and topography that established Toorak as a fashionable address, its name in fact comes from an Aboriginal word for 'reedy swamp'.

The first Crown land sales south of the Yarra took place in the 1840s and 1850s. 'Toorak House', built by merchant James Jackson, along with its extensive grounds, was acquired by the newly established Victorian government in 1851 as Victoria's first Government House. The creation of a vice-regal seat in 1851 set the tone for social exclusivity and was the foundation for Toorak's development as a desirable address.

As Melbourne developed and industrialised in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the wealthy middle-class – including merchants, industrialists, professional men, military men, politicians, and men and women of 'independent means' – sought to escape the bustle of the city and to settle in a quieter, more spacious environment. Paddocks and native bush gave way to large estates and substantial homes. The approach to Toorak was via the Gardiners Creek Road (later Toorak Road), which was the chief east–west route; the drive along it was described as 'very pleasant' in 1879 (Whitworth 1879: 390). Toorak was also accessed from the private punt at Grange Road that linked the two sides of the Yarra and also, from 1879, via the Oakleigh railway line.

During the 1870s and 1880s, many large mansions were erected, usually to an architect's plan. Many adopted the Italianate style of architecture and, like 'Toorak House', were surmounted with a decorative square tower. Toorak in its heyday appeared as an impressive collection of large country estates within relatively close proximity in pleasant, undulating country but nevertheless a suburban setting. Typically, each house was served by a large complex of outbuildings, including servants' quarters (for laundrywomen, cook, housemaids, nursemaid, etc); a laundry; accommodation for gardeners and groomsmen and toolsheds for their equipment; and stables and carriage house. Each estate effectively constituted a self-contained entity.

The scale and extravagances of these residences reached a peak during the land boom of the 1880s as merchants and others among Melbourne's expanding *nouveaux riches* sought a prestigious address. Toorak's mansions were often sumptuously and exquisitely decorated in the latest styles. Their owners could afford to 'go Home' to Britain, and to travel through Europe, and bring back art and other decorative pieces not easily obtainable in the colonies. Large estates also allowed for the establishment of impressive ornamental gardens, often incorporating a conservatory and a fernery, and these were often in keeping with prevailing good taste and in sympathy with the design of the house. In many cases, affluent property owners commissioned landscape designers.

At its height, from the 1870s and up until the dawn of the First World War, Toorak society represented an unusually high concentration of wealth, power and influence not seen elsewhere in Australia. This was home to many of Melbourne's wealthiest and most influential families, including the Baillieu, Clarke, Grimwade, Fairburn, Fink, Miller and Myer families. The salubrious environs of Toorak also provided a seasonal base in Melbourne for wealthy landed families (predominantly Western District graziers).

The population of Toorak was dominantly British and overwhelmingly Protestant. St John's Church of England was a lynchpin of Toorak social life in the Victorian era; it was the preferred venue for Society weddings and became a symbol of social aspiration. Other 'English' influences in the development of Toorak can be seen in the Tudor Revival style of a number of the interwar-era shopfronts along Toorak Road.

Some large estates were subdivided in the 1880s during the frenzied period of the property boom. Other parts of Toorak were developed with more typical middle-class homes of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. There was very minimal, if any, industry in Toorak proper, although many of its elevated homes had clear views across the Yarra of the factories with their chimney smoke that were concentrated on the Richmond flats.

Place history

This area of Toorak was part of the extensive 'Balmerino' estate, which occupied Crown portion 14 in the Parish of Prahran, and stretched from the Yarra River to Bruce Street. It occupied an elevated area of Toorak on a picturesque bend of the Yarra River. The large house known as 'Balmerino Home' had been erected by wealthy Scotsman Robert Anstruther Balbirnie-Vans in the 1840s (Robb 1934: 63). Following her husband's death, 'Balmerino' was owned by his widow Mrs Agnes Balbirnie-Vans, who advertised 'Balmerino Home, home and grounds' for sale in 1869 (*Argus* 27 May 1869). The property comprised '28 acres and 3 perches of freehold land, beautifully laid out into walks, shrubberies [etc] ... running down to the River Yarra' (*Argus* 27 May 1869). The estate was broken up for sale, with the first sales of land advertised in 1870 as highly desirable suburban allotments on elevated land above the Yarra. Three of the allotments advertised for sale in 1870 fronted Bruce Street, which was then called George Street (*Argus* 26 April 1870).

From c1869, 'Balmerino Home' (formerly sited in the vicinity of today's Balmerino Avenue) was occupied by the Melbourne merchant John Benn, a partner in the firm Grice, Sumner & Co., but continued to be owned by the executors of the Balbirnie-Vans Estate (*Argus* 27 May 1869). Benn was rated as an occupant of two properties in Bruce Street in 1877 and 1882, both of which were owned by the executors of Balbirnie-Vans (RB).

The Balmerino Estate was advertised for subdivision in 1886. The advertisement for subdivision in 1886 describes the Balmerino Estate as 'lately occupied by J. Benn Esquire', indicating that he was no longer residing there. The area offered in this subdivision was described as occupying 'this most Aristocratic part of Toorak' (Munro & Baillieu 1886). The house at 35 Bruce Street was erected on allotment 8 of the subdivision plan of the 'Balmerino Estate' of 1886 (Figure 1).

TOORAK.
BALMERINO ESTATE
Lately occupied by J. BENN, Esq.

MUNRO & BAILLIEU
In Conjunction with E. J. DIXON,

Have been instructed to Sell on
SATURDAY, 5th JUNE
24 ALLOTMENTS 24
IN THIS MAGNIFICENT ESTATE.

An examination of the Plan, hereto, is the best evidence that the Land offered for Sale is absolutely the very pick of this delightful Suburb, its position, lying back from the Toorak Road, about 2 minutes walk through Wallace Street, is all that the lovers of luxury and retirement could desire.

The Property is situated upon the highest part of Toorak proper, and is surrounded by the residences of Mrs. Armatage (Como), A. Landale, Esq., D. Power, Esq., J. W. DeLmeida, Esq., M. H. Davies, Esq., Hon. Jas. Williamson and many other beautiful mansions.

This is the only available Land un subdivided within the limits of this Aristocratic part of Toorak, and the Sale offers an opportunity to everyone of securing an allotment in this the most delightful Suburb of Melbourne.

On a large proportion of the Lots to be Sold there are beautiful Trees, of many years growth, and valuable Shrubs.

EVERYONE SHOULD INSPECT THIS PROPERTY

The TERMS are exceedingly Liberal for such Valuable Land, viz.:

£10 DEPOSIT, Balance 2, 4, 6 and 8 Months, at 6 per cent.

The TITLE is a CERTIFICATE, and may be seen on application to Messrs. **YEE & BERT,** Solicitors, 40 Collins-st. E.

Conveyances leave the South Yarra Station on arrival of the 2.25, 2.45 3.5 P.M. Trains from Melbourne.
Luncheon in Spacious Marquee.

AT THE SAME TIME AND PLACE,
BALMERINO HOUSE,
With the Land as shown upon the Plan, will be Sold.

The House is well and faithfully built and contains large accommodation. The Drawing and Dining Rooms are exceedingly spacious measuring about 38 x 20.

The Stable accommodation is all new and replete with every convenience. The Auctioneers would specially request all requiring a House of this description, to inspect the Property previous to the day of Sale.

TERMS: 1/4 CASH; balance 6, 12 and 18 Months, at 6 per cent.; or, at Purchaser's option, Mortgage for balance for 3 Years at 6 per cent.

TROEDER & CO. LITH.

Figure 1. Munro & Baillieu, advertisement for allotments on the Balmerino Estate, 1886 (source: SLV). Note that Balmerino Road, shown in the plan above, has since been renamed Canberra Road.

The house at 35 Bruce Street known as 'Benyeo', together with the house next door (known as 'Miegunyah'), were built by the prominent property speculator C.H. James between November 1890 and November 1891, on the cusp of the financial crash in 1891. Charles Henry James (1848-1898) was a property speculator turned millionaire, active in the 1880s. He was one of the first of the so-called 'land boomers' in Melbourne, who made a substantial fortune from property speculation and then lost it (Beever 1972; Cannon 1995). He has been described as 'one of the most flamboyant land boomers of the 1880s' (VHR citation H0701 for 'Illawarra', Toorak). James was originally a grocer in North Melbourne before commencing extensive speculative buying and selling of suburban land in Melbourne (Cannon 1995). He was responsible for the development of St Georges Road, Toorak, and his opulent mansion, 'Illawarra' (VHR H0701), was erected in 1889 to a design by James Birtwhistle. He was also elected a Member of the Legislative Council.

In 1886-87, C.H. James was rated for two allotments on the north side of Bruce Street, near Balmerino Road. Both sites were land only. He was hoping to profit from the highly desirable suburban blocks on the Balmerino Estate. In 1888, the rate books list C.H. James as owning a 9-roomed brick house in Bruce Street with the adjacent land owned by the Balbirnie Estate (RB). This residence was erected on the most westerly of the two allotments (which today is 29 Bruce Street; now replaced with an interwar Marcus Martin house), while the second block appears to have been further subdivided for two house blocks (RB).

The rate books in 1889 list C.H. James as owning one 10-roomed brick house in Bruce Street with the adjacent land comprising two blocks. The site of 35 Bruce Street was owned by James R. Dobson but was not yet developed (RB). The following year the rate books, recorded in November 1890, list C.H. James as owning the 10-roomed brick house in Bruce Street and also the adjacent two blocks (i.e. 35 and 37 Bruce Street). The site of 35 Bruce Street was let to Hugh MacMeikan, gentleman – no residence had been erected by that time (RB). James claimed to have put his Balmerino properties in Bruce Street into the name of his wife Harriette in 1890, when he was declared insolvent, but the rate books do not reflect this (*Argus* 2 May 1890). He had also transferred the title to his Toorak mansion, ‘Illawarra’, into his wife’s name in 1890 to avoid sequestration (Cannon 1995: 174).

The rate records of November 1891 list C.H. James as owning a total of three 10-room brick houses in Bruce Street. The site of 35 Bruce Street, now with a 10-roomed brick house on it, was still let to Hugh MacMeikan, gentleman (RB). It is not known who the architect was, if any, but the two houses ‘Benyeo’ and ‘Miegunyah’ have a virtually identical layout and almost certainly were designed by the same person.

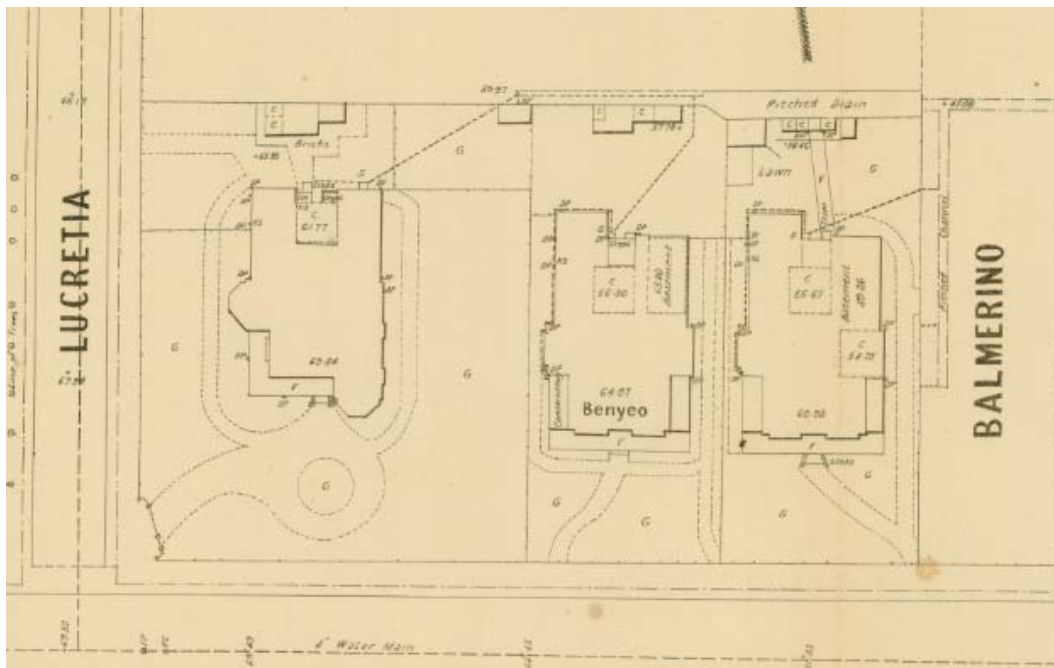


Figure 2. The three houses erected by land boomer C.H. James in Bruce Street, Toorak. The house at 35 Bruce Street, marked as ‘Benyeo’ in the centre, is the sole survivor of these three, MMBW detail plan no. 938, 1900 (source: SLV).

In 1899, the three houses, including 35 Bruce Street, were owned by ‘Harriet [sic.] H. James’ and leased out (RB). Harriette James (née Hardy) was the widow of C.H. James (Beever 1972). In 1899, 35 Bruce Street was let to barrister Gerald Pigott (RB 1899). A later occupant/owner was A.J. Cartwright in 1923 (Context 1994: 37).

The MMBW detail plan of 1900 shows a comfortable Victorian-style villa residence, marked ‘Benyeo’, with a conservatory on the west side and a garden in the front. The slope of the land towards the north allowed for a basement at the rear. There are toilets and outbuildings at the rear. The house on the immediate east has an identical footprint. The house was almost certainly named after the well-known pastoral station ‘Benyeo’ in the Wimmera, established by squatter William Laidlaw. It is not known who named the house, and no particular association

is known to exist between any of the early owners or occupiers and Benyeo station, apart from the fact that C.H. James was also a grazier and that it was fashionable in Victoria at the time to name city residences after a country property.

The area was described as 'Prahran Sewerage District 222' in 1907 which notes the house 'Benyeo' on Bruce Street, and the house on the adjoining allotment on the east side, named 'Miegunyah' (*Age* 10 July 1907).

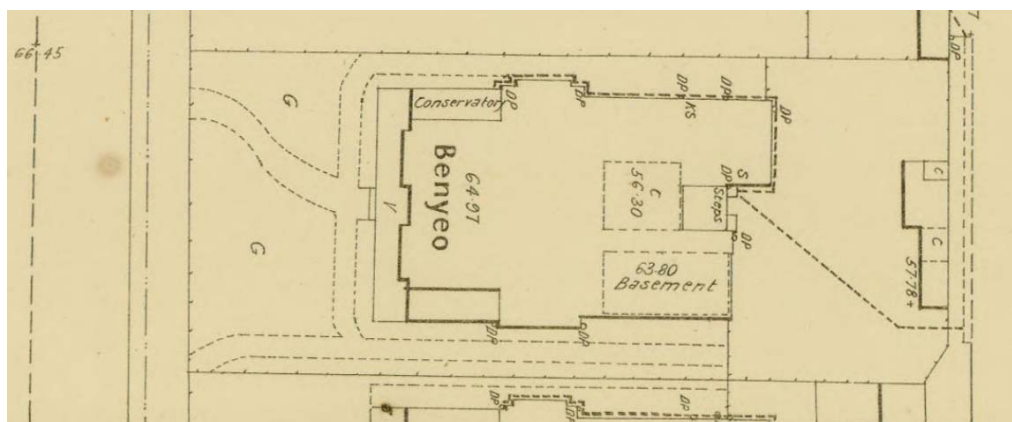


Figure 3. Detail from MMBW Detail Plan No. 938, City of Prahran, dated 1900 (source: SLV)

In 1964 the house was described as one of 'Melbourne's most distinctive private homes' when it was open to the public for a charitable fund-raiser (*Age* 15 August 1964). A sales notice in 1977 described the house as having 'solid bluestone foundations, [and a] slate roof' (*Age* 20 April 1977). By 1977, additions had been built at the rear of the house, along with an in-ground swimming pool (*Age* 23 April 1977).

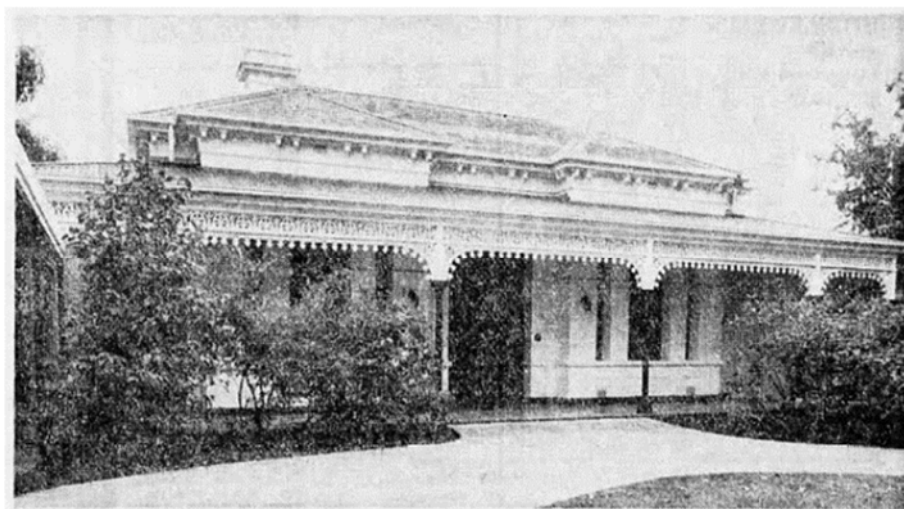


Figure 4. 35 Bruce Street, Toorak, photographed in 1977 (source: *Age*, 23 April 1977).

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Physical description

'Benyeo' is a substantial single-storey Italianate villa that is highly intact. It occupies an allotment on the north side of Bruce Street mid-block between Balmerino Avenue and Canberra Road in Toorak. The house is set back from Bruce Street behind a generous front

garden with a semicircular drive, all behind a tall contemporary front fence that conceals much of the house from the street. A driveway has been retained along the eastern boundary as depicted in the MMBW plan.

Constructed in c1890-91 the building is distinguished by its generous size and sophisticated detailing. It has an M-profile hipped roof, clad in slate, with a pair of wide rectangular projecting bays to the front that have their own hipped roof above the continuous cast-iron verandah (clad in corrugated iron), that stretches across the front façade and returns to both side elevations. It gives the building a symmetrical composition as viewed from Bruce Street, despite the infilled section of the verandah to the east, which is depicted in the MMBW plan, dated 1900. The verandah terminates at both side elevations by secondary projecting bays. The wide chimneys are unusually detailed in cement render with a heavy cornice set between a classical frieze. The deep eaves are supported on paired brackets which are continuous to both side elevations.

The verandah is notable for its high quality cast-iron work including the slender columns with heavy Corinthian capitals and the lacework patterns of the frieze, brackets and fringe set between chamfered timber verandah beams. The verandah floor is raised and retains its decorative tessellated tiles with bluestone nosing. The walls beneath the verandah are rendered with recessed panels set between piers either side of the front entrance door and window lights, and beneath the moulded sill course. The windows to the front projecting bays are deeply recessed with wide sidelights, all with double-hung timber sashes. The highly elaborate timber door has cricket-bat mouldings and wide sidelights.



Figure 5. View of front elevation from Bruce Street which is largely concealed behind a contemporary front fence (source: Context 2016).



Figure 6. View of return verandah to the west elevation (source: Context 2016).



Figure 7. Detail of chimney and eaves (Context 2016).

A number of extensions were constructed in the c1970s which appear to have been restricted to the rear third of the house. The high masonry front fence is an unsympathetic addition.

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 more pretentious in this group might even adopt a small tower or the suggestion of one.

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.

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.

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.

Generally, 'Benyeo' can be compared to other medium-sized Italianate houses in the municipality, of which there are a relatively high number that adopt a strict symmetrical composition to the front façade. Most are more modest houses set on suburban allotments that didn't allow space for a returning verandah: 39 Densham Road, Armadale (in HO130), 5 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 66 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 69 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 35 Woodfull Street, Prahran (in HO135), 4 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 14 Greville Street, Prahran (in HO456), 23 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (HO131), 13 Evelina Road, Toorak (in HO380), 36 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134), and 35 McIlwrick Street, Windsor (in HO138). The villas at, 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 side elevations.

Less common in Stonnington are those places that incorporate a pair of projecting bays, presenting a symmetrical façade to the main street frontage. Examples include more modest houses set on typically narrow suburban allotments, including: 30 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 83 Caroline Street, South Yarra (in HO355), 42 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148), and 44 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148). Larger examples include 6 Horsburgh Grove, Armadale (HO315), 'Lillirie' at 1089 Malvern Road, Armadale (HO273), 294 Williams Road, Toorak (in HO155), and the grand mansion, 'Flete' at 10 Flete Avenue, Armadale (HO38).



Figure 8. 'Lillirie' at 1089 Malvern Road, Armadale, individually significant HO273 (source: Context 2016).

In comparison to the examples listed above, 'Benyeo' is closest in massing and detail to the villas 'Lillirie' at 1089 Malvern Road, Armadale, and 44 The Avenue, Windsor, sharing a symmetrical composition of two projecting bays with a cast-iron verandah that stretches across the entire front façade. Neither of these two examples have a return verandah. Other differences relate to their particular detailing and architectural composition. For example, the grand villa 'Lillirie' is set well back from Malvern Road with a wide front façade and comparatively smaller canted bay windows. It shares a cement render finish with a similar level of applied ornamentation. 'Benyeo' is a more intact example retaining its high-quality cast-iron frieze set within a stop-chamfered frame.

The striking bichrome brick villa at 44 The Avenue, shares a similar composition of rectangular canted bays to the front, but is generally a more muscular example of the type compared to the more delicate and refined 'Benyeo'.



Figure 9. 44 *The Avenue, Windsor, individually significant in HO148 (source: Google Streetview).*

In conclusion, the villa known as ‘Benyeo’ at 35 Bruce Street, Toorak is a highly intact example of one of the municipality’s collection of substantial single-storey Italianate villas. It is distinguished by its generous size and sophisticated detailing including the continuous cast-iron verandah that stretches across the front façade and returns to both side elevations. The verandah is notable for its high quality cast-iron work including the slender columns with heavy Corinthian capitals and the lacework patterns to the frieze, brackets and fringe set between chamfered timber framing. The verandah floor is raised and retains its decorative tessellated tiles with bluestone nosing. The wide chimneys are usually detailed in cement render with a heavy cornice set between a classical frieze and are also of note.

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

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?

‘Benyeo’ at 35 Bruce Street, Toorak, is significant. It was built in c1890-91 by one of Melbourne’s leading landboomers, Charles Henry James (1848-1898) of ‘Illawarra’, at the tail end of the speculative property boom. ‘Benyeo’ was one of three residences constructed by C. H. James on the north side of Bruce Street, but the only one that survives.

It is a substantial single-storey Italianate villa of rendered masonry with a hipped roof clad in slate and chimneys with unusual classical detailing. It presents a symmetrical façade to Bruce Street comprising two projecting rectangular bays and a verandah that stretches across the

front façade and returns to both sides of the house. It is set back behind a mid-sized section and is significant to the extent of its nineteenth-century external form and fabric.

The modern additions and alterations including the high masonry front wall are not significant.

How is it significant?

'Benyeo' at 35 Bruce Street, Toorak is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, 'Benyeo' is a highly intact and refined example of a distinguished residence built as part of a speculative property development in 1890-91 by one of Melbourne's leading landboomers, Charles Henry James. It is one of the few remaining houses of a number of prominently located late-nineteenth century villas that were constructed following the subdivision of the 'Balmerino' estate. The house adopts a symmetrical plan with a hipped slate roof, distinctive chimneys, a pair of projecting bays to the front and a return verandah. (Criterion D).

Aesthetically, it is distinguished by its generous size and sophisticated detailing including the continuous cast-iron verandah that stretches across the front façade and returns to both side elevations. The verandah is notable for its high quality cast-iron work, including the slender columns with heavy Corinthian capitals and the lacework patterns to the frieze, brackets and fringe set between chamfered timbers. The verandah floor is raised and retains its decorative tessellated tiles with bluestone nosing. The wide chimneys are unusually detailed in cement render with a heavy cornice set between a classical frieze and are also of note. (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

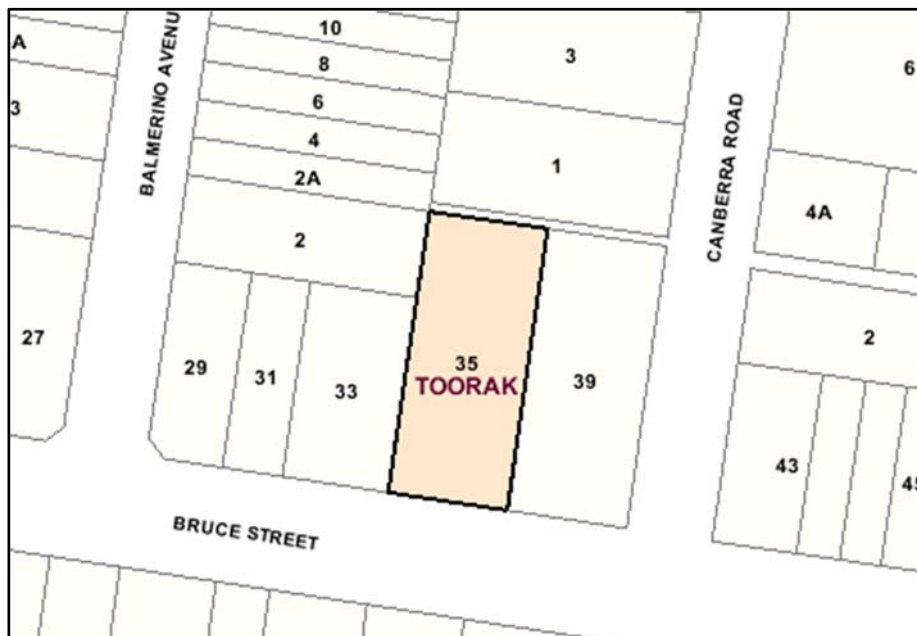


Figure 10. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 35 Bruce Street, Toorak (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2