

‘Waldaira’

**17-19 Ethel Street, Malvern**

Place type: Residential Building (private), Mansion

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Queen Anne Revival

**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.

### Place history

Crown Portion 23A, consisting of 96 acres 3 roods, was purchased by Matthew Neave in 1849. In 1852 Neave subdivided the land into 32 lots of various sizes. In 1890 Ethel Street was created in a subdivision of the Tooronga Station Estate, situated close to the Tooronga Railway Station. This resulted in a number of substantial villas being built in Elizabeth Street and Ethel Street, all within easy access of the railway line.

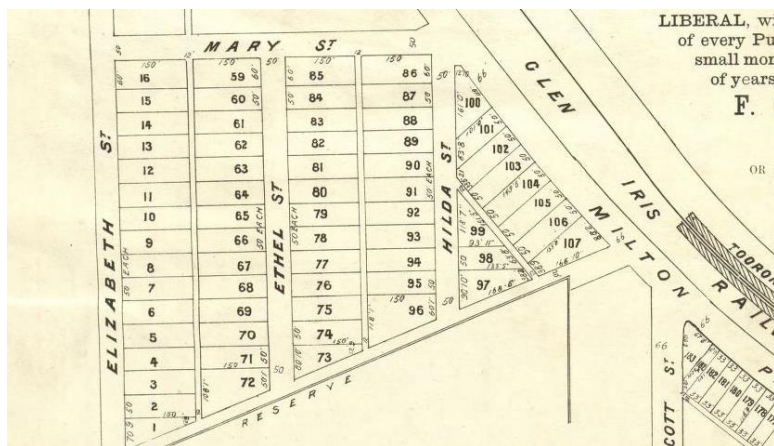


Figure 1. Detail from Plan of Tooronga Station Estate, showing lots 61 and 62 in Ethel Street, [n.d.] c.189-? (SLV)

James Urquhart purchased lots 61 and 62 of the Tooronga Station Estate in 1891, although the land was held in the name of Urquhart's wife, Mary Alice Graham Urquhart (C/T Vol. 2398, Fol. 535). Urquhart had immigrated from Forres, Scotland. He was an accountant with the Melbourne firm of Urquhart & McIntosh, which had offices in the St James Buildings, William Street (Lewis Aitken 1992: 117).

At the end of 1891, architect Charles Douglas Figgis called for tenders to build a 'Brick villa residence At Malvern, for James Urquhart, Esquire' (*Argus*, 20 November 1891, p. 2). The double-storey residence at No. 17 Ethel Street was completed the following year (Lewis Aitken 1992: 117). The Malvern Heritage Study (Lewis Aitken 1992) records the house name as

‘Waldaira’. It may have been named after the homestead by that same name in south-west New South Wales, on the Murrumbidgee River.

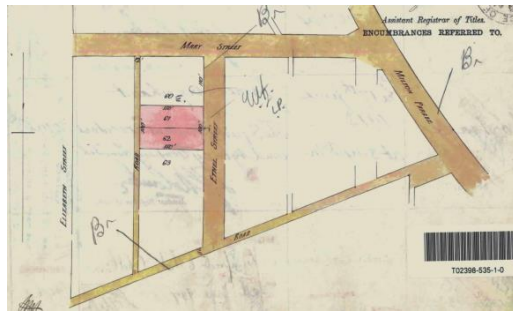


Figure 2. Sketch identifying land (in red) in Ethel Street purchased by James Urquhart in 1891 (C/T Fol. 2398, Vol. 535)

Irish-born architect Charles Douglas Figgis (1849–1895) practised in Ballarat and in Melbourne, where he had rooms at the Victorian Building in Swanston Street. Some of his best-known buildings in Ballarat are the Mining Exchange (1887), the Ballarat Club (1888), and the Scots’ Presbyterian Church, and elsewhere, the Geelong Club (1888), the Presbyterian Church in Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine (1894), and St Andrew’s Uniting Church, Coleraine (1892). Many of his works in Ballarat and country Victoria were public buildings and church buildings, but a surviving coloured sketch, showing the elevation of proposed villas at Malvern (c.1880–1890), links him to residential work in that suburb (see below).



Figure 3. Charles Douglas Figgis, ‘Elevation of Proposed Villas, Malvern’, c.1880-1890, Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria

The MMBW Plan of 1907 shows a large villa residence with a return verandah to the south-east. The house occupies a large block, taking up the equivalent land of two regular house blocks in the street. The house is plumbed, with an inside lavatory and bath. There is an outside washhouse building, situated on the rear boundary, which includes a lavatory, a copper and a trough (MMBW 1907).



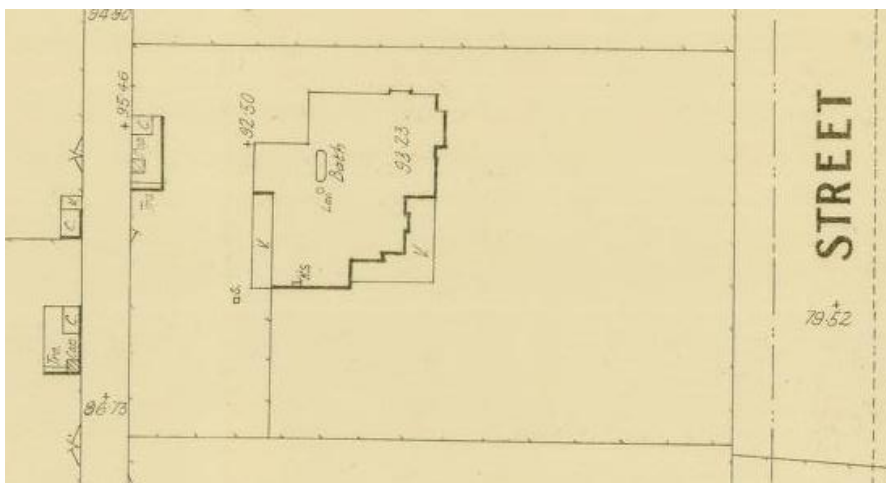


Figure 4. Extract from MMBW detail plan no 1777, dated 1907, Town of Malvern (SLV)

The house was prominently sited on a steep hill on the west (uphill) side of Ethel Street. On the east, the land sloped steeply down to the railway line and Gardiners Creek. The house would have had a fine view across the Gardiners Creek valley to the distant hills beyond. The block had room for an extensive garden at the front and south of the house, and several mature specimen trees remain, including several Pines, an Oak and a Eucalypt.

James Urquhart and his wife Mary Alice Graham née Ross occupied the house for 54 years (Lewis Aitken 1992). James Urquhart died at home in February 1943 and was buried in the Kew Cemetery (*Age*, 24 February 1943, p. 6). A few months later, the grand home at 17 Ethel Street, described as a two-storey brick residence of 9 rooms, sold in 1943 for the sum of £1850 (*Age*, 13 April 1943, p. 4). The sales notice advertised a 'large two story [sic] house with surplus furnishings' (*Argus*, 20 March 1943, p. 14).

Subsequent owners included Sidney Bond Seymour (1943) and Doug Graham (1952-59) (Lewis Aitken 1992: 117).



Figure 5. 17 Ethel Street, photographed in 1992 in Lewis Aitken, Malvern Heritage Study (MP 12941 SHC)

## Sources

'17 Ethel Street, Malvern', MP 12941, Stonnington History Centre.

*Age*, 24 February 1943, p. 6.

*Age*, 13 April 1943, p. 4.

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Lewis, Miles. Australian Architecture Index.

McCalman, Janet 1995, *Journeyings: The biography of a middle-class generation*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

MMBW Detail Plan No. 1777, Town of Malvern, dated 1907, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

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Plan of subdivision, 'Tooronga Station Estate' c.1890, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

Strahan, Lynne 1989, *Public and Private Memory: A history of the City of Malvern*, Hargreen Publishing and the City of Malvern.

Tibbits, George 'An Emanation of Lunacy' in Howells, Trevor & Nicholson, Michael 1989, *Towards the Dawn: Federation Architecture in Australia 1890-1915*, Hale & Iremonger.

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### Physical description

'Waldaira' comprises a large double block on the west side of the street. The large residence is set on the rear half of the block, leaving an expansive front lawn which slopes up to the house. All four sides of the block are lined with mature deciduous trees, contributing to the park-like atmosphere. There is a high masonry wall at the front of the property, which is not original, but the house is still visible from the street thanks to its double-storey height and the rise in the land.

The house is an imposing two-storey mansion of face red brickwork with cast-cement ornament around window and door openings. The slate roof has decorative bands of scalloped slates, and terracotta ridgecapping and ram's horn finials. Chimneys are also of red face brick with corbelling at the tops and vertical bands.

The dwelling is massed in a highly picturesque manner, with three main volumes forming the front façade. There is an entrance tower at the centre, with a low pyramidal roof set atop closely spaced brackets and a band of diaper patterning carried out in burnt headers, giving it a medieval character. To the right of the tower is a slightly recessed wing with a steep pyramidal roof, and to the left is a wing that sits entirely behind the tower and a return verandah, with a transverse-ridged hipped roof of a lower pitch.

The verandah is single-storey, with a balustrade to the first-floor level. The ground-floor level has details that would become popular in the Federation era, including turned timber posts with timber fretwork. Here the frieze is in a Chinoise manner, with intersecting vertical and horizontal sticks. It is highly detailed with fleur-de-lys and club terminations to the short vertical members. Below the frieze are two types of timber brackets: scrolled where the verandah meets the wall, and long, shaped struts to the posts with an additional scroll in the triangular openings.



*Figure 6. Detail of the verandah and balustrade. (Source: Context, 2017)*

The cast-cement ornament to the openings is classically inspired. It is concentrated on the entrance tower and the pyramidal-roofed wing to the right-hand (north) side. Windows to the left-hand wing behind the verandah have long rectangular windows with flat brick arches. All windows of the façade are timber double-hung sash windows.

The front entry is via a segmentally arched opening at the base of the tower. The spandrels are decorated with bas-relief foliage (possibly laurel or eucalyptus leaves). At the centre of the arch is a large, scrolled keystone, and above is a dentilated cornice. Set at the back of the tower is the front door, which has heavy bolection mouldings to its panels. The same dentilation is seen on a bay window at the ground floor to the right-hand side. The pair of windows above it has an engage column between them and a scrolled apron below. Similar scrollwork is used above the bay windows below. The first-floor window of the tower has a projecting semi-circular base, like that of an oriel window. At the top is a frieze in the form of metopes (with impressed vertical lines), and atop the narrow cornice (which is continuous with a stringcourse) are small cast-cement Greek Revival decorations (an anthemion, scrolled consoles, and antefixes).





Figure 7. Classically inspired cast-cement surrounds to the window and door openings. (Source: Context, 2017)

The classical ornament, medieval massing, and Chinese-inspired verandah form an eclectic but successful composition, that might be considered part of the early, experimental development of the Queen Anne Revival style before it solidified into the typical red brick and tile villas with a dominating roof extending over the sheltering verandah which became so popular in the early twentieth century.

The house was described in the City of Malvern Heritage Study (1992) as ‘relatively intact apart from the apparent removal of the verandah roof on the upper level’ (emphasis added). Insofar as it is possible to see from the black & white photo in that document, no changes to the front façade of the house have been made since then, though some trees have been removed from the front lawn since then.

Comparison between the MMBW plan of 1907 and current aerial photos indicate that a rear extension has been constructed, behind the original extent of the house, but it is not visible from the street. There has also been a coating (paint or cement wash) applied at some point to the brickwork, which has mostly weathered away.

## 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 gables 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).

‘Waldaira’ is one of the large Queen Anne houses and villas, and is part of the first wave of them to be built. In its use of red facebrick with cement render dressings and cast decoration, ‘Waldaira’ can be compared to large houses such as 92 Finch Street (c1890), 6 Mayfield Avenue (1891), 33 Grandview Grove (c1895), and 59 Kensington Road (1884). The juxtaposition of picturesque medieval massing with classical-derived ornament at 33 Grandview Grove is comparable to that of ‘Waldaira’. The Chinese-inspired ladder-back verandah fretwork can be compared to the somewhat simpler example at 15 Avondale Road.



Figure 8. 33 Grandview Grove, Prahran of c1895 (Significant in HO135). (Source: WalkingMelbourne.com)

‘Waldaira’ stands out from all these examples, however, in its unusual massing. While the facades of the others are dominated by features gables (often half-timbered or with decorative timber trusses), the roof of ‘Waldaira’ is composed of three hipped forms, each with a different size and slope, suggesting early French Renaissance town houses. ‘Waldaira’ does share this apparent influence with Redd, Henderson & Smart’s ‘Bona Vista’ of 1884, which is distinguished by a corner tower with conical roof suggesting a French Renaissance influence, as well as a steep gable marking the entrance.



Figure 9. 59 Kensington Road, South Yarra, designed in 1884 by Reed, Henderson & Smart (HO64). (Source: RealEstate.com)

Another comparison of interest is with the only other residential design by Figgis to be identified: 'Wando Dale' homestead in Nareen of 1891 (Southern Grampians HO507). Built at virtually the same time as 'Waldaira', it is a very conservative design in keeping with the Italianate style that so dominated the nineteenth century. A transition to the Queen Anne is seen in the ladder-back fretwork of the ground-floor verandah, and the positioning of the front door at the base of a two-storey canted bay is unusual.



Figure 10. 'Wando Dale' homestead, Nareen, built in 1891 to a design by architect Charles D Figgis. Southern Grampians HO507. (Source: John Collins Collection, State Library of Victoria)



In conclusion, 'Waldaira' is a fine example of a substantial late nineteenth-century house which demonstrates the eclectic design approach of early Queen Anne residential design. It is particularly distinguished within the City of Stonnington by its unusual massing of roof forms. The detailing of the cast-cement ornament to window and door openings is of notably high quality.

### **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

8.3.2 Gardens

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

### **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?**

'Waldaira', at 17-19 Ethel Street, Malvern, is significant. This substantial Queen Anne residence was built in 1891-92 for accountant James Urquhart and family. The designer was Irish-born architect Charles Douglas Figgis (1849-95), who practised in Ballarat and Melbourne.

The two-storey brick house stands on its original double allotment behind a large front garden which retains a number of mature specimen trees.

The high brick front fence and the rear addition are not significant.

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

'Waldaira' is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

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

'Waldaira' is architecturally significant as a very fine example of a substantial early Queen Anne residence, with eclectic stylistic influences often seen in early examples of this style. Characteristic elements of the style demonstrated by 'Waldaira' include the use of red facebrick with contrasting cement-render dressings and ornament, picturesque massing, and intricate timber fretwork to the verandah. It retains original features including a slate-clad roof with terracotta finials, corbelled brick chimneys, and diaper-patterned brickwork at the top of the entrance tower. (Criterion D)

'Waldaira' is aesthetically significant for its unusual and sophisticated design which juxtaposes three hipped roof forms with steep slopes, suggesting a French Renaissance influence, as does the use of high-quality classical entablatures, engaged columns and reliefs. The use of an entrance tower at the centre of the façade is striking. The verandah fretwork is a more complex version of the ladder-back friezes that were to become common. The presentation of 'Waldaira' is enhanced by its elevated siting behind a large garden on a double-width block. (Criterion E)

### **Recommendations**

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



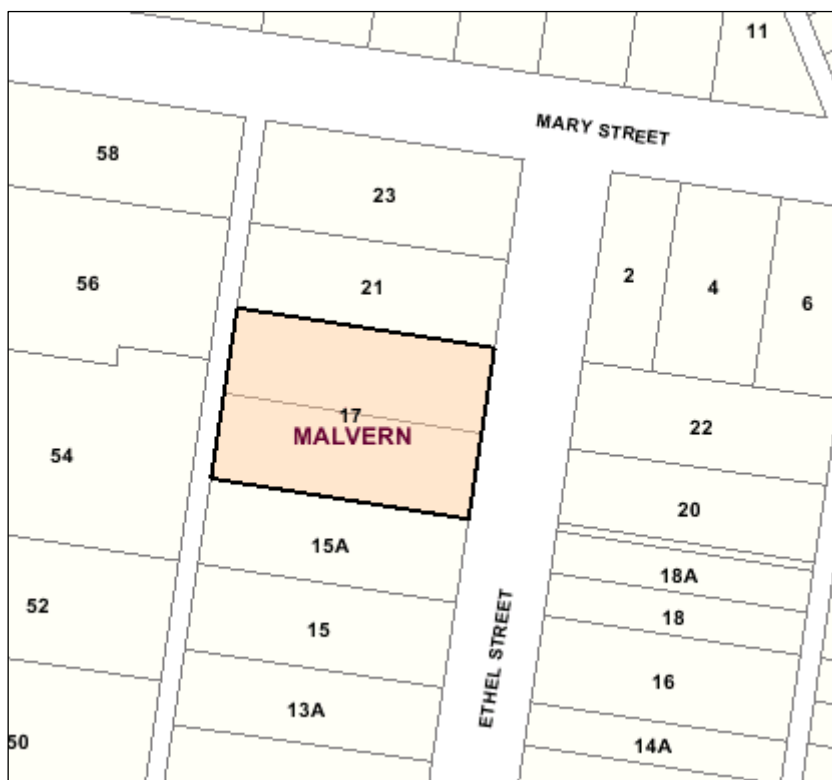


Figure 11. Recommended extent of Heritage Overlay for 17-19 Ethel Street, Malvern. (Source: [www.land.vic.gov.au](http://www.land.vic.gov.au))

HO Schedule controls: None

Recommended grading: A2