

‘Clifton’

**52 Albion Street, South Yarra**

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Duplex

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Regency

### 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. The second director of the gardens from 1859, Government Botanist Ferdinand Mueller, resided in South Yarra, as did his deputy, Charles Wilhelmi.

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.

At the southern end of South Yarra, between Toorak Road and Commercial Road, the land was subdivided with generally smaller allotments. Although a predominantly middle-class suburb, there were also narrow streets of small cottages that accommodated the working class and the lower middle class (including, for example, salesmen and shopkeepers). Here there

were also a number of corner hotels established. Working-class men and women often worked as domestic servants, grooms, drivers and gardeners for those in the big houses, where they were often accommodated in servants' quarters. Workers were also employed in factories along the river flats and lower-lying ground closer to Chapel Street. Industries operating in the 1880s included brickworks, jam and preserving works, and soap works (Whitworth 1879: 433). Some remnant industrial buildings survive along the river, although most are altered.

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 Grammar School, Melbourne Girls' Grammar School (Merton Hall), and Christ Church Grammar School (outside the municipality), were established in the mid to late nineteenth century.

### Place history

The semi-detached dwellings at 50-52 Albion Street were erected c.1871. In 1868 the land was owned by carpenter Edwin Samuel Giles Litchfield, who owned several properties in the area. Litchfield was rated for a 4-roomed timber house (in progress) in 1871, which appears to refer to the beginnings of 50-52 Albion Street (RB). By 1873, Litchfield is rated £46 each for no. 30 and no. 32 Albion Street, for brick and timber houses of 7 rooms each (RB). In 1874, one of the dwellings is referred to as 'Clifton' in reference to a furniture sale held by William Dickson of 'Clifton' at 32 Albion Street (*Age*, 4 December 1874). In 1879, William Watkins was rated £40 each for two 7-roomed brick and timber houses at 30 and 32 Albion Street (RB). The numbering in Albion Street changed in 1891 from 30 and 32 to 50 and 52 when the houses were owned by Emma Watkins, probably a relative of William.

The MMBW Detail Plan of 1895 shows 50 and 52 Albion Street, with adjoining front porches and side verandahs to the rear wings. The arrangements at the rear of each house are slightly different, and this may have been the timber section constructed first (but since demolished).

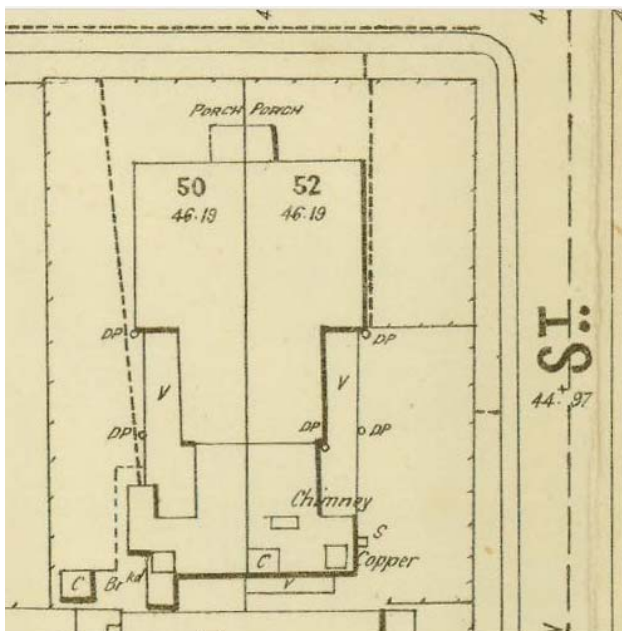


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan no. 956, dated 1895; the back sections of the rear wings may have been of timber (source: SLV).

The two houses were being used as a single dwelling in 1975 when they were offered for sale (*Age*, 22 Nov 1975). A report on the property in 1985, when it was again offered for sale, surmised that the two houses had been previously used as boarding houses on account of alterations made internally (*Age*, 27 Nov 1985).

### Sources

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### Physical description

'Clifton' (or 'Clifton House') is a semi-detached pair of dwellings built to resemble a single grand home (since 1985 it has been converted to a single residence). It stands on the corner of Albion and Tyrone streets, with modest garden setbacks to the front and east side. The two Pencil Pines (*Cupressus sempervirens*) located to the east appear to date from the interwar period, and may have formed part of a longer border row along the Tyrone Street boundary. At the corner is a large, but much later Lemon Scented Gum (*Corymbia citriodora*), which is an attractive and fine example of its species.

'Clifton' is a two-storey building with sheer walls to the east and west sides, and a single-storey wing to the rear (originally the conjoined service wings of the two dwellings). The front façade is distinguished by the enclosed porch at its centre, which once served as the entrance to both dwellings.

The semi-detached origins of the house are indicated by the separate hip roofs to the two-storey section, though this is entirely hidden from view by a simple parapet with a moulded cornice, wrapping around the front and side elevations. The walls are of rendered masonry, ruled to resemble fine ashlar, with classical details of render including a simple beltcourse above each floor, run architraves resting on modillions, expressed quoins to the corners, a corniced parapet to the entrance porch, and Tuscan pilasters to its corners. The building retains two chimneys to the two-storey section, and a very tall shared chimney to the rare wing. The visible front chimney (on the east side) is very simple with a rectangular form and two

slightly corbelled bands near the top. The tall rear chimney was doubled in height in the late nineteenth century, with a second top featuring moulded brick modillions.

The windows to the façade are symmetrically arranged with rectangular six-over-six single-hung sashes to the body of the house, and two round-arched windows to the front of the porch. There are larger round-headed openings on the two sides of the porch, which allowed access to the two dwellings. There is only one window on the east elevation of the two-storey section, at the rear of the ground floor.

The two-storey main section of the house is highly intact, apart from a single-storey addition on the east side set just back from the façade. It mimics the ruled render, parapet and window architrave of the original house (but with a different window format). To the rear, the single-storey wing on the east side has been widened to sit slightly proud of the main mass of the house, again with ruled render to the walls. It also appears that the rear half of both single-storey wings have been demolished.

### Comparative analysis

The terraced house form was introduced from Britain and characterises inner suburban development from the 1850s and 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).

While Windsor had by far the densest nineteenth-century development in Stonnington, and the highest number of terrace rows, inner-suburban South Yarra also had a number of semi-detached terrace house pairs, which was an intermediate density. While the vast majority of terrace houses in Victoria are in the Italianate style, a few early examples demonstrate the long life of the Georgian and Regency styles in Australia.

The earliest architectural styles to be used in Australia were the Georgian and Regency, which were interlinked classically derived styles imported from Britain. The more refined Regency style can be considered the final expression of Georgian architecture. While the reign of King George III ended in 1811, and the Regency period ended in 1820, these styles continued to be used in the colonies for both simple and grand houses until the 1850s and even the 1860s (Apperley et al. 1989:28).

Georgian buildings, as seen in Victoria, were characterised by symmetry and pleasingly harmonious proportions based on classical antecedents. Roofs were generally hipped, with exposed eaves or continuing into a front or encircling verandah (often with a change of pitch, creating a broken-back profile). Two-storey buildings had a verandah only to the ground floor (if at all), supported on simple timber posts or columns. Due to the high price of large sheets of glass at this time, windows were often multi-paned, typically six-over-six (Apperley et al. 1989:42).

The Regency variant of Georgian shared similar proportions and symmetry, but with a greater sophistication of detail. Apperley et al. (1989:46) describe its typical features as follows:

*... Victorian Regency buildings continued to exhibit clearly defined rectangular masses arranged symmetrically with, more often than not, the outer edges of the roof finished behind a simple parapet. The masonry walls of stone or brick were usually stuccoed and lined to imitate quality stonework ... Projecting mouldings of simple, classical design were gently modelled in stucco ...*

The stucco (or cement render) classical details most common seen on Regency buildings was a cornice to the roof parapet, quoins to the corners of the building, classical pilasters to define bays, and architraves around windows (some with entablatures as well). Many houses had a concave or ogee-profile verandah roof, though grander houses might have a portico and frontispiece. Again, due to the cost of large panes of glass, windows were often six-over-six pane double-hung windows, or multi-paned French windows.



As South Yarra is one of the earliest suburbs of Melbourne, it retains an unusually rich collection of both sophisticated and simple examples of Victorian Georgian and Regency houses. More modest examples survive in Windsor and Prahran as well. These range from very simple Georgian cottages such as 5 George Street, Windsor, and 30 MacFarlan Street, South Yarra. More sophisticated examples with quoins and other classical embellishments typical of the Regency style are the preeminent Como House (16 Como Avenue), as well as 75 and 76 Caroline Street, all in South Yarra.

Examples of this style that are Significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay (both in individual HOs and HO precincts) include:

- 15 Darling Street, South Yarra (HO32) – late 1860s double-fronted single-storey house with narrow eaves and Regency timber verandah detail, face brick has been painted
- 76 Caroline Street, South Yarra (in HO355) – c1858 two-storey villa with single-storey concave verandah with slender timber columns, the broad eaves have exposed rafter tails, and the rendered walls have quoins and architraves.
- 354 Punt Road, South Yarra (in HO313) – double-fronted two-storey terrace house with narrow front eaves and Regency timber verandah detail, built date unknown.
- 29 Motherwell Street, South Yarra (in HO137) – an austere two-storey house with a pyramidal hipped roof, narrow eaves, rendered, quoins and simple architraves. The verandah on the west side has been removed. Noted in the HO137 precinct citation as ‘a very early villa’ but dated 1878 in the National Trust Register (B3800).
- 372-374 Malvern Road, Prahran (HO77 & HO78) – 1863-64, a two-storey semi-detached terrace pair built of bluestone with a parapeted front and two-storey concave verandah on Regency-style paired posts.

The semi-detached pair at 52 Albion Street displays a classic and elegant Regency form with the added formality of a pedimented entrance porch instead of an open verandah. This is an unusual treatment in the municipality. The use of a corniced parapet is not commonly seen in Stonnington, though a roof parapet is one of the defining characteristics of the Regency style. The pre-eminent example of its use is the grand Como House (VHR H205), with the only other examples identified that semi-detached pair at 372-374 Malvern Road, and the detached house of 1861 at 372 Punt Road (assessed in the Victorian Houses Heritage Study, 2016).

In its formality and the quality of the render detail, 52 Albion Street compares very well with examples such as 76 Caroline Street and 29 Motherwell Street, and is even richer in detail, particularly in the applied classical ornament to the entrance porch. It also compares well in intactness, with the only notable alteration the recessive extension to the west side. It is one of the later examples of the Regency style, built shortly after 15 Darling Street, but before 29 Motherwell Street.

In conclusion, 52 Albion Street is a largely intact example of one of South Yarra’s rich collection of Victorian Georgian and Regency houses, which are rare in the eastern parts of Stonnington and metropolitan Melbourne more generally. It is a handsome two-storey pair of semi-detached dwellings built to resemble a single villa. Typical of the sophisticated Regency variant of the Georgian style, it has hipped roofs hidden behind a continuous corniced parapet, the masonry walls are finished with ruled render and quoins, and the six-over-six sash windows sit within moulded render architraves. It is particularly distinguished within the City of Stonnington by its formality and elegant classical detail exemplified by the entrance porch at the centre of the façade, instead of the typical verandah. The porch has a corniced parapet, round-arched openings with moulded architraves, and Doric pilasters at the corners.

### **Thematic context**

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

### **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?**

'Clifton', at 52 Albion Street, South Yarra, is significant. It was built in 1871-72 as a semi-detached pair of rental houses for carpenter Edwin Litchfield. Litchfield owned a number of properties in the area and may have also been the designer and builder of 'Clifton'. In the late twentieth century it was converted into a single residence.

It is an elegant two-storey Regency style building, massed and detailed to resemble a single grand home. 'Clifton' has sheer walls to the two sides and an enclosed entrance porch at the centre of the façade. The walls are of rendered brick and feature classically inspired detailing, also in cement render. At the rear is a single-storey service wing.

The non-original single-storey extension to the west side elevation is not of significance, nor is the extension to the east side of the rear wing.

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

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

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

Architecturally, 'Clifton' is a largely intact example of one of South Yarra's rich collection of Victorian Georgian and Regency houses, which are rare in the eastern parts of Stonnington and metropolitan Melbourne more generally. It is a handsome two-storey pair of semi-detached dwellings built to resemble a single villa. Typical of the sophisticated Regency variant of the Georgian style, it has hipped roofs hidden behind a continuous corniced parapet, the masonry walls are finished with ruled render and quoins, and the six-over-six sash windows sit within moulded render architraves. (Criteria B & D)

Aesthetically, it is particularly distinguished within the City of Stonnington by its formality and elegant classical detail exemplified by the entrance porch at the centre of the façade, instead of the typical verandah. The porch has a corniced parapet, round-arched openings with moulded architraves, and Doric pilasters at the corners. (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

