

23 Ethel Street, Malvern

Place type: Residential Building (private), Villa

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

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.

Several private schools in Malvern operated from large Victorian mansions, including Malvern Grammar School and Sacre Couer, as well as many smaller short-lived schools. Later private schools, including the Catholic secondary schools De La Salle and Kildara, also adapted Victorian residences for their schools.

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 that varied in size. In 1890 Ethel Street was created in a subdivision of the Tooronga Station Estate. This resulted in a number of substantial villas being built in Elizabeth Street and Ethel Street.

No. 23 Ethel Street was built by 1891 for Lucy Nicholas on lots 59 and 60 (Lewis Aitken 1992: 118). In 1894 the property was purchased by Judge, George Wood. He remained the owner in 1915 (RB). [In the 1920s the owner was Edward Jones, broker \(RB\).](#)

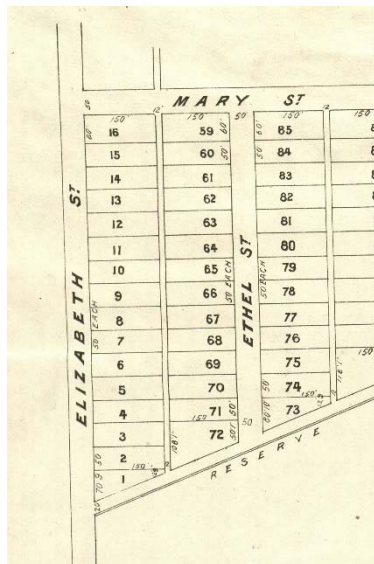


Figure 1. Detail of Tooronga Station Estate c1890 (source: SLV) showing the newly constructed Ethel Street.

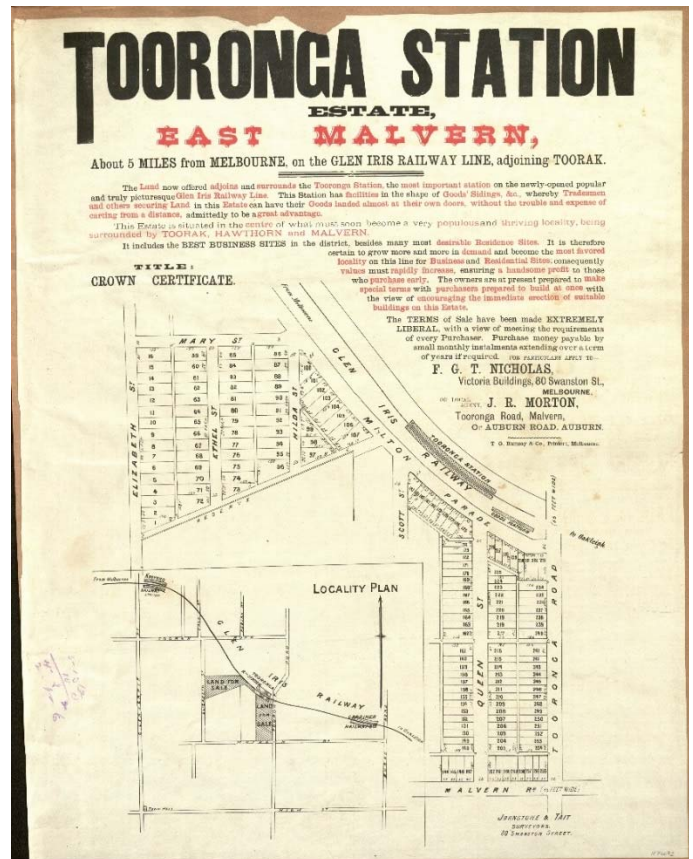


Figure 2. Tooronga Station Estate c1890 (source: SLV).

The MMBW detail plan of 1898 shows a dwelling on a corner block with a return verandah, and a front entrance facing Mary Street. The front gate is at the corner of Mary and Ethel Streets. The house has an enclosed rear verandah and the outside washhouse has a trough, a copper and an outside toilet.

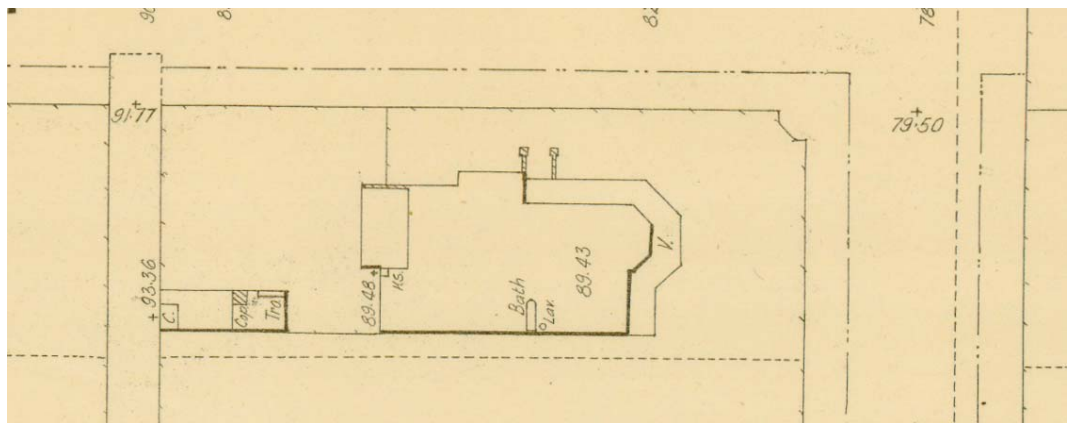


Figure 3. MMBW Detail Plan no. 1777, dated 1907 (source: SLV).

Some changes were made to the rear of the house, probably in the period c1950s-1970s, with the addition of a family room and laundry. This rear addition was demolished in the 1990s and a new two-storey rear section added. The 1990s works also involved the demolition of the south-west (inner rear) corner of the house comprising the Kitchen and Study and an associated rear corner chimney. In addition, one window on the south side elevation was removed and filled in and another was moved on that elevation (with the original opening filled in).

No changes were made at this time to the original extents of the two main facades (facing Ethel and Mary streets), apart from the removal of the back verandah wing wall which would have been visible from Mary Street.



Figure 4. House at 23 Ethel Street, Malvern, taken in 1992 (source: Nigel Lewis, Stonnington History Centre).



Figure 5 The north side elevation of the house at 23 Ethel Street, Malvern, viewed from Mary Street, showing rear addition (source: Context, 2017)

Sources

Age 18 March 1989 (property for sale).

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Physical description

The residence at 23 Ethel Street is a notable example of a single-storey Italianate villa which occupies a corner allotment on the south-west corner of Ethel and Mary streets in Malvern. The house is set within an established garden which largely conceals the house from both street frontages behind a sympathetic reproduction timber picket fence. The property extends to the rear laneway which is accessed from Mary Street.

Constructed by 1891, the villa is an unusual variation on the single-storey asymmetrical Italianate villa type which became popular during the 1880s. The type typically adopts a canted projecting bay to one side of the main façade, beside a cast-iron or timber verandah. In this instance, the composition has been varied so that the projecting canted bay addresses the entrance to the property on the corner of Ethel and Mary streets. The unusual massing is emphasised by the cast-iron verandah that encircles the canted bay and returns on either side of the bay. On the north elevation, the verandah terminates at a secondary rectangular projecting bay that is adjacent to the main entrance.

The building has a hipped roof, clad in slate, with cement rendered chimneys with moulded cornices that are typical of the style. The eaves have timber brackets of a carved design with a pierced hole. The rendered walls retain their ruled finish (although painted) with quoins expressed to the external building corners. Full height segmentally arched windows beneath the verandah are intact with an interesting stepped label detail.

The villa is further distinguished by its raised cast-iron encircling verandah, with elaborate and high quality cast-iron work. It has a shallow ogee-profile roof, clad in corrugated iron, and twisted cast-iron columns with Corinthian capitals and brackets but no frieze. At the front corners of the canted section is a cluster of three columns with an arched insert between them. The raised verandah also utilises floral cast-iron balustrade panels.



Figure 665. Detail of hipped roof to canted bay and eaves brackets (source: Context 2016).



Figure 776. Detail of high quality cast-iron work (source: Context 2016).

The house appears substantially intact externally despite a large two-storey addition constructed to the rear of the house, which is visible along Mary Street. As noted in the History, these works involved some demolition and alterations to the south-west corner of the house, which is not visible from either street front, though the two-storey extension built in the south-west corner and extending behind the original extent of the house is. The attached garage of the extension extends to the rear laneway.

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 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.

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the Italianate 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 notes (in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, 2012:357):

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.

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.

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, the villa at 23 Ethel Street, Malvern can be compared to other medium-sized Italianate houses in the municipality, of which there are a relatively high number that adopt the asymmetrical Italianate plan form. Examples include more modest houses set on typically narrow suburban allotments, including: 34 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 59 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 103 Kooyong Road, Armadale (in HO130), 14 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456), 22 Donald Street, Prahran (in HO456), 5 Fawcner Street, South Yarra (in HO131), 71 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 48 Davis Avenue, South Yarra (in HO150), and 50 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148).

23 Ethel Street can be better compared to other larger examples built on more generous allotments which allowed for a returned verandah, often terminating at a second projecting bay to the side elevation (as at 23 Ethel Street). Examples include: 5 Royal Crescent, Armadale (in

HO130), 11 Avondale Road, Armadale (in HO123), 860 Malvern Road, Armadale (in HO130), 46 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 34 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 5 Wynnstay Road, Prahran (in HO135), 'Oтира' at 56 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148), and 46 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148).

In comparison to the examples listed above, 23 Ethel Street is closest in massing and detail to the villas at 11 Avondale Road, Armadale and 5 Wynnstay Road, Prahran. These examples also adopt typical asymmetrical Italianate planning with a cast-iron return verandah set between projecting bays. While these villas also occupy corner allotments, they take full advantage of the return verandah and perpendicular projecting bays to address both street frontages. Whereas the composition is varied at 23 Ethel Street; it places the canted projecting bay at the front corner and the entrance to the side elevation unusually emphasising the corner bay with the encircling verandah that returns to either side of the projecting bay. The villa at 5 Wynnstay Road is distinguished by its raised siting, utilising grand front steps complete with decorative urns to the raised verandah which has elaborate cast-iron work with paired columns and a balustrade of alternating panels and balusters. While 5 Wynnstay Road is a grander and more prominent example than 23 Ethel Street, they compare well in verandah detailing, both utilising clustered columns and balusters, and in the general level of intactness of the principal volumes of the two houses (though they differ in intactness at the rear). The most obvious change to 5 Wynnstay Road is the painted brickwork.



Figure 887. 5 Wynnstay Road, Prahran, individually significant in HO135 (source: Context 2016).



Figure 998. 11 Avondale Road, Armadale, individually significant in HO123 (source: Google Streetview).

11 Avondale Road, Armadale utilises a greater range of cast and run cement render details with more elaborate detailing to the eaves and window moulds. Conversely, the cast-iron return verandah to 23 Ethel Street, is more elaborate in its form and detailing.

In conclusion, the villa at 23 Ethel Street, Malvern is a highly intact example of one of the municipality's collection of substantial single-storey Italianate villas. It is distinguished by its unusual massing and its high quality and elaborate return verandah that encircles the canted bay. It has twisted cast-iron columns with Corinthian capitals and brackets. At the front corners of the canted section is a cluster of three columns with an arched insert between them. The raised verandah also utilises floral cast-iron balustrade panels. The building is highly intact retaining its ruled render finish and ogee-profile verandah clad in corrugated iron.

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

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 villa at 23 Ethel Street, Malvern, is significant. It was constructed in 1891 and is a substantial single-storey Italianate villa with unusual asymmetrical massing with a cast-iron return verandah, set in a mature garden on a corner allotment.

The house is significant as viewed and appreciated from both Ethel and Mary streets, and is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century external form and fabric.

The modern alterations and additions to the rear are not significant.

How is it significant?

The villa at 23 Ethel Street, Malvern is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, 23 Ethel Street, Malvern is a fine and highly intact representative example of a substantial Victorian Italianate villa built for middle-class residents of Malvern, of the sort that began to characterise the suburb in the 1880s and 1890s. The villa exhibits typical features of this type, including an asymmetrical plan form, cast-iron verandah, a hipped roof clad in slate, and rendered chimneys with heavy cornices. (Criterion D).

Aesthetically, it is distinguished by its unusual massing and siting that is emphasised by the encircling cast-iron verandah that returns on either side of the corner canted bay. The verandah is notable for its high quality and elaborate cast-iron work that includes twisted cast-iron columns with Corinthian capitals, which are clustered at the front corners of the canted section with an intricate arched insert between them. The raised verandah also utilises floral cast-iron balustrade panels which are of note. The building is highly intact retaining its ruled render finish and ogee-profile verandah clad in corrugated iron. (Criterion E)

Recommendation

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+09. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 23 Ethel Street, Malvern (source: www.land.vic.au).

Recommended grading: A2