'Cullean'

5 Wattletree Road, Armadale

Place type: Residential Building (private), Villa

Significance level: Local

Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

Locality history

The locality of Armadale emerged in the 1870s at the eastern end of Toorak. The suburb straddled both the older municipality of Prahran and the newer one of Malvern, with Boundary Road (now Kooyong Road) marking the boundary between the two. The name Armadale derived from the name of the grand residence of Victorian politician James Munro, 'Armadale House', built in 1876. Other mansions and fine villas followed, including 'Brocklesby' (1879) and 'Flete' (1882-83). Along Orrong Road, between High Street and Dandenong Road, an impressive row of five mansions was built for some of Melbourne's leading businessmen in the 1880s. These were 'Larnook', 'Redcourt', 'Sebrof', 'Lalbert' and 'Kabratook' (demolished) (Foster 1996).

Through the 1880s, Armadale was promoted as an exclusive residential area for the middle class, with subdivisions offering generous suburban allotments. A railway station had opened at Armadale in 1879 to service the new Oakleigh railway line and this was used as a drawcard to attract buyers to the area. Much of Armadale's housing stock reflects its foundational period of the 1880s and early 1890s. As well as the large ornate homes of the wealthy, there were streets of comfortable middle-class suburban homes, including double-storey terrace rows, along with pockets of smaller, more modest homes, including some working-class cottages.

Commercial development along High Street, including shops and other services, served the surrounding residential area. The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Board established a tram route along High Street to the city in the early 1900s. In the 1930s and 1940s, as more and more of the large homes in the area were broken up and the land subdivided, antique furniture was in oversupply. In the 1940s the shops in High Street began to carry antiques and *objets d'art*,

catering for an upper-middle-class clientele, and laying the foundation for what later became a high-end shopping strip.

From the early twentieth century, many of Melbourne's large mansion homes set in large garden settings became unsustainable. Large estates were subdivided for residential development, and sometimes the house survived on a much reduced allotment. Large private homes were also converted into multiple dwellings or 'flats', or operated as boarding houses. Large houses were also converted for use as private hospitals (for example 'Alencon') and schools (for example, 'Brocklesby' and 'Blairholme').

Place history

This area of Armadale was occupied by large estates from the 1870s. Many of these were subdivided in the 1880s for suburban residences. The house at 5 Wattletree Road is situated on land that was formerly part of a large estate owned by J. Currie.

Figure 1 Subdivision plan of Farrbrae Estate, East St Kilda, [n.d.] c.1879-94, shows the undeveloped site on the north side of Wattle Tree Road, owned by J. Currie Esq. (State Library Victoria)

By 1888, William McIlwrick (1832–1922), auctioneer, had purchased two parcels of land on what was then called Wattle Tree Road, Armadale. By 1888/89 he was residing in Wattle Tree Road (Wises PO Directory, 1888-89). McIlwrick had immigrated from Ayrshire, Scotland, in the 1850s. In the early 1880s he was living in Windsor. As a real estate auctioneer, it is likely that he did well financially in Melbourne's building boom of the late 1880s.

When McIlwrick paid rates in March 1888 for two parcels of land on the north side of Wattle Tree Road, it was for the land only; no residence had yet been built. The land parcels were designated as lot 4 and lot 5, each measuring 70 ft x 193 ft (RB 1888). The following year, he was rated as the owner-occupier of an 8-roomed brick house in Wattle Tree Road, as well as vacant blocks on either side of the house (RB 1889). McIlwrick made a complaint in January 1888 about the footpath on Wattle Tree Road, between Denbigh Road and Sutherland Road, suggesting that the house was erected by that time or was in the process of construction. He also suggested at this time that the land at the intersection of Dandenong and Wattle Tree Road be made into a park; here he was referring to the triangular remnant of land that immediately faced his own property (SHC digital file, PH 17203).

In 1891-92 McIlwrick was rated for an 8-room brick residence at 5 Wattletree Road, Armadale, as well as adjoining vacant land (RB 1891-92). In 1900 he was again rated for the residence and for the adjoining land measuring 105 x 193 feet (RB 1900).

The 1901 MMBW detail plan shows a large Victorian villa named 'Cullean', with a servants' wing at the rear. The house was approached by a wide gravelled drive along the east side, which continued to the working end of the house. There were stables and a horse paddock at

CONTEXT

the north-east corner of the property. The house name 'Cullean' was taken from a placename in Ayrshire, Scotland. This was most likely chosen on account of William McIlwrick's family connection to that area.
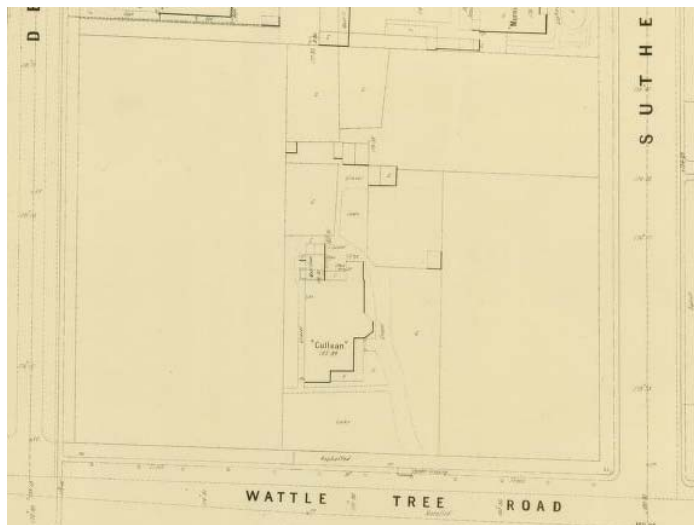

Figure 2. The 1901 MMBW detail plan shows that 'Cullean' is the only residence on Wattle Tree Road between Denbeigh Street and Sutherland Street, Armadale.
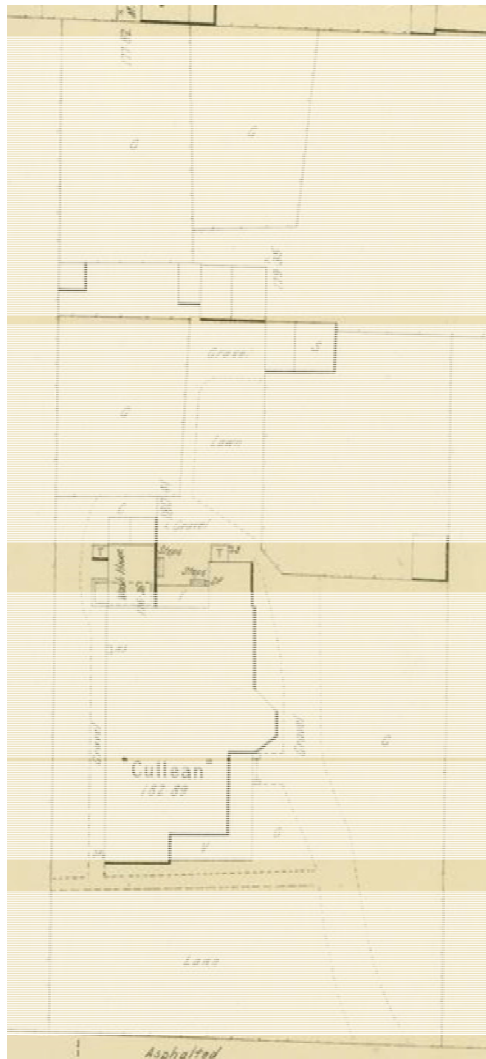

Figure 3 Extent of 'Cullean' in 1901, showing grounds and outbuildings, from MMBW Detail Plan. No. 997, Prahran, 1901 (source: SLV)

William McIlwrick's only son, William Matthew McIlwrick (1873–1945), lived at 'Cullean' with his parents. William Matthew McIlwrick studied law, and in 1899 was employed as an articled clerk who was applying to be a barrister (*Age*, 17 January 1899:7). After his marriage in 1908 to Josephine McIntyre, the couple lived at 'Cullean' with William McIlwrick senior. They had no children (Ancestry.com). Following the death of his father in 1922, William Matthew McIlwrick inherited the property at 5 Wattletree Road.

W.M. McIlwrick served as a Councillor of the City of Prahran from 1911 for 34 years, and died in office in 1945 (*Argus*, 5 October 1945). He served as Mayor of the City of Prahran on four occasions: 1915-16; 1929-31; and 1941-42 and 1942-43. He was instrumental in organising the Prahran branch of the Red Cross, and took steps to alleviate poverty amongst the unemployed in his municipality in 1929-30. He was also a trustee of the Prahran Technical School. The Mayoress, Josephine McIlwrick, was a key organiser of the Prahran branch of the Red Cross during World War I; she was later a governor of the Alfred Hospital (Card file, PH 17201, SHC).

Figure 4 William Matthew McIlwrick in mayoral robes, c.1942 (PH 13455, Stonnington History Centre)

In 1916, Hanover Street, Prahran, was renamed McIlwrick Street, after the Mayor William Matthew McIlwrick, by a decision of the Prahran City Council as part of an anti-German stance during World War I.

W.M. McIlwrick bequeathed a life interest in the house to his widow and requested that on her death 'the house goes to the Presbyterian Church of Victoria Trust Corporation for use as a manse for the minister for the time being of Armadale Presbyterian Church or any other purposes within the discretion of the corporation' (*Argus*, 29 August 1946:6). Josephine McIlwrick died at 'Cullean' in 1953 (*Age*, 25 February 1953:3), and the house was presumably transferred to the Presbyterian Church after that time.

In 1961 the house was incorporated as part of the Glenloch Homes for Aged Pensioners. The internal layout was adapted to accommodate a number of independent 'flats' (see *Age*, 7 December 1971, p. 22). This is a now non-religious organisation but the name suggests that there may originally have been an association with the Scots Presbyterian Church. Glenloch Homes advertises the home at 5 Wattletree Road to potential tenants as 'a charming period home with established gardens' ('Glenloch Homes', brochure, [n.d.]).

Sources

Age, 17 January 1899, p. 7.

Age, 5 October 1945, p. 8 (death notice William Matthew McIlwrick).

Age, 25 February 1953, p. 3 (death of Josephine McIlwrick).

Age, 7 December 1971, p. 22 (re bankruptcy notice, Flat 2 / 5 Wattletree Road).

Apperley, Richard, Irving, Robert & Reynolds, Peter 1989, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus & Robertson.

Argus, 29 August 1946, p. 6 (probate W. M. McIlwrick).

Brown-May & Swain (eds.) 2005, *Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press.

Card files: PH 17203 and PH 17204 (Stonnington History Centre).

City of Prahran. Rate Books, 1888, 1889, 1891-92, 1900.

Context Pty Ltd 2009, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History,* prepared for City of Stonnington, Prahran.

Cooper, J.B. *The History of Prahran: From its first settlement to a city.* Prahran City Council, 1912 (revised 1924).

'Farrbrae Estate, East St Kilda', subdivision plan, [n.d.] c.1879-1894 (State Library Victoria).

Glenloch Aged Care: www.glenloch.com.au

'Glenloch Homes: Affordable independent living for aged pensioners', brochure, [n.d.], http://www.glenloch.com.au/sites/www.glenloch.com.au/files/glenloch-homes-brochure.pdf

Hubbard, Timothy 'Italianate Style' in Goad, Philip & Willis, Julie (eds.) 2012, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture,* Cambridge University Press.

Jordan, Kerry 2003, 'Houses and Status: The Grand Houses of Nineteenth-Century Victoria', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, as cited in Statham, J 2008, 'HO367 Montrose House Heritage Assessment', City of Stonnington].

Lewis, Miles. Australian Architecture Index. (no tender notice found).

MMBW Detail Plan No. 997 (State Library of Victoria).

Sands & McDougall, *Melbourne and Suburban Directories* (S&McD).

Statham, John 2008, 'HO367 Montrose House Heritage Assessment', City of Stonnington ['The Italianate mode' quoted and paraphrased at length].

Wises. *The Victorian Post Office Directory, 1888-89.*

Physical description

'Cullean' is a large, single-storey Italianate villa which stands on the north side of Wattletree Road near its junction with Dandenong Road. It sits on a deep and wide block of land with a large front garden setback. The site has been redeveloped for use as an aged care home and two apartment buildings have been built around it, replacing the east side and rear gardens. The post-war flats in the side garden are two-storeys in height, and mimic the deep front setback of the villa, which lessens their presence in the streetscape. The flats at the rear are not visible from the street. A wide driveway has been created in front of the side flats, with paved parking in front of it and a driveway down the side, adjacent to the villa. Despite this, a substantial garden has been retained directly in front of the villa, hidden behind a modern timber paling fence.

Figure 4. View of 'Cullean' with the post-war flats beside it. (source: Context, 2016)

The villa has rendered walls and a slate-tiled roof. It is asymmetrical in form, as was popular for Italianate villas, with a projecting square bay on the west side of the front façade, and a semi-hexagonal projecting bay at the centre of the east side elevation. Between the projecting bays is a return verandah.

Figure 5. View of the east side elevation and part of the front (left), showing the slated hipped roof, bracketed chimneys and eaves, cast-iron verandah detail, and label moulds to the segmentally arched windows of the semi-hexagonal bay. (source: Context, 2016)

Apart from this asymmetrical composition, the villa exhibits many features that typify the Italianate style, including a low-line M-profile hipped roof, bracketed eaves and chimneys, and

CONTEXT

cast-iron detail to the verandah. The verandah is supported on slim cast-iron Corinthian columns, with a cast-iron frieze set in a timber frame with associated brackets below – a configuration common in the 1870s and early 1880s. It retains the original flooring of tessellated tiles with bullnose bluestone edging.

Figure 6. Detail of the cement render ornament below the verandah. (source: Context, 2016)

The villa exhibits a high level of intact detail executed in cast and run cement render. This includes panelling to the faces of the two rendered chimneys, as well as acanthus-leaf brackets below the chimney cornice; panelling between the eaves bracket of the roof, run label moulds with acanthus-leaf imposts to the segmentally arched windows, and stop-chamfering to the window reveals. The most distinctive ornament of the villa are large geometric designs of a stylised flower and foliage which are incised on the walls beneath the return verandah and on the face of the front projecting bay.

No external alterations to the physical fabric villa were noted.

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 the 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.

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, 'Cullean' at 5 Wattletree Road, Armadale can be compared to other Significant 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 Fawkner 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).

'Cullean' is more appropriately compared to larger Significant examples built on more generous allotments which allowed for a return verandah, often terminating at a second projecting bay to the side elevation (as seen at 'Cullean'). 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), 'Otira' at 56 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148), and 46 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148).

In comparison to the larger examples above, 'Cullean' has massing closest to that of 11 Avondale Road, though the position of the canted semi-hexagonal and rectangular projecting bays are reversed. This villa also shares characteristics such as rendered masonry walls and a relatively high level of run and cast cement render detail, such as brackets to the corniced chimneys and roof eaves, run label moulds to the segmentally arched windows, and vermiculated quoining.

Figure 7. 11 Avondale Road, Armadale, individually significant in HO123 (source: Google Streetview).

'Cullean' shares the use of a rectangular bay to the façade with 34 Grandview Grove, though this house is quite different in detail, relying on bichromatic brickwork for visual interest.

While 'Cullean' is very intact externally and has a relatively high level of external ornament, it is particularly unusual in the City of Stonnington for the incised geometric decoration on its rendered walls. This kind of decoration was strongly influenced by the flattened, geometricised designs popularised by British tastemaker Charles Eastlake with his bestselling *Hints on*

Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and other Details, first published in 1868. This floral and Greek-derived patterns were applied to furniture and building facades. In New York City, Eastlake-inspired patterns were carved into the soft brown sandstone slabs used to face terrace houses of the 1870s and '80s. In Australia, these designs were executed in fresh render.

While there are many Victorian houses in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay with a high level of external decoration executed in run and cast cement, only one individually significant house with this kind of incised ornament has been identified. This is an Italianate house at 163 Peel Street, Windsor (Significant in HO126). Apart from a wide range of heavy cast cement ornament, it has framed panels of incised floral designs.

Figure 8. 163 Peel Street, Windsor, individually significant in HO126. Note the panels on the walls containing incised floral designs (source: Context 2016)

The pre-eminent example of this type of ornament in Stonnington, and a highly unusual one in Australia, is seen on another villa assessed as part of the Victorian Houses Heritage Study. This is the former 'Hybla' at 18 Wallace Avenue, Toorak, of 1889. Its design was inspired by the Neo Greek villas in Glasgow of architect Alexander 'Greek' Thompson in the 1850s. Greek motifs, such as Greek key, anthemia and tridents are used along with stylised floral patterns on the walls which have some similarity to Eastlake-inspired designs.

CONTEXT

Figure 9. Detail of 'Hybla', 18 Wallace Avenue, Toorak. Note the incised designs around the windows, verandah plinths and above the verandah. (source: Context 2016)

In summary, 'Cullean' compares very well to individually significant Victorian houses already in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay in its high level of intactness. Its massing and relatively high level of cement-render and cast-iron ornament are comparable to other large Italianate villas in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, such as 11 Avondale Road. It is particularly distinguished as one of a small number of Victorian houses in the municipality that display incised patterns on the rendered walls, in stylised floral designs inspired by Charles Eastlake.

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

5.4 Developing local government authorities; 5.4.1 The municipality of Prahran

10.4 Health and welfare

'Cullean' is of historical interest for its association with notable local figures William Matthew McIlwrick (1873-1945) and his wife, Josephine McIlwrick. WM McIlwrick was several times Mayor of Prahran, and a trustee of the Prahran Technical School. The couple were key organisers of the Prahran Branch of the Red Cross, and Josephine was a governor of the Alfred Hospital.

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

CONTEXT

What is significant?

'Cullean' at 5 Wattletree Road, Armadale, is significant. It is a large single-storey Italianate villa with rendered masonry walls and a slate-clad roof. The house was built in 1888-89 for real estate auctioneer William McIlwrick as his family residence.

The house is significant to the extent of its nineteenth-century external form and fabric, particularly the main (south and east) facades and the roofscape with its complex hipped forms and chimneys.

The high front paling fence, post-1961 additions to the rear, and the blocks of flats to the rear and to the east of 'Cullean' are not significant.

How is it significant?

'Cullean' at 5 Wattletree Road, Armadale is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, 'Cullean' is a fine and highly intact representative example of a substantial Victorian Italianate villa residence built for middle-class residents of Armadale, of the sort that began to characterise the suburb in the 1880s and 1890s. 'Cullean' exhibits typical features of this type including the asymmetrical plan form with a projecting canted bay at each end of the return cast-iron verandah with tessellated tiles, intact ruled render finish, hipped roof clad in slate, rendered chimneys with heavy cornices, and bracketed eaves. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, 'Cullean' is distinguished by its high level of intact detail executed in cast and run cement render. This includes panelling to the faces of the two rendered chimneys, acanthus-leaf brackets below the chimney cornice; panelling between the eaves bracket of the roof, and run label moulds with acanthus-leaf imposts to the segmentally arched windows. Of particular importance and unusual in the municipality are the incised patterns on the rendered walls, in stylised floral designs inspired by Charles Eastlake. (Criterion E)

Recommendation

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent as shown on the map below.

HO Schedule controls: None

CONTEXT

Figure 10. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 5 Wattletree Road, Armadale (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2