

## 41 Dixon Street, Malvern

Place type: Residential Building (private), House

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.

### **Place history**

Malvern was developed as a comfortable middle-class suburb from the 1880s, following the extension of the railway line from South Yarra to Oakleigh in 1879. Many large estates established in this sought-after locality were subdivided to create smaller suburban allotments. Dixon Street, originally known as Dixson Street (Foster, 1996), was formed in 1885 as part of the subdivision of the fashionable Stanhope Estate (Foster and Stefanopolous, 2007:23). The estate was described as being 'close to three railway stations, [with] magnificent situations, splendid views, [and] about six hundred sites to choose from' (*Lorgnette*, 10 February 1885: 2). Allotments of the Stanhope Estate were sold off in sections from 1885 by auctioneers Staples, Wise & Co. Owner-occupiers, investors and speculative builders all took up allotments.

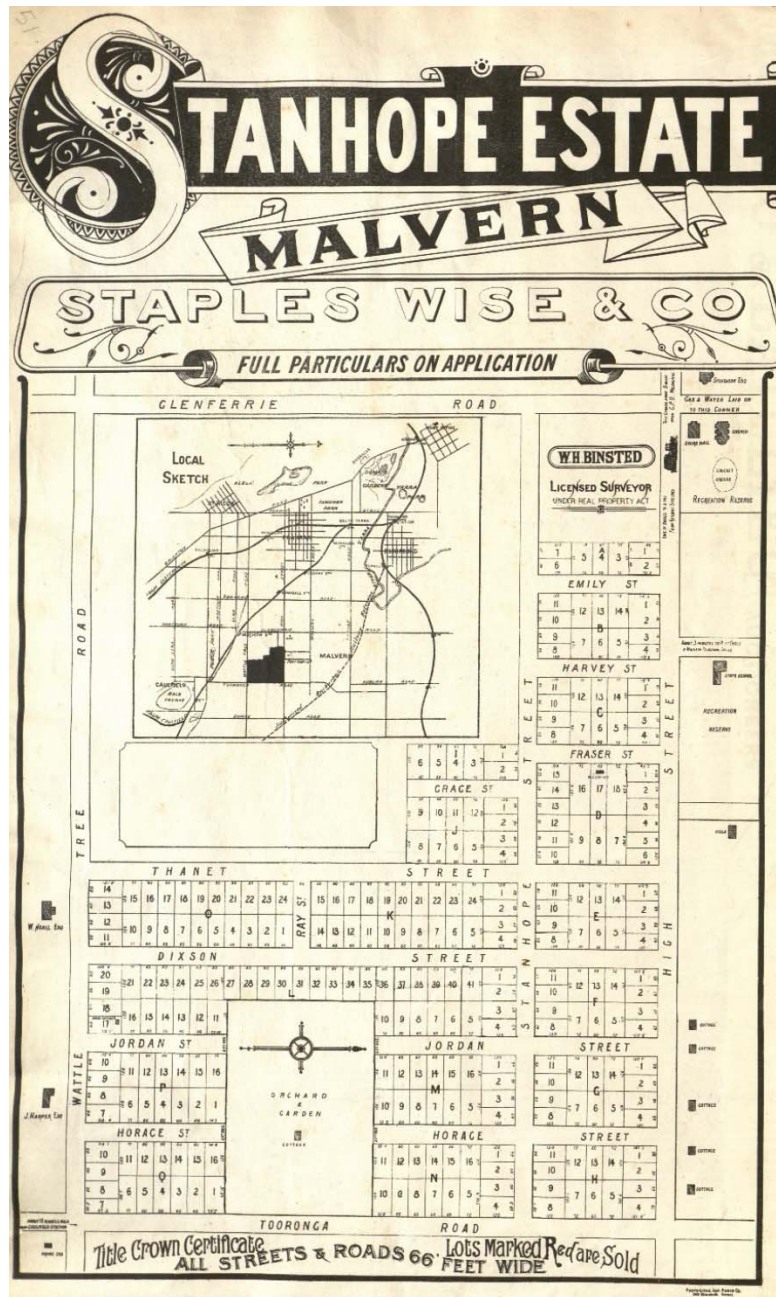


Figure 1 Plan of the Stanhope Estate, Malvern, [n.d.] c.189-? (source: State Library Victoria)

The suburban allotments in Dixon Street were a uniform size, each measuring 60 x 120 feet.

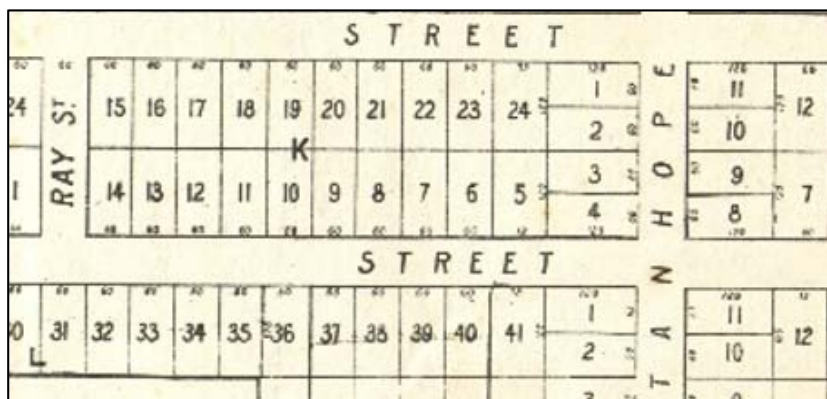


Figure 2 Detail of the Stanhope Estate subdivision plan, showing lot 9, which corresponds to 41 Dixon Street. Charles Butler also owned lots 8 and 10 in Dixon Street (source: State Library Victoria)

The Shire of Malvern rate books for 1891 indicate that lots 8, 9 and 10 in Dixon Street were owned by Charles Butler, contractor, no doubt as a speculative venture, but that no dwelling had yet been built on lot 9 (RB 1891). In 1893, lots 8 and 9 were rated as land only; the occupant (possibly using the land for agistment), was Thomas Mingham Muntiz, surveyor (RB 1893). By 1895, Butler had erected a 7-roomed brick house on the property measuring 120 x 120 feet (i.e., lots 8 and 9, 41 & 43 Dixon Street, though the house is located wholly on lot 9).

Charles Butler (1829–1901) of Fitzgibbon Street, Parkville, had emigrated from Hampshire, England, in the 1850s and became a successful Melbourne builder, brickmaker and contractor. Butler established the South Brunswick Brick Works (HI 7822-0256) in Albion Street, Brunswick (*Argus*, 6 April 1911:1; *Argus*, 14 January 1902:5; Probate papers, PROV). Amongst his significant building works was the extensive Canterbury Terrace, East Melbourne (VHR H0454), which he owned and built in 1877; the Goldsborough Mort Building, Melbourne (VHR H104); Methodist Ladies' College, Kew; and presumably his own two-storey brick residence at 51 Fitzgibbon Street, Parkville. In 1890, he served as president of the Builders and Contractors Association (*Argus*, 12 July 1890:10), and in 1897 he was nominated as a life governor of the Melbourne Workingman's College (*Age*, 23 Sept 1897:6).

The polychromatic brickwork on the facade of his own residence at 51 Fitzgibbon Street, Parkville (see below), bears a resemblance to the façade of 41 Dixon Street.

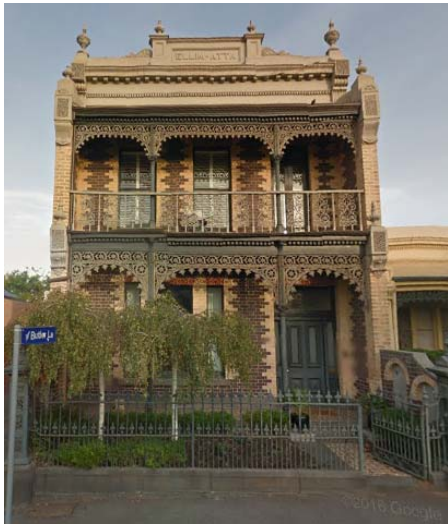


Figure 3: Former home of Charles Butler at 51 Fitzgibbon Street, Parkville. (source: Google Streetview, 2014)

In 1895, the newly completed residence at 41 Dixon Street, Malvern, was tenanted by C.A.D. Pascoe. Butler also owned the adjacent block, lot 10, in 1895. There were at that time very few other brick houses in Dixon Street (RB 1895). It is likely that Butler used bricks from his own brickworks to build the house in Dixon Street, which would be indicated by the stamp of either 'C. Butler' or 'S.B.B.W.' on the frog (Victorian Brickworks: <http://rameking2.blogspot.com.au/2013/12/charles-butler-and-son.html>; accessed 20 January 2017).

In 1897, the 7-roomed brick house owned by Butler, occupying lots 8 and 9, was tenanted by Henry M. Ramage, gentleman (RB 1897), and 1898 the tenant appears to be Joseph George McLean (RB 1898).

Charles Butler died in 1901 but appears to have sold the property shortly before his death. His probate papers indicate that he held several vacant building blocks at the time of his death, which were no doubt acquired for speculative purposes, but he had disposed of 41 Dixon Street before his death (Probate papers for Charles Butler, VPRS 28/P2, unit 302).

In 1901 and 1902, Bell Middleton was rated for the 8-roomed brick house (RB 1901, 1902). In 1901, his name had been inserted replacing previous owner 'Samuel Arthur, importer' (RB 1901). Until a second house was erected on the site that comprised lot 8, the brick house was numbered as No. 43 Dixon Street. In 1904, Bell Middleton was described as a 'sorter' (RB 1904). In 1913 and 1914 Bell Middleton, occupation 'gentleman', was leasing the residence to

Jonathon Barlow, secretary; the house was still listed as 43 Dixon Street (RB 1913, 1914). From 1918 to c.1924, the brick house was tenanted by Mrs Sarah Coburn and by this time it had been renumbered as 41 Dixon Street. Bell Middleton was recorded by 1918 as the owner/occupier of the new 43 Dixon Street, which was a smaller weatherboard dwelling, since demolished (RB 1918).

Sarah Ethelwyn Coborn occupied 41 Dixon Street as a tenant from 1919, her occupation given as 'home duties' (S&Mc 1919). By 1924, there were three additional women listed at this address with the surname Coburn, all typistes, and presumably Sarah Coburn's daughters (ER 1924).

The Malvern rate notice, dated 17 November 1924, for a 7-roomed brick house at 41 Dixon Street has Sarah Coburn's name crossed out as the occupant, replaced by the name of the new occupant, Lewen Masters. The owner remained Bell Middleton, gentleman, who continued to reside next door in the new timber house (RB 1924). In 1924 Bell Middleton was described as a retired public servant (ER 1924). He died in 1932.

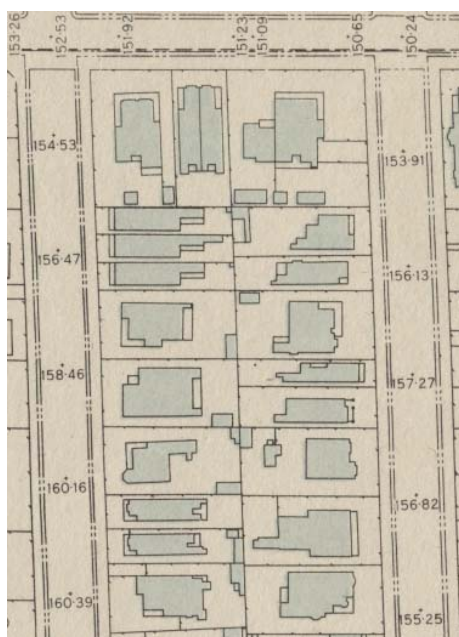


Figure 4 MMBW Plan no. 61, Malvern, 1948, 41 Dixon Street is 8th from the top corner) (source: University of Melbourne Map Collection)

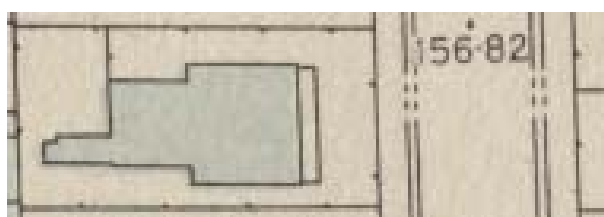


Figure 5 41 Dixon Street, Malvern, from MMBW Plan no. 61, Malvern, 1948 (source: University of Melbourne Map Collection)

Later occupants include Miss V.E. Sheppard in 1930 (S&Mc 1930). In 1949 Isabella Mary Backhouse, Home Duties, occupied the house (ER 1949). She died in 1952 (*Age*, 29 January 1952:7).

### Sources

*Age*, 23 September 1897, p. 6.

*Age*, 29 January 1952, p. 7 (death of Isabella Mary Backhouse).

*Age*, 16 November 1982, p. 10 (real estate notice).

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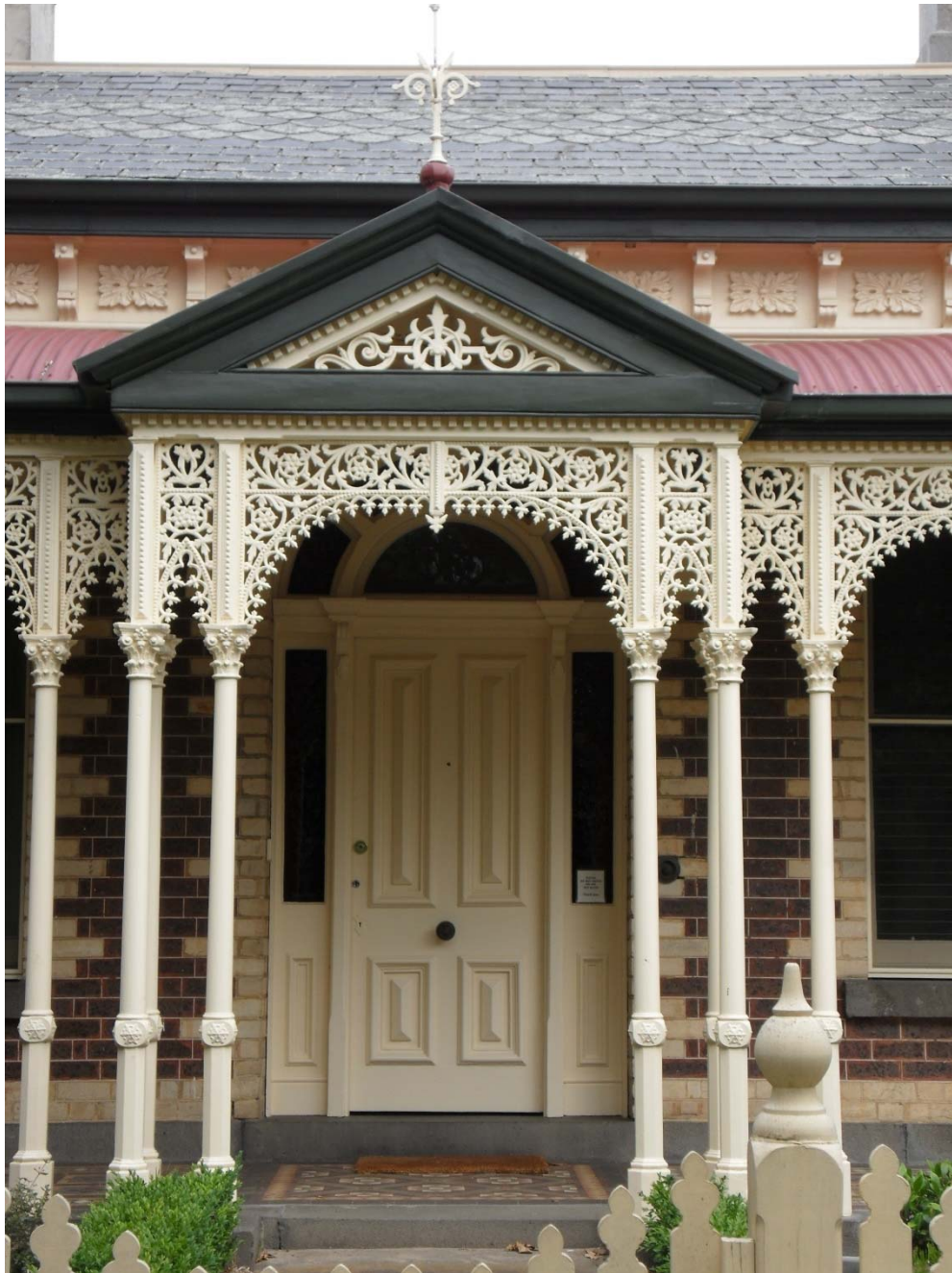
### Physical description

The house at 41 Dixon Street is a double-fronted single-storey Italianate villa that is highly intact. It occupies a somewhat elevated allotment on the west side of Dixon Street, Malvern. The house is set back behind a medium-sized front garden and a sympathetic reproduction

timber picket fence. There is a wide setback on the north side, allowing for a side driveway and associated Victorian-style carport attached to the side of the house.

The house takes the typical form of a symmetrical, block-fronted Italianate villa. Features typical of this type include the M-profile hipped roof with a symmetrical pair of rendered and corniced chimneys, bracketed eaves, a cast-iron embellished front verandah, and symmetrical composition of openings with a central front door and two double-hung sash windows on either side.

The front wall is of tuckpointed brown Hawthorn brick with cream brick quoins to the corners and around the opening, set on a bluestone plinth. The side elevations are of plain red brick. Windows have bluestone sills. The roof retains what appear to be original slates with a central band of green octagonal slates set within rectangular black slates.



*Figure 6. Detail of the front entrance, showing the entry pediment, verandah detail, and arched front door. (source: Context 2016)*

The house retains a high level of original detail, with a concentration on the verandah. The eaves have alternating cast brackets and tablet flowers. The front door sits within a round-

arched opening and has a double arched highlight and sidelights of ruby flashed glass. The front door is four-panelled with fielded panels and bolection mouldings. It is reached via a short flight of bluestone steps. The front verandah has a convex profile hipped roof, with a triangular pediment marking the central entrance. On its apex is a scrolled cast-iron finial, and within the tympanum is more cast-iron ornament. Verandah posts are grouped in threes at the ends, and quadrupled on either side of the entrance. They have an octagonal base transitioning to a slender round shaft. At the juncture between these two sections is a rounded boss with a raised snowflake pattern on it. Capitals are the typical Corinthian type typical of this era. The cast-iron frieze has a traditional rinceaux pattern with integral brackets. Between paired columns, the brackets form a pointed arch.



Figure 7. 41 Dixon Street, showing the carport on the north side which employs simplified versions of the verandah posts and frieze. (source: Context 2016)

Apart from the addition of the carport on the north side, the house appears to be externally intact as viewed from the street.

### 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.

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.

There are a number of small to medium-sized Italianate houses that are individually significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, most of them on the western side of the municipality. Most of them are the asymmetrical type, with a projecting bay to one side of the façade creating additional visual interest. A smaller number of the Significant houses are the symmetrical type, with a double-fronted flat façade. Examples of this type include more modest houses set on suburban allotments that didn't allow space for a returning verandah: 39

Densham Road, Armadale (in HO130), 66 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 69 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (in HO149), 35 Woodfull Street, Prahran (in HO135), 14 Greville Street, Prahran (in HO456), 23 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (HO131), 36 Gladstone Street, Windsor (in HO134), and 35 McIlwrick Street, Windsor (in HO138). The examples at 5 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130) and 13 Evelina Road, Toorak (in HO380) adopt a central pediment to the verandah, indicating the entrance, as at 41 Dixon Street. The villas at 4 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135), 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 sides.

In its massing and detailing, 41 Dixon Street can be best compared to 5 Northcote Road and 13 Evelina Road, both of which have a front verandah with central pediment. Of the two, 41 Dixon is most similar to 13 Evelina Road in its higher than average level of verandah detail. Both houses have eaves brackets that alternate with cast tablet flowers, a convex verandah roof and grouped cast-iron columns to the entrance portico and ends of the verandah. Walls are finished in ruled render. It is somewhat less intact than 41 Dixon Street, with the original roofing slates replaced with terracotta tiles.



*Figure 8: 13 Evelina Road, Toorak, individually significant in HO380. (source: Google Streetview)*

The house at 5 Northcote Road is more similar in materials and intactness, but simpler in detail than 41 Dixon Street. Walls are of tuckpointed red brick, and the roof is clad in slates. The hipped roof of the verandah has uncurved sheets, and single posts are used at the corners and to the entrance portico. Instead of the enclosed and decorated tympanum as seen at 41 Dixon Street and 13 Evelina Road, the pediment is open at the bottom and ornamented with a raking cast-iron frieze.



Figure 9. 5 Northcote Road, Armadale, individually significant in HO130. (source: Google Streetview)

While rendered masonry walls are the most commonly seen on these Italianate houses, 41 Dixon Street is one of a number that have bichrome brick walls and its pattern is simple. This sort of brick patterning is seen on many individually significant Victorian houses in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, including symmetrical Italianate houses such as 15 Woodfull Street, Prahran (in HO135), 69 Tivoli Road, South Yarra (HO149), 23 Fawkner Street, South Yarra (in HO131), and 35 McIlwrick Street, Windsor (HO138). All of these examples, however, have simple front verandah detail, without the grouped columns and central pediment.

### 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. Building Suburbs

41 Dixon Street is of historical interest as the work of Charles Butler (1829-1901), notable brickmaker, builder and contractor operating in Melbourne from the 1870s to 1901.

### 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 41 Dixon Street, Malvern, is significant. It is a single-storey building set on a slight rise. It has a symmetrical, block-fronted façade, front verandah, and hipped roof. The front wall is of brown Hawthorn bricks with cream brick dressings, while red bricks are used for the side elevations.

The house was built as a rental property in 1894 by Charles Butler, a successful Melbourne builder, brickmaker and contractor in the 1870s to 1890s, and was presumably designed by him.

The house is significant to the extent of its nineteenth-century external form and fabric, particularly the principal (east) façade, the front verandah, and the hipped roof and chimneys.

The sympathetic front fence, faux Victorian carport, and rear extension are not significant.

### How is it significant?

The villa at 41 Dixon Street, Malvern is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Malvern.

### Why is it significant?

Architecturally, the villa at 41 Dixon Street, Malvern is a fine and intact representative example of a single-storey Italianate villa built to house the 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 the symmetrical plan form, M-profile hipped roof with bracketed eaves, and rendered chimneys with heavy cornices. Bichrome brickwork was popular for houses of the Italianate and other styles from the late 1860s to the 1890s. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, the villa is distinguished by its high level of intact ornamental detail, particularly the front verandah. It has grouped cast-iron posts with octagonal plinths, a rinceaux-pattern cast-iron frieze and brackets, with arches between paired posts. At the centre is a triangular pediment with a cast-iron infill and finial. Other details of note are the cast-cement ornament to the eaves, and the arched front door which retains extensive ruby-flashed glass. (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

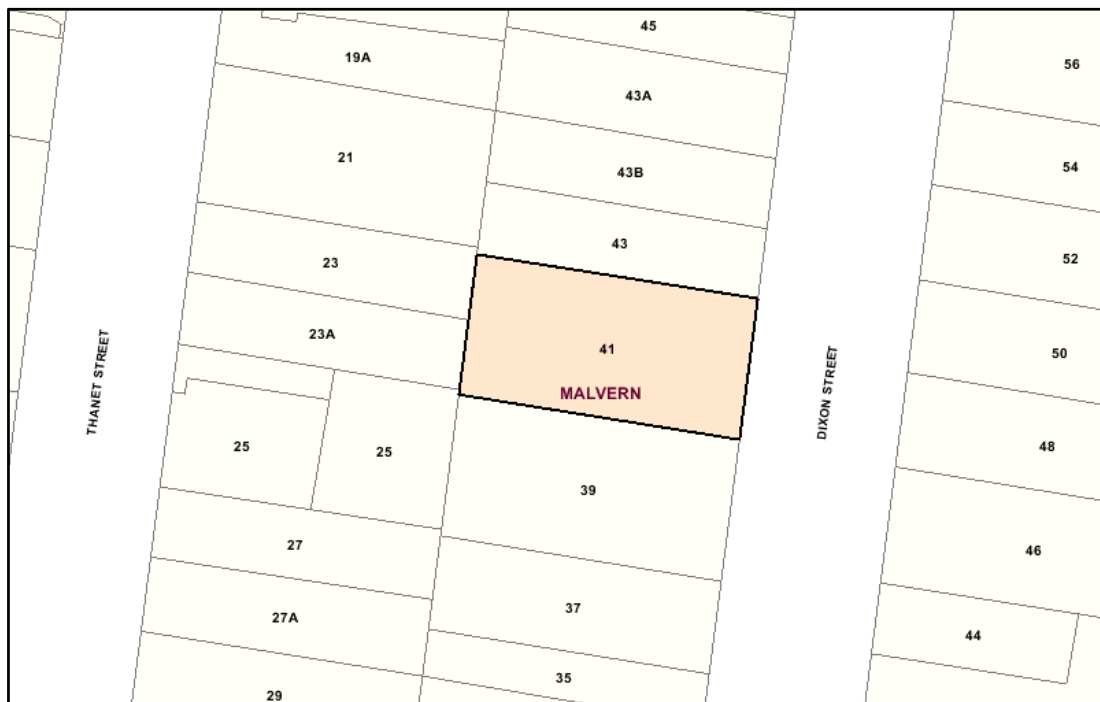


Figure 10. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 41 Dixon Street, Malvern (source: [www.land.vic.gov.au](http://www.land.vic.gov.au)).

Recommended grading: A2