

'Gracedale'

50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Villa

Significance level: Local



'Gracedale' 50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern

Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Italianate (Boom style)

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

The house at number 50 was erected in 1896 on the sloping hill of Elizabeth Street, Malvern, along with a similar dwelling next door at Number 48. They were built following the subdivision of the Tooronga Railway Estate in 1890 (Figure 2), which formed part of the development of Malvern from the 1880s as a fashionable and affluent middle-class suburb. The rate books for the Shire of Malvern indicate that number 50 was a substantial brick residence of 9 rooms (RB).

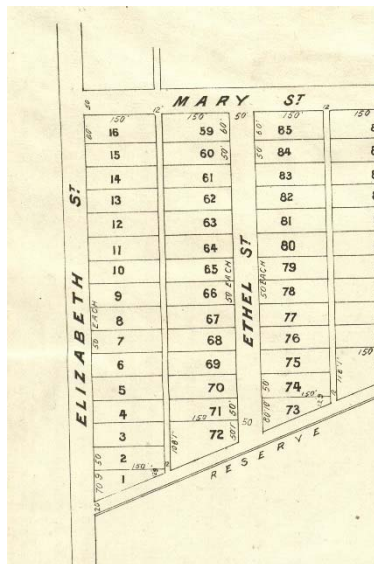


Figure 1. Detail of Tooronga Station Estate c1890 (source: SLV).

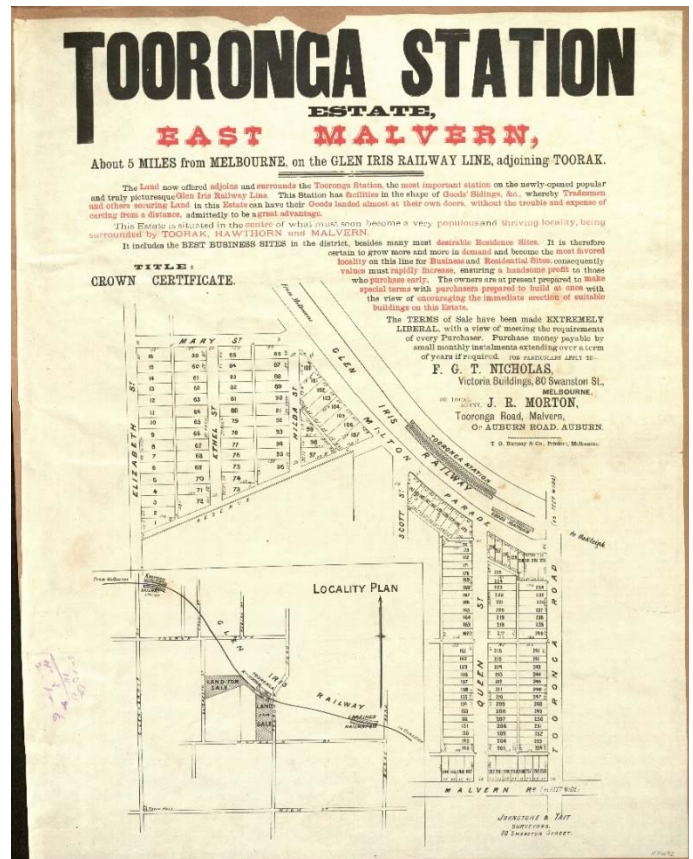


Figure 2. Tooronga Station Estate c1890 (source: SLV).

The house is identified as 'Gracedale' on the MMBW Detail Plan of 1907 (see Figure 3). The house was plumbed with an inside bathroom comprising bath and lavatory (by 1907). It had a double-hung entrance gate for vehicles to enter and there are large outbuildings at the rear of, which may have served as either as stables or a motor garage. The property also had a rear outside toilet.

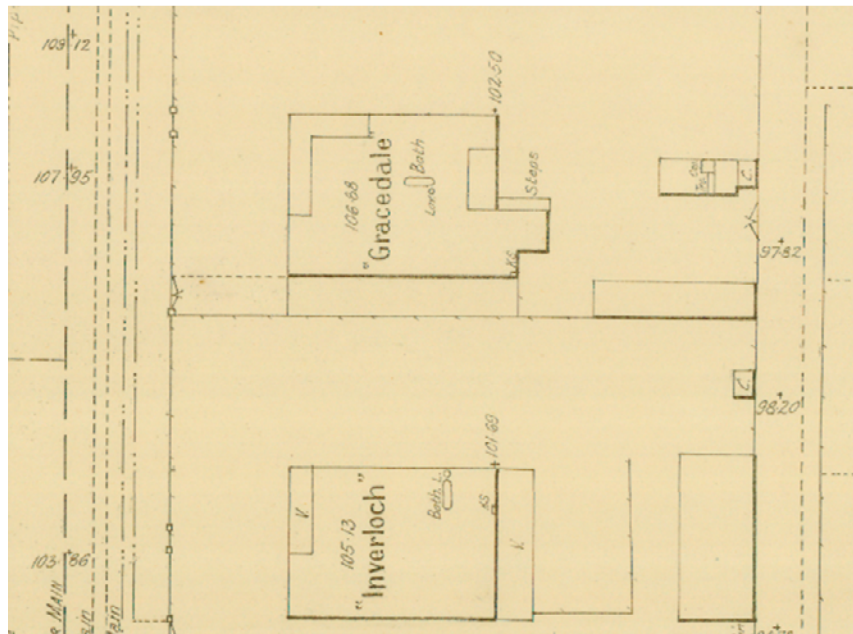


Figure 3. MMBW Detail Plan no. 1777, dated 1907. Showing 'Gracedale' (no. 50) and its southern neighbour 'Inverloch' built at the same time. (source: SLV).

'Gracedale' was first owned by John M Cumming, who is listed as occupying a brick house of 9 rooms (RB; S&McD).

During the interwar period, the supports to the return verandah were replaced with more up-to-date dwarf Tuscan-order columns resting on rendered piers. The ogee-profile roof of the return verandah was retained.



Figure 4. Front verandah of 50 Elizabeth Street in 1992, showing the interwar verandah supports and the original ogee-profile roof. (source: Stonnington History Centre, Reg. MP14527)

In 1942 the house and its contents were sold at auction. The items listed for sale are indicative of a comfortable middle-class suburban home at that time:

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5. At 11 a.m. On the Premises. 50 ELIZABETH-STREET. MALVERN.

Choice FURNISHINGS. Including Upright Grand Piano, by Hoel-Ung and Spangenberg. In Walnut Case: Dainty 3-piece Occasional Suite. Carved Walnut Frames; Suite of Very Fine Walnut Dining Chairs, Cedar Wardrobe and Chest of Drawers, Finest Quality Axminster Carpets. Ornaments and Bedroom Furnishings. Solid Walnut Dining Table. Kitchen Utensils, etc. 'To be Sold at 12 Noon. — ROLLS ROYCE SEDAN CAR. Silver Ghost Model. New Martin and King Body. On View Day Preceding Sale, from 2 to 4.30 p.m. A J WELLER & SON. Auctioneers, 204 Glenferrie-road (near Town Hall). Malvern (Age 31 October 1942).

The house was renovated and extended at the rear in 1992. The Stonnington Library Service holds in its collection a series of photographs as a record of the renovation project carried out by architectural practice Hayball Leonard Stent, which was submitted for a City of Malvern Design Award. Part of the works included a restoration of the return verandah. The roofing iron was removed and replaced in the same profile, and new cast-iron verandah posts and decorative frieze and brackets were installed.



Figure 5. House at 50 Elizabeth St, Malvern, taken in 1992 (Stonnington Library and Information Service).

Sources

Age, 31 October 1942.

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Photos of renovation project at 50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern, taken 1992, Stonnington Library and Information Service.

Plan of subdivision, 'Tooronga Station Estate' c1890, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

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Physical description

The residence known as ‘Gracedale’ at 50 Elizabeth Street is a single storey rendered villa on the east side of Elizabeth Street mid-block between Beaven Avenue and Mary Street in Malvern. It is set back behind mid-sized gardens with a vehicle turning-bay and high masonry and hedged front fences that conceal views to the building from the street.

Constructed in 1896, ‘Gracedale’, has an asymmetrical plan which features a rectangular projecting bay to one side of an ogee-profile cast-iron verandah that returns along the north side. The building façade steps back twice from the projecting front bay with the front door accessed beneath the return verandah at the rear northern bay.

The building is distinguished by its boldly modelled parapet, with decorative cornices below, which conceal the M-profile hipped roof. The tall chimneys are rendered with large cornice mouldings, corbelling and wythes, and are decorated with a recurring cast shell motif. The balustraded parapet has classically turned balusters set between piers. The highly decorative cornice has deep mouldings with modillions and a continuous frieze of cast festoons. The cement render finish has been painted and is relatively plain below the cornice with simple square-headed openings to the double-hung sash windows, which are paired to the projecting bays and beneath the verandahs. The front door appears to retain the decorative glazing to the sidelights and highlights.



Figure 6. Detail of balustraded parapet and elaborate cornice at 'Gracedale' at 50 Elizabeth Street (source: Context 2016).

The ogee-profile verandah has a corrugated iron cast-iron frieze, brackets and ornamental fluted posts with Corinthian capitals, all reinstated in 1992 (it is not known what the original cast-iron patterns were, but the present ones are appropriate to the period).

The house has been subject to a large extension, which is contained to the rear. The high hedged fence conceals much of the distinctive architectural features of the house 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 more pretentious in this group might even adopt a small tower or the suggestion of one.

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 (Statham, 2008).

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the Italianate style 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 (2012:357) notes:

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.

As Melbourne’s land boom reached its height in the late 1880s and early 1890s, both grand and small houses in the Italianate mode were covered with increasingly florid and extravagant ornament, some of it straying beyond Italianate’s traditional classical vocabulary. These houses are often referred to as ‘Boom Style’, particularly small terrace houses with enormous showy parapets. While the most common type of ‘Boom Style’ house is related to the Italianate, it can also be applied to other types of buildings of that era, including the Gothic Revival Olderfleet Buildings and the Renaissance Revival Block Arcade, both in Melbourne. Kohan and Willis (2012:97) note that ‘Boom Style’ is not a definable style but instead a compositional approach with richly adorned facades.

Despite being constructed after the land boom crash, ‘Gracedale’ can be best compared to other Boom-style villas constructed in Malvern during the late 1880s and 1890s, including those along the south side of Stanhope Street. These include the row of detached houses: ‘Roma’, at no. 44 (HO337), ‘Branskea’, at no. 46 (HO338), ‘Coimboon’, at no. 48 (HO279), ‘Inverleith’, at no. 50 (HO339); ‘Darjeeling’, at no. 52 (HO340), and ‘Castledon’ at no. 54 (HO280); and the villas ‘Rostrevor’, at no. 86 (HO281), ‘Gunyah’, at no. 88 (HO282), and no. 92 (HO283). Due to their similarity in form and detailing, they appear to have all been designed by a single builder or designer.



Figure 7. ‘Branksea’ 46 Stanhope Street, Malvern HO338 (source: Context 2016).

In comparison with the Stanhope Street examples, 'Gracedale' has less elaborate parapet detailing (i.e. without a semi-circular pediment), but conveys the stylistic exuberance of the Boom-period through its balustraded parapet and the applied ornamentation to the cornice. They can be most closely compared to the villa 'Branksea' at 46 Stanhope Street (**Error! Reference source not found.**) which adopts a similar plan form of a projecting rectangular bay to one side of a cast-iron verandah. It retains tuckpointed polychrome brickwork below the ornate rendered parapet, however, it appears that the verandah has been replaced with straight sheets of corrugated iron. 'Gracedale' compares well to this example in level of intactness as it retains its ogee profile verandah and cast cement ornamentation.



Figure 8. 'Castleton', 54 Stanhope Street, Malvern HO280 (source: Graeme Butler & Associates, March 2002, Heritage Overlay Review, Amendment C5, C6, City of Stonnington).

'Gracedale' is distinguished by its Boom-era ornamentation when compared with the comparatively small number of late Victorian houses in this part of Malvern.

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*

8.2.1 *'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?

'Gracedale', at 50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern, is significant. It was constructed in 1896 and comprises a single-storey residence built to a design of distinctive detailing representing the stylistic excesses and flamboyance of the late Boom period, despite being constructed several years after the economic crash.

The house features rendered masonry walls, an Italianate asymmetrical plan form with projecting rectangular bays, distinctive cast cement balustraded parapets and a return verandah.

The front facade of the house is substantially intact externally, apart from the reinstatement of verandah iron in 1992. It is significant to the extent of the nineteenth-century form and fabric. The modern rear addition and front brick fence are not significant.

How is it significant?

‘Gracedale’, at 50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern, is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, ‘Gracedale’ is a substantially intact representative example of the Boom-style houses constructed in Melbourne’s suburbs in the late 1880s and 1890s. The house adopts typical Italianate features, such as the asymmetrical plan form, M-profile hipped roof (concealed), double-hung sash windows, and ornate entrance doors. It is one of a small number of nineteenth-century Boom-style houses in this part of Malvern. They were built as part of the development of Malvern from the 1880s as a fashionable and affluent middle-class suburb. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, the house is distinguished by its boldly modelled balustraded parapet, with decorative cornice below, and the tall rendered chimneys with large cornice mouldings, corbelling and wythes. The highly decorative cornice of the houses has deep mouldings with modillions and a continuous frieze of cast festoons. The return verandah retains its ogee-profile roof. (Criterion E)

Recommendation

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the whole property at 50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern as defined by the title boundaries.

HO Schedule controls: None



Figure 9. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 50 Elizabeth Street, Malvern (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2