

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

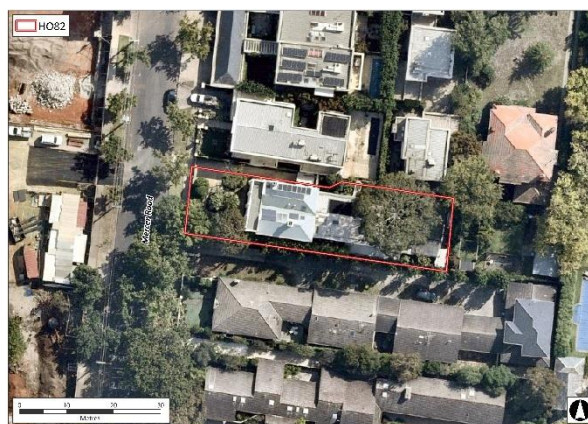
Heritage Place: Residence
Address: 34 Mercer Road, Armadale

HO Reference: HO82
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 2 November 2023
Year of Construction: 1888

Designer: Unknown
Builder: James Dodgson



Photograph of 34 Mercer Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO82.

Heritage Group: Residential Buildings
Heritage Type: Mansion

Key Theme: Building Suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Creating Australia's most prestigious suburbs

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as an individually significant place on the HO

Controls:	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input type="checkbox"/> Internal alterations	<input type="checkbox"/> Tree controls
	<input type="checkbox"/> Victorian Heritage Register	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporated Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Prohibited uses may be permitted	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 34 Mercer Road, Armadale is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the 1888 boom era mansion is of local heritage significance, as well as the mature palm (*arecaceae*) trees in the front setback. The 1929 extension (later significantly altered), front fence, post-2008 weatherboard extension, carport, bungalow and shed are not significant.

How is it significant?

The residence at 34 Mercer Road, Armadale is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington. Further, the façade has rare articulation and ornamentation.

Why is it significant?

The residence is of historic significance in demonstrating the development of boom era mansions in the suburb of Armadale during the late 19th century, and in particular, the development of comparatively smaller allotments than those of the large Toorak mansions and estates constructed during the same period. The residence is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period. (Criterion A)

The façade of the residence is of interest as an unusual and comparatively rare example of an arcuated four bay verandah in two tier composition, divided by engaged columns in superimposed orders and enhanced with classical mouldings in stucco. Ornamentation in this manner is reasonably rare within the municipality. (Criterion B)

The residence is a high-quality, fine and intact example of an Italianate boom era mansion, comprising an unusual arcaded verandah, decorative stucco and ornamented parapet. The building is a prominent structure on Mercer Street owing to the elaborate façade design, high integrity and high visibility. The mature palm (*arecaceae*) trees in the front setback are likely remnant plantings from the construction of the house and add to the setting of the place. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	The residence is of historic significance in demonstrating the development of boom era mansions in the suburb of Armadale during the late 19th century, and in particular, the development of comparatively smaller allotments than those of the large Toorak mansions and estates constructed during the same period. The residence is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period.
B	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	The façade of the residence is of interest as an unusual and comparatively rare example of an arcuated four bay verandah in two tier

		composition, divided by engaged columns in superimposed orders and enhanced with classical mouldings in stucco. Ornamentation in this manner is reasonably rare within the municipality.
C	<i>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
D	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
E	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	The residence is a high-quality, fine and intact example of an Italianate boom era mansion, comprising an unusual arcaded verandah, decorative stucco and ornamented parapet. The building is a prominent structure on Mercer Street owing to the elaborate façade design, high integrity and high visibility. The mature palm (arecaceae) trees in the front setback are likely remnant plantings from the construction of the house and add to the setting of the place.
F	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
G	<i>Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
H	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

• Physical Analysis

The residence at 34 Mercer Road, Armadale, is a two-storey rendered brick structure with a distinctive Victorian boom era style combined with some unusual features. The front façade is notable for its unusual arrangement of four arcuated bays in two tier composition, divided by engaged columns in superimposed orders and enhanced with classical mouldings in stucco. The bays form a portico that

span the length of the street façade of the building and extend up to the first level to form a covered porch both laid in English tiles. The rest of the structure behind the street front façade balustraded parapet has a double hipped roof. The street front façade is finished in a white render and the sides of the structure are a white painted brick.

The five columns are intricately designed to accentuate the striking vertical form. The ground level Tuscan columns sit on a pedestal, framed on each side by two square Doric columns which form the arches. The half round columns extruded from the façade terminate at the entablature denoting the first-floor slab. The first-floor Doric columns continue from the same pattern, sitting on a pedestal and is framed in a similar fashion to the ground level arches. The first floor and parapet levels have Victorian spindle balustrades. The extruded half round columns are engaged piers and are not load bearing.

The front façade porticos have arched double hung timber sash windows in a double height. There are engaged piers on the inside wall of the portico to mirror the street front façade. The main entrance cross hatched leadlight door is located off the pebble laid side path. The door is arched and has a similar design to the front façade, framed by two stylised columns that form the door frame. The front entrance is protected by a half round metal sheet awning that is sympathetic to the door form.

The front and back yards of the property are landscaped. There are several mature trees on the property including some tall palm (*arecaceae*) trees, however it is unclear if these are original to the site. The front yard includes several fan palms (*washingtonia*), yucca trees and dense shrub plantings that partially obscure the building from street view. The backyard has several additions including a carport, a bungalow, a storage shed and a garden pond.

The street front boundary is demarcated by spear top fencing supported by a concrete foundation with four piers. The fencing and piers are painted dark grey in contrast to the white front façade of the structure. The front boundary fence is a contemporary addition.

The rear of the dwelling was extended in 1929, creating the former west façade. Sometime after 2008, a major two-storey extension was constructed over the first extension. The 2008 extension is clad in weatherboard and has contemporary window and door forms that are not in character with the original dwelling. Aerial imagery shows solar panels and skylights on the roof.

The dwelling is located near the junction of Mercer Road and Malvern Road, in close proximity to commercial shops on Malvern Road and Lauriston Girls School. The site is currently used a residential property and is considered to be in good condition. The distinctive street front façade of the property has a high degree of integrity. The property overall is of moderate integrity due to the extensions and alterations to the original form.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- Brick extension to the main structure at the rear (1929).
- Major two-storey extension clad in weatherboard to the rear of the main structure (after 2008).
- Replacement of original roof to Corrugated galvanized iron roof.
- Addition of skylights.
- Addition of solar panels.
- Addition of a side carport.
- Addition of front entrance half round awning.

- New front fence, concrete foundation and piers.

History

• Historical Context

For thousands of years preceding European colonialism, the area now known as Stonnington was the traditional home of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. This environment would have provided historical traditional owners with access to pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot), and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), in a rolling landscape on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay. It is important to note that the rich cultural heritage of traditional owners in Stonnington did not end with colonialism—it has a rich presence to this day.

The first land sales in what would become Armadale began in 1854 following the surveying of Glenferrie Road and High Street. The suburb of Armadale was formally included in the City of Prahran and, as is the case with many suburbs in Stonnington and surrounds, it received its name from a lone but notable property. Armadale House was built by one James Munro, son of the first keeper of the Prahran pound. On arriving in Australia from his home in Sutherland, Scotland, Munro would work for Fergusson and Moore—Fergusson being James Fergusson of Kooyong. Munro went on to become Premier of Victoria and, later, Attorney General, before losing it all in the economic crash of the 1890s. Following the turn of the century, many of the original 19th century properties faced demolition and subdivision, encouraging growth in early 20th century and the interwar period. While Armadale today enjoys an affluent reputation for its association with the surrounding suburbs of Toorak, Malvern and Kooyong, traces of remnant working class houses can be seen at the small timber workers cottages present in some parts off High Street and near the border with Malvern (Cooper 1924, 268).

• Place History

Constructed in 1888, the development of 34 Mercer Road was a speculative venture undertaken by civil servant W.J. Stodart. James Dodgson, a warehouseman, completed and occupied the nine room brick house in 1889. The MMBW plan of c.1894 shows the completed dwelling on its current allotment. During this early period, the properties at 34 and 36 Mercer Road shared an accessway to outbuildings at the rear along the common boundary (MMBW 1894). Dodgson remained in residence until the mid-1890s when the house was briefly occupied by Frederick Frith. From around 1897 onwards, the dwelling was home to solicitor Gordon R. Stewart Sands.

The MMBW plan of 1902 shows the residence with the same footprint as the c.1894 plan and the accessway remaining between 34 and 36 Mercer Road. An outbuilding is also situated along the western boundary.

The residence remained in the Stewart family until at least the 1916 and known occupants during this period include Mrs I. Stewart, Mrs G.R. Stewart and Belle Stewart. It is likely that the first additions to the rear of the dwelling took place during this period.

During WWI, the property was passed on to Nellie Robertson before its purchase and occupation by Albert Cherbury David Rivett and Stella Rivett née Deakin in 1929. A successful chemistry professor and science administrator, Albert Rivett's involvement in the Commonwealth Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (later CSIRO) as Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer from 1927 led to

significant contributions in the field of animal disease control (Schedvin 1988). He was subsequently knighted for his efforts in 1935 while living at Mercer Road. The middle daughter of second Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, Stella was also a research chemist who studied at the University of Melbourne (Deakin University Library 2021). During the Rivett occupancy, Stella made a number of alterations to the earlier additions to the rear of the residence. Throughout the 1940s, the property was occupied by Annie Lee-Steere. By 1948 until at least the mid-1980s, Mrs E.L. Feller and architect Karl Feller occupied the property. Key alterations during this period include the construction of a carport and studio to the rear of the dwelling in 1984.

Comparative Analysis

In Armadale there are several examples of large Victorian mansions reflecting the suburb's affluent history from the late 19th century. Though these residences no longer grace manicured gardens set on acreage, they still represent a period of booming development and affluence in Armadale as well as the Victorian Italianate boom era style. From a historical and architectural era perspective, the subject site is comparable with the following properties:

- **Trelowarren, formerly known as Kilbryde (543 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO86).** Built in 1876-77 as a boom era Italianate mansion formerly on a large estate.
- **Larnook (519 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO85).** Built in 1881 as a late 19th century boom era Italianate mansion formerly on a large estate.
- **Stokell (49-51 Adelaide Street, Armadale) (HO1).** Built in 1889 as a boom era Italianate mansion formerly on a large estate.

However, the dwelling at 34 Mercer Road can be clearly differentiated in two ways; the original allotment size and the unusual façade detailing. Unlike the above examples that were once set on extensive acreage, the building was constructed on a much smaller allotment with only the rear portion subdivided for 1088-1090 Malvern Road. Further, the façade is of interest as an unusual and comparatively rare arcuated four bay façade in two tier composition, divided by engaged columns in superimposed orders and enhanced with classical mouldings in stucco. No clear comparative examples were identified for this assessment, however the following properties from the same era demonstrate similar architectural qualities:

- **3-5 Mercer Road, Armadale (HO327).** Built in 1890, the subject site consists of a set of substantial terraces characterised by vaulted loggias on both ground and first levels. The façade is defined by three arched openings with the centre arch wider than the two side arches, each framed by Tuscan order engaged piers. Although these elements are different in detail design, they have a similar streetscape presence as 34 Mercer Road.
- **10-12 Northcote Road, Armadale (HO130).** The site consists of a set of late 19th century terraces with arcaded verandahs and decorative piers. The roof form is different to 34 Mercer Road in that there is no parapet, with a slate hipped roof exposed.

The above comparative assessment shows that façade ornamentation in this manner is reasonably rare within the municipality.

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Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

Further Images



Overview of front façade (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Front façade and fence (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View along western elevation, showing the 2008 two-storey rear extension (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of chimney (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

Former citation prepared by: John Statham Conservation Consultant, 2002.

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