

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Residence
Address: 14 Mercer Road, Armadale

HO Reference: HO329
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 2 November 2023

Designer: Arthur Fisher (possibly)
Builder: Unknown

Year of Construction: 1899



Photograph of 14 Mercer Road (source: Extent Heritage, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO329.

Heritage Group: Residential Buildings
Heritage Type: House

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Middle class suburbs and the suburban ideal

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 14 Mercer Road, Armadale is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the Victorian era dwelling with Medieval/Free Style influences is of local heritage significance. The timber front fence is contributory. The garage addition, landscaping and later alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

14 Mercer Road is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Aesthetically, 14 Mercer Road is distinguished by its medieval-inspired detailing. It is a style that sets the building apart from the prevailing fashions of the Victorian era. It is a style that set these buildings apart from the prevailing fashions of the Victorian era. Elements of note include the finely detailed Gothic Revival bargeboard and awning, as well as the front bay window with a separate hipped roof. Other aspects that contribute to the aesthetic value of the dwelling include the hipped slate roof with a projecting gable and the tuck-pointed brickwork. The building also has aesthetic significance as part of a row of three closely related dwellings at 12-16 Mercer Road, all originally built in the same style. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
B	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
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>	Aesthetically, 14 Mercer Road is distinguished by its medieval-inspired detailing. Elements of note include the finely detailed Gothic Revival bargeboard and awning, as well as the front bay window with a separate hipped roof. Other aspects that contribute to the aesthetic value of the dwelling include the hipped slate roof with a projecting gable and the tuck-pointed brickwork. The building also has aesthetic significance as part of a row of three

		closely related dwellings at 12-16 Mercer Road, all originally built in the same style.
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

14 Mercer Road is a single storey Victorian house with Medieval/Free Style influences. It is a tuck pointed red brick structure laid in a running bond. The double fronted has a projecting gable roof and a secondary projecting hip roof over a window bay. The front gable is capped with a detailed Gothic Revival bargeboard and finial that is cohesive with the timber detailing of the verandah. The bay has two double hung timber sash windows with a fixed arched leadlight stained-glass arch containing arched brick window heads. The structure has a slate roof with a metal roof ridge cap and there are four open face brick corbelled chimneys extending from the roof.

The front façade has a raised covered porch with corrugated galvanized iron roofing, turned timber verandah posts and valance. There is a hipped roof projection, or gableton, extending the from the front awning above the steps to the front door. The projection and awning are capped with a Gothic Revival style bargeboard with ridged valance and finial. The three-pane timber front door has symmetrical two-pane sidelights.

The grounds of 14 Mercer Road are heavily landscaped. There are birch (*betula*) trees and spider flower (*grevillea*) shrubs planted in the front yard. There is an extensive backyard with a half basketball court and swimming pool with timber decking. The street boundary is demarcated by white timber post and picket fence. There is a short driveway laid in concrete that terminates at the garage extension, with a brown timber sectional garage door. The extension is sympathetic through its use of similar sized and coloured red brick.

There are several extensions on the property including a freestanding granny flat at the backyard. Aerial imagery shows the addition of eight skylights and a series of solar panels on the main structure. There appears to be an opening in the roof form of the main structure to create an internal courtyard.

14 Mercer Road is located close to the main commercial precinct on High Street, Armadale Train Station and the Mercer Road Tram stop. 14 Mercer Road is currently used as a residential property and is considered to be in good condition. There have been extensions and additions at the rear and side, extensive alterations to the landscape, and removal of original detailing. However, the primary built/roof form, original front facing openings and joinery remain intact. 14 Mercer Road would be considered to have moderate integrity.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- Garage extension to the north (side).
- Freestanding extension by the back of the house.
- Metal roof ridge cap.
- New timber post and picket boundary fence added – it matches 14 and 16 Mercer Road.
- Addition of a swimming pool.
- Addition of a half basketball court.
- Addition of timber pool decking.
- Addition of concrete laid driveway.
- Addition of eight skylights.
- Addition of solar panels.
- Addition of two open face brick chimneys.
- Addition of internal courtyard in the main structure.

[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 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 of the 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 worked for the stationer business Fergusson and Moore—Fergusson being James Fergusson of Kooyong. Armadale House, built in c.1887, was the first of many grand houses constructed in the suburb in the late 19th century. Munro went on to become Premier of Victoria and, later, Attorney General, before losing 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**

Erected in 1899 for prominent Australian mining magnate Anthony Edward Bowes Kelly, better known as Bowes Kelly, 14 Mercer Road comprises one of three identical brick houses (12, 14 and 16) located in a row towards the south end of Mercer Road, Armadale (then Malvern). While the architect has not been verified, these three dwellings were possibly constructed to designs laid out by architect Arthur Fisher (Nigel Lewis & Richard Aitken Pty 1992). A local in the area at 1 Sorrett Avenue, Fisher is noted for designing the medieval inspired half timbered dwelling Westford at 2 Ash Grove Malvern.

In 1897, Bowes Kelly is listed as the owner of a 249 foot allotment that 12, 14 and 16 Mercer Road would come to occupy (Malvern Rate Books 1897-98). A pastoralist and land speculator throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Kelly purchased a one-fourteenth share in the new Broken Hill Mine in 1884 following news of silver discoveries in the Barrier Ranges (Wheeler 1983). He went on to sit on the board of directors from 1885 and by 1893, he was both the director and principal shareholder of Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Co. Ltd (Wheeler 1893). He lived in the dwelling Waiora at Glenferrie Road, Malvern from 1888 before moving to the mansion Moorakynne, also in Malvern in 1901.

Kelly was a keen property investor and developer throughout the 1890s, and 1899 saw the construction of three houses with ten rooms each on his allotment at Mercer Road. 14 Mercer Road was leased to Lyell S Christie in 1901 (Malvern Rate Books). At the time of his occupancy, the house was described as having nine rooms on an 800 ft area of land. A MMBW plan from this period shows one bathroom, as well as steps leading into the dwelling's front entrance (MMBW 1902). While it is relatively identical to 12 and 16 Mercer Road in layout and structure, the plan indicates that the house at number 14 is slightly longer in length (MMBW 1902). Christie's occupancy lasted a few years, and by 1904, Bowes Kelly had leased the house to clerk Charles Tranter Franklin (Malvern Rate Book 1904-5; *The Age* 1917, 7). Several tenants passed through Kelly's dwelling from this period onwards, and occupiers consisted of broker Alfred Harvey in 1910 and civil engineer Henry Deane in 1915 (Malvern Rate Books 1915-16).

Bowes Kelly's ownership of 14 Mercer Road concluded when Henry Deane purchased the property in 1919 (Malvern Rate Book 1919-1920; Sands & MacDougall 1920). A prominent engineer, scientist and botanist, London born Henry Deane worked on several large construction projects in Sydney before relocating to Melbourne. These included the construction of the Homebush to Hawkesbury River railway, the Newnes to Clarence railway, as well as various tramways from 1899 (Walker 1981; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 1924, 10). He also carried out work on tertiary fossil flora of eastern Australia and was a founding associate member of the Institution of Engineers, Australia (Walker 1981). Deane lived at 14 Mercer Road for several years, before passing away suddenly in 1924.

The dwelling was subsequently purchased by accountant Thomas A Tabart in 1925 (Malvern Rate Books 1924-26). Tabart occupied the house alongside his wife and daughters Edna and Pixie for several years, and the family appears to have named the dwelling Rosny by 1929 (*The Age* 1930, 7; *The Argus* 1928, 1; *The Argus* 1929, 16; *The Prahan Telegraph* 1926, 8). As Mrs. T. A. Tabart was the president of the Women's Hospital Auxiliary during their occupancy, several meetings and fundraisers were held at the dwelling throughout the 1920s (*The Herald* 1929, 13; *The Age* 1930, 25). The most notable occurrence at the dwelling, however, was a homemade bomb that was thrown at the side lawn in 1928 (*The Argus* 1928, 8). Reported to be the result of a 'foolish practical joke by youths', the explosion caused minor damages to the lawn soil and several nearby plantings (*The Argus* 1928, 8).

The Tabart occupancy ended sometime in the early 1930s, and by 1932, Dr Stewart O Cowen is listed as the official occupier (Malvern Rate Book 1932-33). Cowen's ownership lasted a little over a decade, and between 1947 and 1950, Reverend John MacKenzie is the occupier. The residence was subsequently passed onto MacKenzie's daughter Margaret Elpseth Maxwell and son in law James Bruce Fletcher in 1950 (The Argus 1942, 5; Sands & McDougall). The Fletchers occupied the house until at least 1970, marking a decades long intergenerational residency (Sands & McDougall 1970). The last known occupier is E. V. Gleeson, who lived at the dwelling from c.1974. According to its property history, 14 Mercer Road changed ownership several times throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, with several modern alterations also taking place during this period.

Comparative Analysis

The following comparative analysis focuses on a range of dwellings located in the City of Stonnington that share stylistic similarities to 14 Mercer Road, as Victorian houses with Medieval influences. Many of the dwellings were built as investment properties for Bowes Kelly. Further, while the architect has not been verified for a number of these sites, the similarities in the dwellings indicates that they were possibly constructed to designs laid out by architect Arthur Fisher.

The selected houses were designed in an eclectic manner with a medieval character to the gable facing the street and secondary projecting gable roof over a window bay. The medieval character is further reinforced with the entry gableton verandah on some examples. The steep pitched roofs, tall chimneys and the lack of stucco ornamentation on these red face brickwork buildings represents a rejection of the Italianate and the more flamboyant Queen Anne styles.

Comparative examples include:

- **12 Mercer Road, Armadale (HO329).** Constructed at the same time as 14 Mercer Road in 1899, owned by Bowes Kelly and potentially designed by Arthur Fisher. 12 Mercer Road is less favorable to 14 Mercer Road in terms of intactness as it is missing the decorative barge board and gableton above the awning. Both dwellings have had red brick extensions added to the northern elevation towards the front façade and are extensive relandscaping. Key similarities include the overall built/roof form, arrangement/style of openings, projecting bay window and insertion of a sympathetic timber front fence.
- **16 Mercer Road, Armadale (HO330).** Constructed at the same time as 14 Mercer Road in 1899, owned by Bowes Kelly and potentially designed by Arthur Fisher. 16 Mercer Road is less favorable to 14 Mercer Road in terms of intactness as it is missing the decorative barge board. However, it retains other key features such as the ornamental gableton to the verandah. Key similarities include the overall built/roof form, arrangement of openings, projecting bay window and insertion of a sympathetic timber front fence.
- **5 Myamyn Street, Armadale (HO331).** Built in 1896, originally owned by Bowes Kelly and potentially designed by Arthur Fisher. This dwelling is arguably more intact than 14 Mercer Road, having retained its original façade, side walls and roof (with the exception of the gable truss and verandah brackets). Although there have been several additions at the rear of the dwelling, its front façade is considered to be of high integrity. Key differences include a more finely detailed and less restrained bay window, and a relatively high brick fence at 5 Myamyn Street.

- **7 Myamyn Street, Armadale (H0538).** Built in 1896, originally owned by Bowes Kelly and potentially designed by Arthur Fisher. As with 5 Myamyn Street, this dwelling is more intact than 14 Mercer Road, having retained its decorative timber joinery to the gable end. Like 14 Mercer Road, it contains a timber picket boundary fence. The projecting bay window detailing at 7 Myamyn Street is less restrained in its style than at 14 Mercer Road.
- **Norwood (133 Manning Road, Malvern East) (H0552).** Designed by Arthur Fisher and built in 1889. Both buildings are quite intact. Norwood is more simplistic in its overall design. The verandah does not include the medieval style gableton and the projecting bay window is less decorative and visually prominent.

Compared to the above properties, 14 Mercer Road an intact example a Victorian house with Medieval/Free Style influences. It has been altered at the rear but is highly intact on the main primary portion of the building. It is arguably the most intact, having undergone less additions and alterations compared to 12 and 16 Mercer Road. It is also an important example as one part of a group of three medieval style properties attributed to Bowes Kelly.

References

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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 building (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



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



Garage addition to the side (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of front fence and gate (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Authors

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