

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Flete

Address: 10 Flete Avenue and 24 Moorhouse Street, Armadale (formerly 2 Flete Avenue)

Designer: Thomas Watts

Builder: Unknown

HO Reference: HO38

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 23 January 2023

Year of Construction: 1882-83



Photograph of Flete (source: Extent Heritage, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO38.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings

Heritage Type: Residence

Key Theme: Building suburbs

Key Sub-theme: Creating Australia's most prestigious suburbs – seats of the mighty – mansion estates in the 19th century.

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain as an individually significant place on the HO with internal controls.

Controls:	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input checked="" 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 10 Flete Avenue and 24 Moorhouse Street, Armadale (otherwise known as Flete) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the 1882-83 Late Victorian Italianate style residence is locally significant. The cast iron fence, whilst not original, is contributory. The tennis court, landscaping and later alterations and additions to the property specifically at 24 Moorhouse Street are not significant.

How is it significant?

Flete is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington, and is associated with the architect Thomas Watts.

Why is it significant?

Flete is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of Victorian mansions on estates in the suburb of Armadale during the mid-19th century, prior to the wider subdivision of the late Victorian estates. The mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period. The house was home to a range of well-known occupants including Supreme Court Judge Sir Hartley Williams, Judge Sir John Latham, and internationally famous opera singer Dame Nellie Melba. (Criterion A)

Flete is aesthetically significant as a fine and intact example of a Late Victorian residence, exhibiting the principle characteristics associated with that period. Key characteristics of aesthetic value include the wrought iron lacework verandah, projecting polygonal bays, a hipped slate roof, decorative Italianate chimney caps, decorative bracketing under the eaves, stucco render, decorative timber joinery and deep wrap around verandah. The interior is of aesthetic significance, built around a central hall configuration and elaborately decorated with an arched ceiling, plastering and pillars. The cast iron front fence also adds to the aesthetic value of the place. (Criterion E)

Flete has associative significance as a house designed by the prominent 19th century architect, Thomas Watts. (Criterion H)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Flete is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of Victorian mansions on estates in the suburb of Armadale during the mid-19th century, prior to the wider subdivision of the. The mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period. The house was home to a range of well-known occupants including Supreme Court Judge Sir Hartley Williams, Judge Sir
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		John Latham, and internationally famous opera singer Dame Nellie Melba.
<i>B</i>	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>C</i>	<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.
<i>D</i>	<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.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Flete is aesthetically significant as a fine and intact example of a Late Victorian residence, exhibiting the principle characteristics associated with that period. Key characteristics of aesthetic value include the wrought iron lacework verandah, projecting polygonal bays, a hipped slate roof, decorative Italianate chimney caps, decorative bracketing under the eaves, stucco render, decorative timber joinery and deep wrap around verandah. The interior is of aesthetic significance, built around a central hall configuration and elaborately decorated with an arched ceiling, plastering and pillars. The cast iron front fence also adds to the aesthetic value of the place.
<i>F</i>	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>G</i>	<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.
<i>H</i>	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	Flete has associative significance as a house designed by the preeminent 19th Century architect, Thomas Watts.

Description

- Physical Analysis

Flete is a single-storey, Late Victorian Italianate white stucco rendered brick dwelling. It has a wide encircling verandah based on a Maltese Villa design. The structure is symmetrically planned around wide internal passage axes which intersect to form a large central entrance hall. Flete is a distinctively planned Italianate mansion most notable for the consistent elevational treatment, wide encircling verandah and high-quality interior details.

The deep-set verandah forms the façade on the north, south and west elevations. It has a flat corrugated galvanized iron roof with projections emphasizing the corner hipped roof projections of the main structure. The verandah is supported by thin painted cast iron columns and decorative arabesque lacework. The main structure has a slate hipped roof with four projecting corner hipped extensions which has bracketed eaves with decorative pointed mouldings. The roof is capped with metal ridge capping. Six rendered chamfered chimneys with bracketed cornices and two tall terracotta chimney pots project from the main roof.

The main entrance door is a six-panel timber door with two doorknobs and a ringed door knocker. The door is flanked by two barley twist timber carvings on the door frame and two-pane sidelights on each side. The top of the door is capped by dentil mouldings and a three-pane fanlight. The windows are a timber double hung sash window. The inner façade walls under the verandah awning are embellished by a frieze.

The street boundary is demarcated by a low double spear top cast iron fence. The painted fence is supported by a concrete foundation. The car and main entrance gates are framed by ornate cast iron posts with a hipped capping. The boundary fence is also demarcated by a low hedge running the perimeter.

The grounds of Flete are highly landscaped. There are several mature trees on the property including two Canary Island Palm trees framing the front main entrance on Flete Avenue. Aerial imagery shows a netted area possible protecting a small orchard on the northwest corner of the property by the tennis court. Extending from the west façade of the main house and between the netted area and pavilion is an Italian style garden and pergola. The north façade of the house overlooks an expanse of lawn. The southeast corner of the property beside the main structure is paved in concrete tiles and used for car parking. The eastern portion of the property has an unsympathetic extension with a pool which extends from the east façade of the main structure. The northeast corner of the property has a brown brick and terracotta hipped roof structure.

Flete is located close to the main commercial precinct on High Street. It is close to Armadale Train Station and Lauriston Girls School. Flete is currently used as a residential property. The main structure appears highly intact. The grounds of the property have been highly modified over time. Flete would be considered to be of moderate integrity.

- ## Alterations and Additions

- A comparison of a 1902 MMBW plan with a 1977 auction plan shows that the two rear wings of the building were added some time after the turn of the century.
- The grounds were completely built over to include extensive additions. Additions to the west and north side of the site were removed by 2004.
- Tennis court and orchard on west side of property reinstated (2006).
- Additions on east side of property removed (2006).
- Only one of the original additions on site remain located at the northeast corner of site, currently used as a parking garage.
- Italian style garden (2009).
- Pergola and garden pavilion (2009).
- Main structure repainted from yellow to white (2009).
- Extensive landscape work on street frontage, trees were retained (2009).
- Unsympathetic addition to the east side of the property (2010).
- Swimming pool added (2010).
- 6 skylights added to the main roof.
- Air conditioning units added to the main roof.
- New corrugated iron sheet awning over the verandah.
- Removal of original stables.

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

A significant history of 10 Flete Avenue (formerly 2 Flete Avenue) has previously been authored by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) in 2007. The following place history draws primarily from this existing citation, and is augmented by revisions and supplementary research by Extent Heritage.

Flete in Flete Avenue Armadale was erected in 1882/3 for eminent Supreme Court Judge Sir Hartley-Williams on over six acres of land that originally fronted Kooyong Road. Designed by architect Thomas Watts, the twelve room, single-storey brick house was initially occupied by Williams and his first wife. Following her death in 1885, Williams married his cousin Jessie Bruce Lawford. Together with their family, they would occupy the dwelling until 1901 (Malvern Rate Books). Born in Fitzroy to prominent judge Sir Edward Eyre Williams and educated at Oxford University in England, Sir Hartley Williams ran a successful common law practice throughout the 1860s (Miller 1976). Upon Sir Redmond Barry's death in 1881, Williams was nominated to succeed him on the bench of the Supreme Court. He was officially sworn in on July 1881, and became the youngest judge in the colony (Miller 1976). A republican, Williams favoured Federation and advocated for the separation of Australia from Britain (Miller 1976).

The house was subsequently purchased by Captain Charles Lawrence following Williams' retirement to England in 1902. A MMBW plan from this year shows a main entry into the estate from Kooyong Avenue, as well as a conservatory, pavilion, tennis court and stables on the property (MMBW 1902). Following his death in 1905, his wife Mary Lawrence became the owner of Flete. She occupied the house until the estate's subdivision into twenty-two allotments in 1920 (Baillieu Allard 1920). An auction flyer from this period describes the dwelling as a 'magnificent brick villa residence' featuring 'wide verandahs on three sides, halls with marble tile floor, large drawing, dining and breakfast rooms, five large bedrooms, dressing rooms, two bathrooms, kitchen, scullery, pantries and cupboards, and maid's quarters' (Baillieu Allard 1920). Subdivision also saw the creation of Flete Avenue and the north end of Moorhouse Street.

The residence was ultimately sold to barrister Sir John Latham and his wife Eleanor (née Tobin) in 1921. A prominent lawyer, politician and judge, John was the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia (1935-52), Chancellor of the University of Melbourne (1939-41), Deputy Prime Minister (1932-34) as well as Leader of the Opposition (1928-31), while Eleanor was a former teacher, philanthropist and president of the Lyceum Club, an all female association for women who had distinguished themselves in art, music, literature, philanthropy or public service (Macintyre 1986; Heywood 2002). The Latham occupancy gained the house significant coverage. In 1934, a profile of Flete was published in *The Australian Home Beautiful*. Drawing particular attention to the garden, the article details a 'two acre garden' spread out into:

wide lawns, bounded on one side by a shrubbery, which hides within its leafy depths a charming flagged and sheltered "walk," which skirts the edge of the garden, ending finally at the tennis court. Miniature rockeries, and a lily pool with a playing fountain, "break up" the solid shrubbery treatment, and enhance the charm of the path, from which occasional glimpses are caught of the house...but the real charm of this garden lies in the trees which shelter it from the afternoon sun, and cast dappled shadows on the grass; threes full of the dignity of maturity, wattles, gums and birches, lovely heritage of a garden that is truly old... (Cooper 1934, 8).

Other aspects of the dwelling that are detailed include the seventy feet long, twenty feet wide entrance hall, its 'high, domed roof, supported by Tuscan columns', as well as the drawing room that looks out into the garden (Cooper 1934, 8-9). The Lathams lived at Flete until the early 1940s, at which point they had moved to 42 Washington Street, Toorak.

Following their move, the dwelling was leased to merchant Yasutaro Niizeki and then to the Women's Auxillary Air Force during WWII in 1943. In 1946, the Melbourne Bible Institute purchased the property, re-named it 'Lawry House' and turned it into a Women's Hostel. By 1950, it was listed as a brick house of thirteen rooms. It was subsequently acquired by the Yooralla Society of Victoria, and operated as an adult care facility known as "Flete House" between 1977 and 2002. The Yooralla ownership saw a number of repairs and restoration made to its interiors, which had undergone fire damage by 1977. Following this period, it was bought by David Crammond for \$7 million in 2002, before being sold again in 2006 for \$14 million (Schneiders 2006).

Comparative Analysis

Flete was designed by renowned British-born architect Thomas Watts. Watts' work is described by Willis in 2012 as follows:

Watts designed the grand Italianate house 'Bontharambo' near Wangaratta, Vic. (1858)... His [Watts'] practices in all their iterations were prolific; he designed significant numbers of houses, warehouses, hotels, banks and non-conformist churches. Among these, were a number of very fine Italianate mansions, including 'Glen Eira', Kooyong Road, Caulfield (1881); Grimwade House, Balaclava Road, Caulfield, Vic. (1875); 'Larnook', Orrong Road, Prahran [Armadale], Vic. (1881); 'Flete' (later Rorymont'), Flete Avenue, Malvern [Armadale] Vic. (1881-82); and various other churches using Classical porticos, such as the Albert Street Baptist Church, East Melbourne (1859; portico 1863) (Willis, 2012).

The works outlined above by Willis highlight both the significance of Watts as an architect operating in Melbourne during the mid to late 19th century, as well as the significance of his works. Flete can be directly compared to all Watts' works, however as a building containing a verandah with lacework and a hipped slate roof, visible and unimpeded by a parapet, there are two specific residences that are most comparable to Watts' work, and an additional site within the municipality that shares design themes comparable to Flete.

Comparative examples include:

- **Grimwade House (220 Orrong Road, Caulfield North) (H054).** Grimwade House was constructed in 1875 to designs prepared by Thomas Watts. The site consists of a two-storey Late Victorian Italianate house with projecting bays, a wrought iron lacework verandah on both storeys, stucco render, Italianate chimney caps, decorative bracketing in the eaves, a hipped slate roof and arched windows. These design elements are all characteristics of Late Victorian design and are directly comparable to Flete. While Flete is a single-storey residence, it still has projecting bays, a wrought iron lacework verandah, a hipped slate roof, Italianate chimney caps, and decorative bracketing under the eaves. Both properties are representative of Watts' Late Victorian design.

- **Larnook (519 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO85).** Built in 1881 for W. H. Miller, banker and son of Henry 'Money' Miller, Larnook is comparable to Flete as a late 19th century boom-era Italianate mansion formerly on a large estate. Like Flete, Larnook contextualises 19th century Armadale and the broader municipality of Stonnington. Common design characteristics include the use of a wrought iron lacework verandah, stucco render, hipped slate roof, projecting polygonal bays and decorative bracketing under the eaves.
- **Tintern (10 Tintern Avenue, Toorak) (HO105).** Tintern is a prefabricated iron house that was constructed in Glasgow and assembled onsite in 1855 for William Westgarth. The grand house would sustain significant extensions and alterations from 1896 onwards. Although it is a very different house from Flete, both buildings are still comparable as grand 19th century houses, with common characteristics including the use of stucco render, the wrought iron lacework verandah, projecting polygonal bays and hipped slate roof forms. Tintern is a double-storey house, however it was originally a single-storey residence and the southern elevation still conveys the form of a single-storey dwelling. Regardless of these alterations, Tintern and Flete can be understood as comparable examples to each other, and are directly reflective of the development of affluent residences in Stonnington during the 19th century.

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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



Flete's façade, southern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Southern elevation of Flete, looking north (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Façade details on Flete (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Flete plantings, southern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Flete plantings, looking north west (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Eastern elevation of Flete (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Interior of Flete. Source: (1925). "FLETE" THE HOME of THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, *The Australian home beautiful : a journal for the home builder*. Held by SLV.

Authors

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