‘Oyama’

2 Kelmscott Road, Armadale

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), Villa  
Significance level: Local

Recommended protection: Planning Scheme  
Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Italianate

Locality history

The locality of Armadale emerged in the 1870s at the eastern end of Toorak. The suburb straddled both the older municipality of Prahran and the newer one of Malvern, with Boundary Road (now Kooyong Road) marking the boundary between the two. The name Armadale derived from the name of the grand residence of Victorian politician James Munro, ‘Armadale House’, built in 1876. Other mansions and fine villas followed, including ‘Brocklesby’ (1879) and ‘Flete’ (1882-83). Along Orrong Road, between High Street and Dandenong Road, an impressive row of five mansions was built for some of Melbourne's leading businessmen in the 1880s. These were ‘Larnook’, ‘Redcourt’, ‘Sebrof’, ‘Lalbert’ and ‘Kabratook’ (demolished) (Foster 1996).

Through the 1880s, Armadale was promoted as an exclusive residential area for the middle class, with subdivisions offering generous suburban allotments. A railway station had opened at Armadale in 1879 to service the new Oakleigh railway line and this was used as a drawcard to attract buyers to the area. Much of Armadale’s housing stock reflects its foundation period of the 1880s and early 1890s. As well as the large ornate homes of the wealthy, there were streets of comfortable middle-class suburban homes, including double-storey terrace rows, along with pockets of smaller, more modest homes, including some working-class cottages.

Commercial development along High Street, including shops and other services, served the surrounding residential area. The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Board established a tram route along High Street to the city in the early 1900s. In the 1930s and 1940s, as more and more of the large homes in the area were broken up and the land subdivided, antique furniture
was in oversupply. In the 1940s the shops in High Street began to carry antiques and *objets d'art*, catering for an upper-middle-class clientele, and laying the foundation for what later became a high-end shopping strip.

From the early twentieth century, many of Melbourne’s large mansion homes set in large garden settings became unsustainable. Large estates were subdivided for residential development, and sometimes the house survived on a much reduced allotment. Large private homes were also converted into multiple dwellings or ‘flats’, or operated as boarding houses. Large houses were also converted for use as private hospitals (for example ‘Alencon’) and schools (for example, ‘Brocklesby’ and ‘Blairholme’).

**Place history**

The two-storey mansion named ‘Oyama’ originally faced Huntingtower Road. Miles Lewis in the *Australian Architecture Index* cites the built-date as 1887. The *Index* states: ‘a brick house of 14 rooms, with stables and outbuildings was built at a cost of £4000, and immediately sold to a Mr Chiselhurst. The same year, the house was sold to Miss Bessie Grant and occupied by journalist and politician, David Blair (Blair had married the sister of J M Grant in 1852)’ (Lewis 2013). There is a possibility that the house was erected by architect and house agent C.E. Connop, but this needs further confirmation (Lewis 2013, records 1616 and 6480).

As noted in the *Index*, in 1888, ‘Oyama’ was briefly the home of David Blair who was a journalist, politician and historian, and his wife, who was a sister of James Grant (former lands minister who drafted the ‘Grant’ Land Act of the 1860s). The house was listed in the name of Bessie Grant in the Shire of Malvern rate books (RB).

David Blair, described as a ‘veteran journalist’ in 1889, had reached retirement age by the time he was living at ‘Oyama’. He continued to be an active part in Melbourne public intellectual life and social life. He and family members performed original works to private audiences at Oyama in 1889 (*Table Talk* 1889). He was the author of a significant early ‘national’ history, *The History of Australasia* (1878) and the comprehensive *Cyclopedia of Australasia* (1881) (Roe 1969). The subsequent occupant, from 1891, was the police inspector Hussey Malone Chomley, who was chief commissioner of police and a well-known Melbourne figure (RB; Kimber, 1969). Chomley moved to ‘Oyama’ in retirement and lived there from 1891 until his death in 1906.

The MMBW Detail Plan no. 1763, dated 1902, shows a large house in spacious grounds, set well back from the road (Huntingtower Road) with a carriage drive leading from an angled front entrance. There is a tennis court and stabling. The house on the immediate north side, named ‘Weerona’, has the identical format of large double-storey house with a tennis court laid out on an identically sized allotment, indicating they were almost certainly built at the same time by the same speculative developer.
The original tennis court, as marked in the 1902 MMBW plan, remains extant and in the same location on the front boundary of the property.

The garden was most likely laid out in a manner befitting the house and gardening staff. In an early photograph of the front of the house, dated c.1900, there is a glimpse of a relatively mature *Cordyline Australis* in the front garden, a fashionable tree of the period (see Figure 2).

The house was purchased by Dr Leon Jona in 1924. He subdivided the property between 1939 and 1951 (City of Stonnington citation HO209, n.d.). This is likely when Kelmiscott Road was created, on the former site of the driveway, and the rear of the block – along with the stable – was removed.

**Sources**

2 Kelmiscott Road 1999, ‘Oyama’, Armadale Citation, L47(D) Panel.
Physical description

‘Oyama’ is a substantial Italianate two-storey mansion of an asymmetrical design that occupies a large allotment on the north-west corner of Kelmscott and Huntingtower roads in Armadale. Kelmscott Road terminates at the western boundary of the property. The house is set within a large and mature garden that partially conceals the house from both street frontages.

Constructed c1887, the house appears to have been built in two stages. The 1902 MMBW plan shows the principle section of the house fronting Huntingtower Road with a return verandah and two projecting enclosing wings constructed in masonry. The bay now fronting Kelmscott Road to the south is wide and rectangular, and contains the recessed entrance portico while the eastern bay is canted with rounded-arch bay windows. The return verandah to this section appears to retain its original high quality cast-iron detailing. At an unknown date, the residence was extended to the west, which adopts a continuation of the original design, utilising identical cast-iron lacework patterns and eaves brackets, and has the appearance of a terrace house abutting the main building.
The building has a hipped slate roof and relatively unadorned painted cement rendered walls with a deep cornice and elaborate eaves brackets. The windows are double-hung sashes grouped singly or in pairs and in a tripartite grouping to the southern elevation beneath the verandah, although they are separately expressed by moulded arched hood moulds with ornamental label moulds. Windows to the canted bay contain ornate keystones with masks. The entry is through a recessed arched opening with large console brackets on the side (south) projecting bay.
The exterior as viewed and appreciated from Kelmscott and Huntingtower roads (i.e. the south and east elevations) appears intact with the alterations mostly confined to the rear and side elevation (north and west elevations) not readily visible from the public realm. They include alterations to the hipped roof and new window openings (Section 29A Application, 2 Kelmscott Road, City of Stonnington, 2012). The property also has a modern masonry garage to the south-west boundary. Subdivision in the mid-twentieth century greatly reduced the extent of the large allotment, and the early planned garden appears to have been largely lost. The early curtilage to Huntingtower Road remains evident however, along with the retention of a tennis court which is consistent with the 1902 MMBW plan.

Comparative analysis

Although many single-storey villas were built in Melbourne and its suburbs during the 19th century, after the 1840s the grandest houses were almost always of two-storeys, or occasionally three as at Government House and ‘Cliveden’. Owners often added a storey to their single-storey house as their fortunes improved, of example, ‘Como’ in South Yarra had a second storey added by 1855. Towards the end of the century, there was an increasing tendency to prefer the higher status of a two-storey house over that of a single-storey one (Jordan 2003:117 as cited in Statham 2008).

The architectural expression of a grand two-storey Victorian house could reflect any one of a range of fashionable British antecedents drawing their inspiration from classical Greek, Roman or Georgian sources to the more picturesque, such as Gothic or Tudor. British country houses of the mid-nineteenth century drew predominantly from the range of Picturesque styles. About a third of these grand Victorian houses adopted an Italianate style combining informal massing with a plain rendered expression enriched by classical motifs. The balance adopted a formal symmetrical classical expression. The Italianate was seen to combine the stateliness of a classical style with a picturesque and fashionable asymmetry (Jordan 2003:117 as cited in Statham 2008).

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 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 a 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 (cant) 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.

The development of the former City of Prahran and the western part of the former City of Malvern coincides with the emergence of the Italianate forms of expression in Victoria. Consequently, the City of Stonnington retains a disproportionate number of Melbourne’s better examples of the mode. A number of these, typically the grandest and most elaborate mansions or those associated with Victoria’s most notable families, have been added to the Victorian Heritage Register. These include: ‘Toorak House’, ‘Greenwich House’ and ‘Mandeville Hall’, in Toorak; ‘Stonington’ in Malvern; and ‘Malvern House’ in Glen Iris.

Generally, ‘Oyama’ can be compared with other substantial houses of the 1880s that demonstrate Italianate massing and detailing with an asymmetrical form. Comparable examples that are Significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay (both in individual HOs and HO precincts) include:

- ‘Carrington’, 58 Kooyong Road, Armadale (HO318) – an imposing two-storey Italianate villa designed by architect Alfred Dunn. The building (c1887) has an asymmetrical form with a two-storey cast-iron return verandah set beside a canted projecting bay fronting Kooyong Road.
• 29 Grandview Grove, Prahran (in HO135) – a substantial two-storey Italianate villa with an asymmetrical plan. The building is an unusual variation of the typical two-storey return verandah to one side of a canted projecting bay arrangement, where in this instance the cast-iron verandah is continuous across the front façade of the building.

• 72 Elizabeth Street, Malvern (HO309) – an imposing two-storey Italianate villa with two perpendicular projecting bays (one rectangular and one canted) with a two-storey cast-iron return verandah set between them. The building has elaborate detailing to the cement render, especially the architraves and paired eaves brackets.

• ‘Glenayon’, 19 Pine Grove, Malvern (HO278) – an imposing two-storey Italianate villa sited on a prominent corner location in Malvern. The building retains its unpainted cement render finish to two perpendicular canted bays which contain a two-storey cast-iron return verandah.

In comparison with these examples, ‘Oyama’ shares the asymmetrical plan form and return verandah that was commonly adopted by the grandest villas of the 1880s-1890s. ‘Oyama’ is intact externally as viewed and appreciated from both street frontages, despite rear additions including a new garage to the south elevation. Other examples, including 72 Elizabeth Street, Malvern (HO309) and ‘Glenayon’, Malvern (HO278), have contemporary extensions (including garages) appended to one side.

In its formality and the quality of the refined cast-iron lacework and render detail, ‘Oyama’ compares very well with the other examples such as 72 Elizabeth Street, Malvern (HO309) and ‘Carrington’, Armadale (HO318) which shares a similar recessed entrance portico and similar cast and run details (hood moulds with ornate bosses).

![Figure 6. 'Carrington', 58 Kooyong Road, Armadale HO318 (source: http://www.homehound.com.au/ accessed 24 June 2016).](image-url)
In conclusion, ‘Oyama’ at 2 Kelmscott Road is a substantially intact example of a substantial two-storey Italianate villa that adopts an asymmetrical plan and a two-storey cast-iron return verandah. It informs an understanding of the Italianate expression within this part of the municipality which informs an understanding of the role of houses as symbols of wealth, status and taste, for Melbourne’s middle classes.

**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

8.1.2 Seats of the mighty – Mansion estates in the nineteenth century

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?**

‘Oyama’ at 2 Kelmscott Road, Armadale, built c1887 and comprising a substantial two-storey Italianate villa with two-storey cast-iron return verandah set in a mature garden setting, is significant.

The two-storey mansion originally faced Huntingtower Road and was one of a pair built by a speculative developer, probably architect and house agent C.E. Connop.

‘Oyama’ is significant to the extent of its intact nineteenth century form and fabric, including the original c1887 house.

Modern alterations and additions such as the masonry garage are not considered to be significant.
How is it significant?
‘Oyama’, at 2 Kelmscott Road, Armadale is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?
‘Oyama’ at 2 Kelmscott Road, Armadale is a fine representative example of a substantial Victorian Italianate villa residence built for, and occupied by prominent Melbourne residents, such as journalist and politician, David Blair and police inspector, Hussey Chomley, of the sort that began to characterise the suburb of Armadale in the 1880s. ‘Oyama’ demonstrates an asymmetrical plan form and return verandah typical of the grandest villas of the 1880s-1890s that is notable for its fine Italianate detailing including the cast iron return verandah, bay windows, recessed entrance portico and render detail. (Criterion D)

Recommendation
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 8: Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 2 Kelmscott Road, Armadale (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2