‘Clare House’ (formerly ‘Hintonville’)

56 Stanhope Street, Malvern

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

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
Malvern evolved as an extension to suburban Toorak and Armadale, appealing to middle-class tastes for large allotments, with an ample supply of substantial villa residences. Toorak as well as Armadale had a predominantly Protestant population; there was no Catholic church in Toorak until 1918. When the younger municipality of Malvern was developed in the 1880s, a Catholic parish church was quickly established in Stanhope Street in 1889. The Catholic minority was attracted to the area. Stanhope Street in particular, furnished with a Catholic primary school, presbytery, brothers’ residence ‘Manresa’, and Gothic-style church and church hall, developed a predominantly Catholic population. The Vincentian Brothers had acquired land in Stanhope Street and here they erected a chapel, which was replaced in 1902 by the current St Joseph’s Church, designed by A.A. Fritsch. Stanhope Street – between Glenferrie Road and Irving Street – developed into what has been described as Malvern’s ‘Catholic precinct’ (Foster and Stefanopolous 2007:19).

Malvern experienced rapid growth in the late 1880s and the five houses in a row – numbers 48, 50, 52, 54, 56 – which bear striking similarities, were almost certainly built by a speculative builder at the height of the land boom in c1889.

Stanhope Street was created with the subdivision of ‘Winters Estate’ in 1888 (SLV 1888, ‘Winters Estate’). Tenders were called for the formation of Stanhope Street in 1888 (Age, 14 February 1888), and street formation and metalling continued into the following year. The current house looks to be occupying the block marked lot 6 on the subdivision plan for Winter’s Estate.

It has been suggested in previous research (HO280 place citation) that local builder John Wright had built the row of brick villas at numbers 44-56 Stanhope Street. Tender notices from Wright appear in 1889 for ‘fencing’ in Stanhope Street but no other details have been found to verify Wright’s role. Whether an architect was also involved remains unclear. Miles
Lewis has suggested that the row, which includes number 56 Stanhope Street, is similar to the work of Norman Hitchcock and Olaff Nicholson (Butler 2002).

The house known as ‘Hintonville’ at 56 Stanhope Street, Malvern, was built by 1890 according to the rate books, with local history sources putting the built date at 1889 (RB; Foster and Stefanopolous 2007:17). Elizabeth Williams was the owner/occupier of the 8-roomed brick house in Stanhope Street from 1890 until her death in 1894. Situated opposite St Joseph’s Catholic School, it was one of a row of houses in the street that became a desirable address for local Catholics.

Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan no. 1743, Malvern, dated 1902 (source: SLV)

Joseph Antonio L’Estrange, a solicitor, occupied the house from c1895 until c1900 and was active in the life of the St Joseph’s Catholic Parish. He was at that time unmarried and he lived with his sister Mary Alice, who had married Hugh Mahon, an Irish-born journalist and later an MP in the Federal parliament. The house incorporated an office which appears to have been used as the business address for L’Estrange. Mary Mahon was the owner from 1895 of the 8-roomed brick house at 56 Stanhope Street as well as the timber stables in the paddock next door.

Mary and Hugh Mahon owned the house until 1916, when it was put up for sale. Melbourne’s Catholic newspaper, the Advocate advertised its suitability for a Catholic family:

‘An eligible home, in one of the best positions in the favourite suburb of Malvern, is about to be offered for sale. Being nearly opposite the Catholic Church, Presbytery, and Schools, the property possesses attractions for a Catholic family. The present occupant is the Hon. Hugh Mahon, M.P. Minister for External Affairs. Further particulars may be had at 56 Stanhope street …’ (Advocate, 14 October 1916)

Hugh Mahon was a political leader during the most heated sectarian period of Australia’s history. As an Irish nationalist and former colleague and gaolmate of the failed Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, Hugh Mahon had strong grievances about Britain’s position on Home Rule in Ireland and took a firm stance against the British occupation of Ireland in 1920 when he was sufficiently outspoken to be expelled from the Federal Parliament. He is the only politician to have ever been expelled from the Australian Federal Parliament (Gibney 1986).

There were presumably no buyers in 1916 as the house went to auction the following year. Advertising the forthcoming sale by auction in 1917, the house was described as a ‘very substantial brick villa’ and ‘nearly opposite St Joseph’s R.C. Church’. The house contained ‘8 Rooms and Offices, also Sleeping-out Verandah, &c., on Very Fine Allotment 66 x 146. An Ideal Home, Most Conveniently Situated’ (Argus, 17 November 1917). In 1918 the house had been purchased by William Malone, gentleman (LV: V2007 F242).

In 1936, 56 Stanhope Street was subject to subdivision (City of Malvern 1936) which most likely related to the loss of the paddock and stables on the east side to create a new house.
block. Later owners of 56 Stanhope Street included Nellie Hayes in 1939 and Nellie and R T Hayes in 1945 (Argus, 16 March 1939).

Figure 2. Nigel Lewis, 56 Stanhope Street, Malvern, photographed for the ‘Malvern Heritage Study’, 1992 (source: Stonnington History Centre, MH 13093)

The front fence in 1992 was a simple c1920s painted timber and woven wire low fence with mild-steel details to front gates. The fence has since been replaced with a reproduction timber picket fence.

Sources

Advocate, 14 October 1916
Age, 14 February 1888
Argus, 17 November 1917
Argus, 16 March 1939
Art Portfolio Ltd 1911, City of Malvern Illustrated.
Shire of Malvern, Rate Books (RB).
City of Malvern 1936, ‘Subdivision – 56 Stanhope Street’, catalogue entry to documents and files, reference MH31573, Stonnington History Centre (SHC).
Graeme Butler & Associates 2002 ‘HO280 Citation for 54 Stanhope Street’, prepared for City of Stonnington.

Land Victoria (LV), Certificate of Title, as cited above.


MMBW Detail Plan no. 1743, Malvern, dated 1902 (SLV).

Nigel Lewis Richard Aitken Pty Ltd 1992, ‘City of Malvern Heritage Study’, prepared for the City of Malvern.


Statham, John 2008, ‘HO367 Montrose House Heritage Assessment’, City of Stonnington [‘The Italianate mode’ quoted and paraphrased at length].


**Physical description**

![Image of the residence at 56 Stanhope Street](source: Context 2016).

The residence at 56 Stanhope Street, originally known as ‘Hintonville’, is a single-storey polychrome brick residence that forms part of the unique group of villas located in Stanhope Street which demonstrate the stylistic excess and flamboyance of the late Boom period. The row of detached villas (No.s 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54 and 56) occupy allotments on the south side of Stanhope Street between Glenferrie Road and Irving Street in Malvern. No. 56 is set back from the street behind a small garden and a sympathetic (reproduction) timber picket fence.

Constructed c1889, the building is highly intact. It has an asymmetrical plan which features a projecting canted bay to one side of an ogee-profile cast-iron verandah. The building is distinguished by the highly decorated and boldly modelled parapet that conceals the M-profile hipped roof behind. The roof is now clad in corrugated iron which is likely to be a later change (i.e. from slate). The chimneys are cement rendered with cornices which are typical of the era.
The balustraded parapet with classical urn balusters set between piers with raised and fielded panels is embellished by a semi-circular pediment with scalloped shield motif above the house name (altered) which is set in a panel. Urns, masks, raised panels, dentil mouldings and eaves brackets separated by rosettes add further interest to the cast cement parapet.

The front façade is of tuckpointed brown Hawthorn brick with cream and red brick dressings in the form of surrounds to the windows, door, blind niche, and to the building corners. Windows to the projecting canted bay are three segmentally-arched double-hung sashes and beneath the verandah are two double-hung sash windows which are flanked on either side by small niches. The front door, which is located beneath the verandah closest to the canted bay, retains its sidelights and highlight with decorative glazing.

The cast-iron verandah retains its ogee-profile corrugated iron roof and appears to be intact. High quality cast-iron work includes floral motifs to the frieze lacework and ornamental iron supports with Corinthian capitals. Dentil mouldings to the timber verandah beam complete the composition.

The residence has a very high level of intactness, with extensions constructed c2000 restricted to the rear (south) and west elevations which are not readily visible from Stanhope Street.

Figure 4. Detail of rendered parapet, chimney, and ogee profile verandah (source: Context 2016).

Figure 5. Detail of niche distinguished by the tuckpointed polychrome brickwork pattern (source: Context 2016).

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.

The Boom Style houses along Stanhope Street have been immortalised as the exemplars of this architectural mode by influential post-war architectural critic and designer, Robin Boyd. In his hand-drawn illustrations summarising architectural history in *Australia’s Home*, ‘Boom Style’ is a polychrome brick house with identical features to 56 Stanhope Street, including the ogee-profile verandah roof, blind niche in the front wall, and overall configuration.

Figure 6. ‘Boom Style’ as depicted in Robin Boyd’s book *Australia’s Home* (1952: 63).

The most obvious comparisons for the house at 56 Stanhope Street are the other houses constructed along the south side of Stanhope Street, including the adjacent row: ‘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); as well as the villas ‘Rostrevor’, at no. 86 (HO281), ‘Gunyah’, at no. 88 (HO282), and no. 92 (HO283). These examples are all Significant in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay.
While the buildings are not identical, they share a number of common features, and due to their similarity in form and detailing they appear to have all been designed by a single builder or architect. The houses at 48, 50, 52, 54, 86 and 88 are most similar to ‘Hintonville’, all featuring the classic asymmetrical Italianate plan form of a canted projecting bay to one side of an ogee-profile cast-iron verandah. They all feature a balustraded parapet to the roof, concealing an M-profile hipped roof, with a semi-circular pediment with a scalloped shield motif above the house name.

The villas in Stanhope Street vary in their level of intactness, mostly relating to the overpainting of brickwork and missing parapet elements. The intactness of ‘Hintonville’ is very high in comparison to most others in the group, with the villa retaining its tuckpointed polychrome brickwork, ogee-profile cast-iron verandah and cast-concrete orbs to the parapet.
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

8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth, status and fashion

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?

‘Hintonville’, at 56 Stanhope Street, Malvern is significant. It was built c1889 and comprises a single-storey residential design with distinctive detailing illustrating the stylistic excesses and flamboyance of the late Boom period.

It was subsequently owned and occupied by the Mahon family, from 1895 to 1917. Hugh Mahon was an Irish-born journalist and later a member of the Australian Federal parliament. He was the former colleague and gaol mate of the failed Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell and took a firm stance against British occupation of Ireland in 1920, for which he was expelled from Parliament.

‘Hintonville’ features polychrome brickwork, a classic Italianate asymmetrical plan form and a distinctive cast-cement balustraded parapet. The house is highly intact externally, and the house is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century form and fabric. The modern alterations and additions are not significant.

The setting of ‘Hintonville’, as one of a unique group of villas that are highly illustrative of the Boom-style located in Stanhope Street, contributes to its significance.

How is it significant?

‘Hintonville’, at 56 Stanhope Street, Malvern is of local architectural, aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, ‘Hintonville’ is a highly intact, representative example of the Boom-style houses constructed in Melbourne’s suburbs in the late 1880s and early 1890s. It demonstrates the stylistic excesses and the flamboyance of the late Boom period and is synonymous with the stylistic group of villas constructed on the south side of Stanhope Street c1889. A successful design expression for terrace houses, here, the ‘Boom-style’ has been translated into a detached ‘row house’ form which is uncommon in the eastern suburbs of the City of Stonnington. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, the house is distinguished by its polychrome brickwork and highly decorated and boldly modelled parapet. The brickwork is expressed in tuckpointed brown Hawthorn brick with cream and red brick dressings in the form of surrounds to the windows, door, blind niche, and to the building corners. The balustraded parapet with classical urn balusters set between piers with raised and fielded panels is embellished with a semi-circular pediment above the house name. Urns, masks, raised panels, dentil mouldings and eaves brackets separated by rosettes add further interest to the cast cement parapet. The house also retains its ogee-profile cast-iron verandah with high quality floral motifs to the cast-iron lacework and ornamental iron post with Corinthian capitals. (Criterion E)

‘Hintonville’ is of historical and associative significance for its ownership and occupation by Hugh Mahon (1857-1931), who was an Irish nationalist, compatriot of Charles Stewart Parnell, and Member of the Australian Federal Parliament. He was the only politician ever to be
expelled from the Australian parliament for his ‘disloyalty’ to Britain over Britain’s treatment of Ireland. This association illustrates the strong Catholic character of Stanhope Street, which was described as Malvern’s ‘Catholic precinct’, as it was furnished with a Catholic primary school, presbytery, brothers’ residence, church, and church hall, attracting a predominantly Catholic population. (Criteria A & H)

**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 9. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 56 Stanhope Street, Malvern (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).](image)

Recommended grading: A2