

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Abbeyleix, 1 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern (HO335)



Figure 1. 1 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern (GJM Heritage, July 2020).

DATE: June 2021

Place type: House	Architect: Unknown
Construction Date: 1890	Builder: Unknown

Historical Context Summary

The City of Stonnington stands on the Traditional Lands of the Woi wurrung and Boon Wurrung Peoples of the East Kulin Nations. Archaeologists believe that Aboriginal People have been in Victoria for more than 30,000 years. Throughout this long history their relationship with the landscape (where and how they live) has changed according to factors such as climate change, resource availability, and cultural change (Context 2006:10).

The first European settler in the Malvern district was John Gardiner in 1835, a pastoralist from New South Wales who was one of the first overlanders to Port Phillip. He pastured his stock near the junction of Gardiner’s Creek and the Yarra River and is the namesake of Gardiner’s Creek, Gardiner’s Creek Road (now Toorak Road) and both the locality and the Shire of Gardiner (before they were re-named Malvern). The first recorded use of the name Malvern was in January 1854, when barrister Charles B. G. Skinner named his hotel on the corner of Malvern and Glenferrie roads the ‘Malvern Hill’ after a district in England. The name for the Shire of Malvern was derived from Malvern Hill Estate, a private subdivision in the area dating to 1856 (City of Stonnington [CoS]; Context 2006:34).

The first land sales in the area were held in 1854 and most original Crown grantees subdivided their allotments for resale (Context 2006:41; 2009:4). Gardiner’s Road District was proclaimed in 1856 before Gardiner Shire was formed in 1871, which was renamed Malvern Shire in 1878 (CoS). The municipal boundary comprised the current localities of Malvern (previously Gardiner), Malvern East, Glen Iris (south of Gardiners Creek), Kooyong, Armadale (east of Kooyong Road), Toorak (east of Kooyong Road) and Chadstone (west of Warrigal Road). Early directories listed Malvern and Malvern East as the one locality, until 1910.

The former Malvern Shire saw slow population growth to 1881, by which time it totalled just under 2,000 people (Victorian Places). In 1879, the Oakleigh Railway Line was opened along the southern extent of the municipality, through Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and Hawksburn to join the existing line at South Yarra. The arrival of the Oakleigh railway coincided with the start of the land boom, which resulted in considerable urban growth. In the 1880s the district comprised substantial residences on large allotments, as well as pastoral and agricultural holdings (including market gardens and orchards) and commercial development (Context 2006:41, 65-6). During the 1880s boom period, the municipality saw a dramatic increase in population, quadrupling to approximately 8,000 by 1891, and steadily increasing to 10,000 by 1901 (Victorian Places). In the 1890s a number of timber houses were built in Malvern as an economy measure, but some residents complained that wooden houses would degenerate into slums. Concern about this development led to a slum abolition movement and subsequently, c1912, Malvern Council began to declare brick areas, where timber houses were not permitted. By 1916 the Council had also fixed a minimum area for individual housing allotments at 6000 square feet, with minimum frontages of fifty feet (Context 2006:128).

The railway line along the northern extent of the municipality was established in 1890 through the Glen Iris Valley from Burnley. Stations were established at Heyington, Kooyong, Tooronga, Gardiner, Glen Iris and Darling, however, expected residential development in their vicinity stalled during the 1890s following the economic collapse (Context 2006:66). The 1893 *Australian Handbook* (as cited in Victorian Places) described Malvern as ‘an elevated residential suburb’, served by a line of omnibuses from Prahran, with many leading merchants and professional men living in the area in pleasantly situated ‘dwellings of a superior class’. The entry noted that a number of notable mansions had been erected by this date, and that the market gardens and orchards were ‘steadily being reduced, and cut up into building allotments, on which [were] being erected

many handsome villas and business establishments' (Victorian Places). The municipality saw rapid development and urbanisation from 1900 and it was declared a Borough and then a Town in 1901. In 1911 the municipality was declared a City, with a residential population of 16,000 (Context 2006:86; Victorian Places).

The Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust was established in 1908, with electric tramlines opening along High Street in 1910-14, Glenferrie Road in 1910-13, to the south along Wattletree Road in 1910-12, and Malvern Road in 1915. The arrival of the tramlines further drove the development of commercial centres in the immediate vicinity and residential development beyond. New train stations were built at Armadale, Hawksburn, Malvern and Toorak between 1908 and 1918, and at Malvern East in 1929 (Context 2006:70-2, 113; Victorian Places).

Residential development during the early twentieth century generally occurred on newly subdivided estates or on nineteenth century subdivisions that had remained partly or wholly undeveloped during the 1890s depression (Context 2009:5). In 1912 it was reported that 800 houses a year were being built in the (by then) City of Malvern, which boasted 'a progress unprecedented by any other suburb' (Context 2009:128). In the decade between 1911 and 1921 the population in the City of Malvern doubled, from 16,000 to 32,000 residents, and then increased steadily to 43,000 by 1933 (Victorian Places). This population growth saw development spread to the Glen Iris Valley and the outer reaches of the City, in Malvern East. The housing stock in this eastern part of the municipality was more characteristically uniform and unadorned in comparison to housing in Malvern. Kooyong's development was substantially completed by the end of the 1920s (Context 2006:128, 131).

By 1946 the Australian Blue Book (as cited in Victorian Places) stated that Malvern was one of the 'leading residential suburbs of the Metropolis'. It comprised the substantial homes of many of Melbourne's leading citizens, in what was termed 'The Garden City' due to the number of parks and public gardens. Development in the City of Malvern steadied from the 1930s, with the population averaging 45,000 until the 1990s (Victorian Places). The City of Malvern amalgamated with the City of Prahran in 1994, to form the City of Stonnington.

Place History Summary

Originally the drive for the large Nerrena Estate to the east of Glenferrie Road, The Avenue (current Sorrett Avenue) was formed in 1887 with most houses in the street constructed c1889-90 (Lewis 1992) as part of the Malvern Grange Estate.

The post-boom economic downturn in Melbourne led to the sale of a number of Malvern allotments in July 1889, including lots 10 to 14 in Sorrett Avenue (*Age*, 16 July 1889:2). At this time Lots 13 and 14 contained weatherboard villas, Lot 11 and 12 contained incomplete weatherboard villas and Lot 10 (1 Sorrett Avenue) contained 'foundations and walls of a brick and stone building, containing ten apartments' (*Age*, 16 July 1889:2). Rate Books confirm that the National Mutual Society were the owners of this incomplete house in 1889 and that stone foundations were in place on the land that year.

Architect George Jobbins purchased the property and the 10-roomed stone and brick house was completed in 1890. Jobbins did not occupy the house but owned the property until it was purchased by George Hall in 1894. Arthur Bailey purchased the house in 1905 and the Bailey family continued to reside at 1 Sorrett Avenue until 1940 (S&M). Photos of the house taken in c1905 show members of the Bailey family and an earlier fence (Figures 4-6). The substantial bluestone dwelling was offered for sale as 'Abbeylex' in July 1940 (*Age*, 24 July 1940:2).

It is suggested that the house may have served as a private hospital in the 1940s (Orama Private Hospital registration 1941, via SHC) however the Sands and McDougall Directories list Elizabeth Barnett as the occupant from 1940 until the 1950s, and the Rate Books confirm Elizabeth Barnett as tenant in 1940.

Current aerial photographs indicate that an earlier outbuilding on the rear boundary (evident in 1902; Figure 3) was removed and an outbuilding constructed at the north-west corner of the property (dates not confirmed).

Description Summary

The following description includes detail contained within 'City of Malvern Heritage Study', Lewis & Aitken, 1992.

The house is located at the west end of Sorrett Avenue, close to Glenferrie Road, on the north side of the street.

The house is constructed of coursed rubble bluestone with cement render detailing including quoins, window frames and chimneys. The projecting window bay has a castellated parapet and hood moulds to the arch-headed windows, while the projecting entry porch also features a castellated parapet and a trefoil motif containing the date 'AD 1890'. The steeply pitched slate-clad gable roof is punctuated by tall, slender chimneys finished in cement render. The front gable end is finished with decorative timber fretwork and finial. The later pointed arched opening under the gable end creates a sleep-out porch on the front bay which replaced the earlier circular roof vent.

Key Features:

- Victorian Tudor style
- Asymmetrical elevations with projecting front gable
- Coursed rubble bluestone walls
- Steep, slate-clad gable roof forms
- Cement render detailing including quoining, window frames and chimneys
- Dominant front gable with rendered projecting bay with pointed arch-headed windows
- Decorative timber fretwork to gable ends
- Castellated parapets to window bay and entrance porch of front elevation
- Trefoil motif over entrance containing date 'AD 1890'
- Tall rendered chimney with corbelled capping at south-west corner.

Intactness/Integrity

The house at 1 Sorrett Avenue remains highly intact to its period of construction. The place retains a high degree of integrity and legibility as a Victorian Tudor style house.

Changes to the property include:

- A large arch in front gable end which has replaced an original circular roof vent (this may have been an early change)
- A chimney has been removed from ridge of transverse gable
- The front fence has been replaced with reproduction cast iron fence.



Figure 2. Entrance detail (GJM Heritage, July 2020).

References

Context Pty Ltd, Stonnington Thematic Environmental History, 2006 & 2009 addendum.

J B Cooper, *The History of Malvern, From its First Settlement to a City*, Melbourne, 1935.

Landata Victoria, historical aerial photograph, 1945.

Lewis & Aitken, *City of Malvern Heritage Study*, 1992

Malvern Rate Books.

Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Plan Malvern No 59, 1902

Sands & McDougall Melbourne Directories (S&M).

Stonnington History Centre (SHC), image collection, including:

- MP7812
- MP7815
- MP7813
- MP12230.

Victorian Places, 'Malvern' & 'Malvern East', <http://www.victorianplaces.com.au>.

Historic Images and Plans

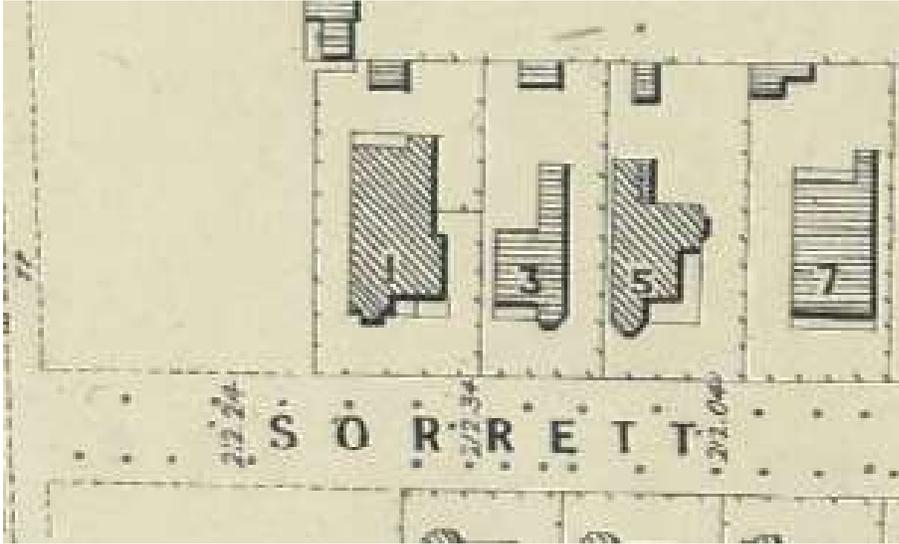


Figure 3. Footprint of the buildings at the subject site in 1902, as evident on MMBW Plan Malvern No 59, dated 1902. (Source: SLV)



Figure 4. House, 1 Sorrett Avenue, c1905. (Source: SHC MP7812)



Figure 5. House, 1 Sorrett Avenue, c1905. (Source: SHC MP7815)



Figure 6. House, 1 Sorrett Avenue, c1905. (Source: SHC MP7813)



Figure 7. Detail of a 1945 aerial showing the subject site and extent of the house and outbuildings at this date (Landata).



Figure 8. House, 1 Sorrett Avenue, 1963. (Source: SHC MP12230)