

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Stokell

Address: 49-51 Adelaide Street, Armadale

HO Reference: HO1

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 22 March 2022

Designer: John Beswicke (likely)

Year of Construction: 1889

Builder: Stephen Armstrong



Photograph of upper façade (source: Stonnington Library, Stokell, taken March 1990 and provided by Di Foster, reference number MP8252. Unrestricted copyright).



Location map and extent of HO1.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings

Heritage Type: Mansion

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

Controls:	☐ External paint colours	☐ Internal alterations	☐ Tree controls
	☐ Victorian Heritage Register	☐ Incorporated Plans	☐ Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	☐ Prohibited uses may be permitted	☐ Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 49-51 Adelaide Street, Armadale (otherwise known as Stokell) is significant. Specifically, the form, scale and detailing of the substantial 1889 boom era Italianate mansion is of local heritage significance. The front fence and gate, carport, pool and pool house are not significant.

How is it significant?

Stokell is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington. It is also associated with prominent local building contractor Stephen Armstrong and prominent architect John Beswicke.

Why is it significant?

Stokell is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of Late Victorian mansions on estates within Armadale during the late 19th century, prior to the wider subdivisions of the late Victorian estates in the area. The mansion is of historical significance in demonstrating residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period. Stokell also has historical significance as a former private hospital between 1938-1990, known as St. Ronan's Rest Home and later St. Ronans Private Hospital. (Criterion A)

Stokell has principal design characteristics attributed with late Victorian mansions. These include the masonry construction with render, a hipped roof form, stucco render, projecting bay windows, and arcaded verandah. (Criterion D)

Stokell is aesthetically significant as a high-quality and fine example of an Italianate boom era mansion with a grand setting established by the late Victorian detailing, openings, scale, form and setback. This aesthetical value is accentuated through the stilted segmental arcaded verandah, decorative stucco, projecting bay windows and chimneys. Although it is not highly visible, the building is a landmark residence in Armadale owing to the scale and deep setback which contrasts with the style of later developments in the area. (Criterion E)

Stokell has associative significance in relation to prominent local building contractor Stephen Armstrong who constructed the dwelling and was responsible for the construction of several affluent mansions in Melbourne's east. Armstrong was known for his ability to demonstrate the workmanship and elaborate detailing in his Italianate buildings, with prominent external massing, arcaded verandah, projecting bays, intact decorative stucco, chimneys and fenestrations. Stokell is also of associative significance as a house either designed by, or copied from, well known architect John Beswicke. This is evidenced by the combination of semicircular and stilted segmental arches which is highly characteristic of his work. (Criterion H)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	Stokell is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of Late Victorian mansions on estates within Armadale during the late 19th century, prior to the wider subdivisions of the late Victorian estates in the area. The mansion is also of historical significance in demonstrating
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		residential development in the south eastern suburbs by Melbourne's wealthiest citizens during the gold rush period. Stokell has historical significance a former private hospital between 1938-1990, known as St. Ronan's Rest Home and later St. Ronans Private Hospital.
<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>	Stokell has principal design characteristics attributed with late Victorian mansions. These include the masonry construction with render, a hipped roof form, stucco render, projecting bay windows, and arcaded verandah.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	Stokell is aesthetically significant as a high-quality and fine example of an Italianate boom era mansion with a grand setting established by the late Victorian detailing, openings, scale, form and setback. This aesthetical value is accentuated through the arcaded verandah, decorative stucco, projecting bay windows and chimneys. Although it is not highly visible, the building is a landmark residence in Armadale owing to the scale and deep setback which contrasts with the style of later developments in the area.
<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.

H	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	Stokell has associative significance in relation to prominent local building contractor Stephen Armstrong who constructed the dwelling and was responsible for the construction of several affluent mansions in Melbourne's east. Armstrong was known for his ability to demonstrate the workmanship and elaborate detailing in his Italianate buildings, with prominent external massing, arcaded verandah, projecting bays, intact decorative stucco, chimneys and fenestrations. Stokell is also of associative significance as a house either designed by, or copied from, well known architect John Beswicke. This is evidenced by the combination of semicircular and stilted segmental arches which is highly characteristic of his work.
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Description

• Physical Analysis

Stokell is a large two-storey boom era Victorian Italianate mansion with a triple hipped slate roof. Its façade is finished with a white stucco. The front façade facing Adelaide Street has a prominent arcaded verandah with Corinthian columns on both the ground and first floors. The verandah wraps around the north and east façades and is framed on the ends by projecting bay windows and a hipped slate roof. Other key details include bracketed eaves, architraves and impost mouldings, and balcony balustrades.

The windows are arched double hung sash timber framed windows. The mouldings and window frames are a muted yellow colour in contrast with the white stucco façade. The first-storey is capped with cornice and eave brackets. There are three white painted brick chimneys with a simple Italianate moulding, each with three terracotta chimney pots extending from the roof. There is roof access over the centre and east hipped roof with an Italianate wrought iron balustrade.

The front wall is a white rendered brick with wall piers with a cast stone pier cap. The foundation base of the wall, wall capping and pier caps are painted the same muted cream colour as the detailed mouldings and window frames of the house. There is a black wrought iron gate that leads to a covered car porch that is laid in concrete. The main street entrance is recessed from the main wall and framed by two in built garden beds. The non-original black wrought iron gate is framed by two similar styled wall piers and a hipped roof.

Aerial imagery shows the grounds of Stokell to be well maintained with expanses of lawn surrounding the main structure. There is a swimming pool in the backyard with a pool house. The pool house may be part of the original external wash house and was reported to be intact during the 1992 review of the property. There are mature trees on the property.

Stokell is located just off the junction of Adelaide Street and Malvern Road, and is in close proximity to commercial shops on Malvern Road and Lauriston Girls School. Stokell is currently used as a residential property and is considered to be in good condition. The dwelling appears to be intact and would be considered to be of high integrity.

- [Alterations and Additions](#)

- New gutter and downpipes.
- Addition of a carport.
- Concrete driveway.
- Addition of a swimming pool.
- Addition of air-conditioning services on the roof.
- Front fence replaced.
- Car and main entrance gate added.

[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](#)

The rate books shows that the mansion Stokell was under construction by the year 1889. The dwelling, built in the boom era Victorian Italianate style had a 325 foot frontage to Adelaide Street (Malvern Rate Books 1889). Stephen Armstrong, a prominent local builder was the owner and builder. He was responsible for the construction of several affluent mansions in Melbourne's east. Armstrong was known for his ability to demonstrate the workmanship and elaborate detailing in his Italianate buildings,

with prominent external massing, arcaded verandah, projecting bays, intact decorative stucco, chimneys and fenestrations. He named the house after his wife's maiden name.

During its initial years, Stokell was occupied by Stephen Armstrong, his wife, and their two daughters Lily and Jessie. By 1894, the brick house consisted of fifteen rooms. A MMBW Detail Plan of 1902 shows large gates, a sweeping drive from Malvern Road, a separate service entry from Adelaide Street, stables and other outbuildings. Additional rooms were added over the next decade and by 1905, Stokell comprised eighteen rooms with a 150 foot frontage to Malvern Road. While Armstrong remained the owner during this period, it was occupied by merchant James Ormond.

The house changed hands a number of times after Armstrong's ownership. In 1911, Armstrong sold the house to Mrs L.G. Laycock. Laycock's ownership was short-lived and by 1914, the house was sold onto member of prominent Western District grazing family, Mary Winter. By 1923, Charles de Plan Lloyd, a broker, owned and occupied Stokell (Sands and McDougall 1923). During his occupancy, the house measured 160 feet by 520 feet and was re-named Ambo. Following du Plan Lloyd's death in 1937, the house was sold for £8800 to one S.M. Cantor.

In 1938 the building became a private hospital known as St. Ronan's Rest Home (The Argus 1939, 16). It was managed by Dougald McCormick. By 1973, the name had changed to St. Ronan's Private Hospital (The Australian Jewish News 1973, 2). The hospital closed in 1990 and the property has operated as a private residence since.

Comparative Analysis

In Armadale there are remnant examples of large Victorian mansions reflecting the suburbs affluent history. While these residences no longer grace manicured gardens set on acreage, they still represent a period of booming development and affluence in Armadale. Stokell may be compared to the following boom era Victorian Italianate mansions located on Orrong Road:

- **Trelowarren, formerly known as Kilbryde (543 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO86).** Built in 1876-77 for Robert D. Reid, merchant and member of the Victorian Legislative Council who would later become a Senator, Trelowarren is directly comparable to Stokell as a boom era Italianate mansion formerly on a large estate dating from the late 19th century. Trelowarren directly reflects a period of rich development and expansion, informing Stokell's construction and providing a remnant landscape context for Stokell. Today, both houses provide physical evidence of Armadale prior to the subdivision of the 19th century estates.
- **Larnook (519 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO85).** Built in 1881 for W. H. Miller, banker and son of Henry 'Money' Miller, Larnook is comparable to Stokell as a late 19th century boom era Italianate mansion formerly on a large estate. Like Trelowarren, Larnook contextualises the historical setting of Stokell and provides physical evidence of Armadale prior to the subdivision of the 19th century estates.
- **Former Sebrof House (514 Orrong Road, Armadale) (HO84).** Built in c.1884 for William Williams, merchant, the house would later be owned by the Forbes family who renamed it Sebrof. Former Sebrof House is directly comparable to that Trelowarren as both houses are key examples of boom era Italianate mansions built on large estates in the late 19th century on Orrong Road, Armadale. Former Sebrof House directly reflects a period of rich development and expansion, informing Trelowarren's construction and providing a remnant landscape context for

Trelowarren. Today, both houses provided historical evidence of Armadale prior to the subdivision of the 19th century estates.

Overall, Trelowarren, Larnook, Former Sebrof House and Stokell can be understood as a collection of remnant boom era mansions, contextualising the development of Armadale prior to the subdivision of the late Victorian estates in Armadale. The four surviving mansions, however, no longer stand in their Victorian gardens and their grounds have been drastically reduced by the subdivisions.

Although Stokell is of a grander scale than most surviving examples, Stokell is representative of many large Italianate mansions of the 1880s, being a two-storey villa with an L-shaped balcony along two sides and projecting bays at the diagonally opposite corners. However, the combination of forms found at Stokell is particularly characteristic of architect, John Beswicke (later Beswicke and Coote). Specifically, this comment refers to the stilted segmental arcading above a level of semicircular arcading. Miles Lewis has suggested that the arches look like the work of John Beswicke/Beswicke and Coote (as cited in Nigel Lewis and Richard Aitken Pty Ltd 1992, 68). Given no tender notice has been found for Stokell, and this is expected as the owner was a builder, there is a possibility that Stephen Armstrong simply used Beswicke's work as the basis of his own building, with or without the concurrence of the architect. Nevertheless, comparative example of the architects work with stilted segmental arcading have been included here for reference:

- **La Verna (39 Sackville Street, Kew) (HO162).** Built 1888 and designed by John Beswicke, the two-storey boom era Victorian Italianate mansion is characterised by a square bay with four arches with single columns.
- **Kawarau (405 Tooronga Road, Hawthorn) (HO130 / HO489).** Built in 1891 and partly remodeled in 1904 by Ussher and Kemp, the two-storey boom era Victorian Italianate mansion characterised by a square bay with four arches, double columns on the ground floor and single columns on the first floor.
- **Residence (3 Molesworth Street, Kew) (HO143).** Built in 1891 and designed by Beswicke and Coote, the two-storey boom era Victorian Italianate mansion is characterised by a square bay with four arches, double columns on the ground floor and single columns on the first floor.

The stilted segmental arcading also appears in the designs of Lloyd Tayler, for example 5-7 Collins Street, Melbourne which was built in 1884.

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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



Detail view of front gate / entry (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View of the site from Adelaide Street – there is very low visibility (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View of chimney (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Google streetview showing a view of the building in winter (source: Google Streetview, June 2019).



1890 artwork of the subject building (source: Stonnington Library, 'Stokell', taken March 1990 and painted by William Tibbits, reference number MP8225).

Authors

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