Place name:	Plummer Residence (former)
Address:	39 Nicholson Street, Essendon
Place typology:	Residential
Construction date range:	1941
Architectural style:	Inter-War Georgian Revival
Assessment:	Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022
Recommendation:	To be included in the schedule to the heritage overlay

Photos of place:



39 Nicholson Street, Essendon. Photograph by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

39 Nicholson Street, Essendon, is a two-storey, gabled-roofed cream brick house in the inter-war Georgian Revival style. It was erected in 1941 for accountant Leslie Plummer and his wife Alice. The architect has not been identified.

The significant features of the house include:

- The elegantly-proportioned street façade with repetitive fenestration
- The relatively low hipped roofline with overscaled slab-like chimneys at either end
- The multi-paned sash windows with louvred timber shutters and S-shaped metal shutter-dogs

How is it significant?

39 Nicholson Street, Essendon, is of local architectural significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

39 Nicholson Street, Essendon, is significant as a fine and substantially intact example of a house in the inter-war Georgian Revival style. It displays many of the defining characteristics of the style, such as its elegantly-proportioned double-height façade with low hipped roofline, symmetrical chimneys and regular repetitive fenestration including trademark multi-paned windows with louvred shutters. Although the Georgian Revival style was widespread in certain parts of metropolitan Melbourne, it was rather less common in what is now the City of Moonee Valley. This house is thus a rare example of this distinctive style amongst the late inter-war houses that proliferate in the municipality. (Criterion B; Criterion E).

Description:

Occupying a corner site, 39 Nicholson Street, Essendon, is a two-storey cream brick house in the inter-war Georgian Revival style, with a hipped roof clad in glazed terracotta tiles. The Nicholson Street facade is nominally double-fronted, with a recessed bay window at the far left (south) end that incorporates a single-storey flat-roofed garage. Balanced without being precisely symmetrical, the remainder of the facade has a central group of three windows at the upper level, with another single window at either end. At ground level, there is a continuous bay of four windows to the right side, and projecting off-centre bay window to the left, with separate hipped rooflet, that contains a recessed quarry-tiled entry porch and another pair of windows. All windows contain timber-framed double-hung sashes with horizontal glazing bars, while those at the upper level also have panelled timber shutters with louvred inserts and traditional S-shaped shutter-dogs, all painted pale green. The front door is flanked by narrow sidelights with vertical strips of rippled glazing. At the lower level, contrasting dark-coloured clinker brickwork has been used for the plinth line, planter boxes, lintels of openings, and the parapet capping to the garage.

The secondary street frontage, facing north to Raleigh Street, is asymmetrical and double-fronted, with the projecting bay incorporating a central chimney breast with stepped edges, and windows of the same form and detailing seen on the Nicholson Street frontage.

The two street boundaries are delineated by a fence with arched bays of mild steel palisades between tall capped piers of clinker brick, incorporating driveway and pedestrian entrance gates along the Nicholson Street side.

History:

Contextual History

City of Moonee Valley occupies part of the Traditional lands of the Wurundjeri-willam clan of the Woi-wurrung people. Many sites in the area now known as City of Moonee Valley show evidence of Woi-wurrung activities and spiritual connections. Fish were trapped in the rivers and creeks, stone was quarried from the river edges, murnong daisy was

collected and kangaroos hunted across grassland areas, and bark was harvested from trees in the river valleys. This relationship between the Woi-wurrung and the land, water, animals and plants, continues to this day (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.29).

The first Europeans to explore the area known as Moonee Valley was a surveyor, Charles Grimes in 1803. In 1836, settlers moving from Van Diemen's Land crossed the area in the hope of finding empty, cheap and plentiful land for sheep. By 1842, surveyors had created the first map of the Parish of Doutta Galla and then Woi-wurrung lands were offered for sale by the British Crown to Europeans (noting that the land was never ceded). The Wurundjeri were moved off their land which had a profound impact on their culture, health and language. By 1860, the entire parish was sold (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.32-33).

Early development of the area began with the goldrush period of the 1850s which saw Mount Alexander Road used as a thoroughfare to the diggings with over 30,000 people estimated as moving along the dirt road each week. Businesses and shops sprang up providing sustenance, transport and accommodation to service the passing gold rush trade. Some very early wayside hotels and shops still survive from this period (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.51-54). After the heady days of the goldrush, the 1860s saw Essendon, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Flemington develop into permanent townships. The development of railways by private companies gave huge impetus to suburban development of the area with the opening of the Essendon railway in 1860. The government purchased the line in 1868. Suburban trains terminated at Essendon and it wasn't until 1889 that Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Newmarket stations were completed. By 1893 stations opened at Strathmore and Pascoe Vale and in 1922 Glenbervie Station opened. The railways provided an enormous boost to residential development along the line and those who had previously moved to areas without trains, now clamoured for them (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.59).

By the 1880s Essendon had become a Borough and by 1891 had a population of 14,411. Many subdivisions occurred during the land boom of the 1880s and many failed to eventuate due to the depression of the 1890s. In the interwar period a boom in subdivision and residential infill occurred in Travancore, Essendon, Ascot Vale, Strathmore and Moonee Ponds, which was focused on new transport routes along the tram lines, first established to Essendon in 1905. In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed and lines were extended and improved. The tram lines saw development occur either side of Maribyrnong Road, further along Mt Alexander Road, Buckley Street and Keilor Road (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.65-68, p.115).

Education was an important consideration in the development of the municipality, with schools having been established in Essendon and Flemington in the 1850s. The development of State schools in the area reflects the major phases of education and includes a number of 'firsts'; the first non-denominational school in Victoria was set up in Essendon in 1850, the first purpose-built infants school in the state was set up in 1902, and Essendon High School was the first purpose-built high school in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Denominational schools were also set up in the area in the early 1850s, with more private schools established during the boom period of the 1880s. Residents wanted a better life than the one most had left behind in Britain, including a good education for their children (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.157-161).

In the three decades after the Second World War, Melbourne's suburbs ballooned outward to cater for post-war migration, the baby boom, an increasing need for new housing, and a more car-centred economy. Areas to the north of Essendon had been open paddocks in 1945, but by 1950 the Shire of Keilor found themselves with a developing suburb with no name. It was later called Niddrie. Similarly, Airport West was developing quickly with houses being built before the roads. By 1964 it was claimed that Airport West had the cheapest cream brick veneers in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.120-121). Many houses in these post-war areas were austere weatherboard or brick veneer bungalows, with a few scattered architect-designed or project homes on new blocks, particularly along the Boulevard in Aberfeldie. These post-war housing areas were car-centred communities located close to industry along Keilor Road, Matthews Avenue around Essendon Airport and East Keilor. By 1960 Airport West had its first hotel, the famous Skyways Hotel and then in the 1970s the first shopping centre, owned by Westfield, was begun (heritage ALLIANCE, G*ap Heritage Study*, 2005: pp.28-30).

Post-war housing pressure also saw a huge investment by the Housing Commission of Victoria who developed 150 bungalows in concrete, weatherboard and brick in Aberfeldie. They then began an ambitious estate of houses and flats on a 77 acre site at Ascot Vale in 1949. These low-rise walk-up flats eventually gave rise to the high-rise flats of Flemington which opened in June 1965 (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.123).

Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot

Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the Moonee Valley community which today is one of the most diverse and vibrant in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.124).

Place history

The house at 39 Nicholson Street, Essendon, was erected in 1941 for Leslie and Alice Plummer.

A longtime Essendon resident, Leslie Passmore Plummer (1879-1957) began his career as a clerk and went on to become an accountant. In July 1911, he married Alice Patterson Myers (1881-1973) and the couple initially resided in Fletcher Street, later moving to Napier Street. During this period, the family increased with the births of three children: daughters Nancy (born 1912) and Mary (born 1914), and son David (born 1916). In 1926, the Plummers moved into a double-fronted red brick villa at 47 Raleigh Street, Essendon which occupied an uncommonly large block on the south-west corner of Nicholson Street (*Herald*, 6 September 1926, p.17). The family of five continued to reside there for about fifteen years. After David Plummer married in December 1940, his parents opted to subdivide the property and erect a new house for themselves on the block's Nicholson Street frontage, allowing David and his new wife Marjorie to take up residence in the original family home on Raleigh Street (*Argus* 5 December 1940, p.10). The new house, designated at 39 Nicholson Street, was evidently constructed during 1941. Leslie and Alice Plummer were already in occupation by April 1942, when their second daughter, Mary, became engaged to David Thomas, a grazier from Barham near Moama (*Argus*, 11 April 1942, p.5). That same year, the Plummers' eldest daughter Nancy married Reginald Gibson, identified in electoral roles as an agent, and the newlyweds took up residence with Nancy's parents at 39 Nicholson Street. When Nancy's sister Mary married in 1945, she and her grazier husband returned to make their home in Barham.

The Plummer and Gibson families continued to live together at 39 Nicholson Street for several decades, while the house next door on Raleigh Street, Essendon remained occupied by David and Marjorie. Following Leslie Plummer's death in 1957, the family property was further developed, creating a second and smaller allotment further south on Nicholson Street, Essendon (Certificate of Title, 8259/089). This became the site for a small gable-roofed cream brick dwelling, designated as No. 37 and initially occupied by prominent local physician Dr Aneice Saleeba (1902-1968), who does not appear to have been related to the Plummer family. After the widowed Alice Plummer died in December 1972, the house at No. 39 continued to be occupied by Nancy and Reginald Gibson, and their three children, into the 1980s. In 2000, a new boundary fence was erected along the Nicholson and Raleigh Street frontages of the property.

Sources:

Primary sources

The Argus

The Herald

Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plan no. 1656, 1910. Map Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Plans Plus, "Proposed fence, 39 Nicholson Street, Essendon", working drawings, dated March 2000.
City of Moonee Valley.

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

6.0 Building towns, cities and the garden state

6.7 Making homes for Victorians

Comparative Analysis:

The following are some notable architect-designed houses in the City of Moonee Valley from 1935 to 1941:

- Price Residence, 2 Riverview Road, Essendon (Mewton & Grounds, 1935) – *VHR H1160; also HO108*
- Saunders Residence, 24 Cooke Street, Essendon (A Bramwell Smith, 1935) – *standing; not listed*
- Dr O'Donnell Residence and Clinic, 153 Buckley Street, Essendon (Hughes & Orme, 1935) – *demolished 2018*
- Winbush Residence, 50 Fletcher Street, Essendon (Harry Winbush, 1936) – *individually listed as HO489*

- Berriman Residence, 89 Woodland Street, Essendon (Meldrum & Noad, 1938) – *extant; not listed*
- Lynch Residence, 15 Levien Street, Essendon (R M & M H King, 1938) – *individually listed as HO489*
- Green Residence, 14a Aberfeldie Street, Moonee Ponds (W H Merritt, 1939-40) – *extant; not listed*
- Perry Residence, 15 Park Crescent, Aberfeldie (J H Esmond Dorney, 1940) – *individually listed as HO469*
- Davie Residence, 6 Peterleigh Grove, Essendon (Seabrook & Fildes, 1941) – *individually listed as HO96*
- Halik Residence, 81-83 Mooltan Street, Travancore (Lazlo Guttman, 1941) – *altered; part of precinct HO23*

The houses listed above, most of which are already included on the heritage overlay schedule, represent a range of architectural styles that were fashionable during the closing years of the inter-war period. They include two regionally significant examples of the progressive Functionalist style, namely 2 Riverview Road (which is also on the VHR) and 6 Peterleigh Grove, a regrettably altered example at 81-83 Mooltan Street, and some fine specimens of the Streamlined Moderne idiom at 15 Levien Street, 40 Fletcher Street and 14a Aberfeldie Street. More conservative tastes are reflected by some key examples in the English Domestic Revival style, such as the recently-demolished doctor's residence at 153 Buckley Street and three extant dwellings at 15 Park Crescent, 89 Woodland Street and 24 Cooke Street.

While the Georgian Revival idiom was also popular in the late 1930s and early 1940s, in parallel with the styles discussed above, it is rather less well represented in the City of Moonee Valley, and there are currently no individual examples included on the heritage overlay schedule.

Other local examples of the inter-war Georgian Revival style

As noted above, the subject building has few pertinent comparators as a local example of a building demonstrative, to a greater or lesser degree, of the inter-war Georgian Revival mode. The examples cited below include some broadly comparable residential buildings from the 1930s and another from as late as the mid-1940s. Two of these comparators have since been demolished, which serves only to underscore the significance of the subject building as a rare surviving local manifestation of this style. One particularly comparable example, circa 1941, is already covered by a heritage overlay (HO).

Residence, 11 Riverview Street, Essendon (1933) Designed by architects Gawler & Drummond, this two-storey gable-roofed roughcast rendered house has some qualities in common with the subject building, such as its monumental street façade with balanced fenestration and multi-paned sashes. However, its Georgian Revival influences are less explicit, and have been combined with elements of the bungalow and Tudor Revival modes, such as the quirky hip-roofed dormer windows and canted front porch.	 *Source: Google StreetView, Jan 2019*
Sydenham Flats 8a Sydenham Street, Moonee Ponds (1935) This two-storey block of four flats was designed by Bates, Smart & McCutcheon, who were one of Melbourne's leading exponents of the inter-war Georgian Revival style. Of red brick construction with a hipped roof, the flats displayed many characteristics of the style including multi-paned windows with louvred shutters, quoined corners and a canted bay window with distinctive ogee-profile rooflet. The entrances to each flat, to the side, had rendered porticos with quoined surrounds and a balcony above. The building was demolished in 2019.	 *Source: Google StreetView, Jan 2019*

Residence, 236 Pascoe Vale Road, Essendon (circa 1937) This two-storey building exhibits some Georgian Revival characteristics, such as its compact double-storey form, gabled roofline, balanced façade and multi-paned sash windows. However, it is somewhat hybrid in that it also has elements associated with other styles of the same era, such as the rough clinker brickwork and round arched doorway of the Tudor Revival style, and a porthole window more typically associated with the Streamlined Moderne mode.	 *Source: Google StreetView, Dec 2020*
Residence 20 Brewster Street, Essendon (circa 1941) This house, contemporaneous with the one at 39 Nicholson Street, is probably its most pertinent local comparator. It is very similar in form and composition, with comparable shuttered multi-paned windows along with some even more explicit Georgian Revival references such as the rendered façade and projecting portico with Tuscan columns. The house is currently protected by a heritage overlay as part of the broader *Peterleigh Grove & Kalimna Street Precinct* (HO3).	 *Source: Google StreetView, June 2014*
Police Station and Residence 78 Lincoln Road, Essendon North (1945) From 1945, PWD Chief Architect Percy Everett embraced the Georgian Revival mode in a series of suburban police stations with attached residences. Examples at Surrey Hills and Toorak were sophisticated two-storey dwellings with balanced facades, multi-paned sashes, octagonal feature window and narrow eaves returning along the gable ends. This example at Essendon, however, was a much simpler single-storey building with a more perfunctory nod to the Georgian Revival. It has been demolished.	 *Source: State Library of Victoria*

Recommendation:

That the whole of 39 Nicholson Street, Essendon, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Solar Energy Controls	Yes
Fences and Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No