

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Benshemesh Flats Group Listing  
2 (1960)'

**Other names:** -

**Citation No:**  
2429

**INSERT MAP**



**Address:** 306 Dandenong Road (Leaworra),  
16 Lansdowne Road, and 8  
Westbury Street (Wolverton), St  
Kilda East

**Heritage Precinct:** Not applicable

**Heritage Overlay:** TBC

**Graded as:** Significant

**Category:** Residential: Flats

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Style:** Postwar - Modernist

**Constructed:** 1960

**Designer:** Mordecai Benshemesh

**Amendment:** TBC

**Comment:** New citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

The three separate blocks of flats, constructed in 1960, at 306 Dandenong Road (Leaworra), 16 Lansdowne Road and 8 Westbury Street (Wolverton), St Kilda East – all designed by the émigré architect Mordecai Benshemesh - are significant.

All three buildings are intact, are three storey, have cream brick walls and flat roofs with wide, sheet-lined soffits to the front/main elevations, and timber-framed openings. They all have balconies orientated to take best advantage of the solar access and the site configuration. The stairwells have louvred glass to provide some airflow. All retain their original low cream brick fence and associated letter box enclosures.

306 Dandenong Road (Leaworra), comprised of 12 flats, was designed in December 1959 but constructed in 1960 by A M & R R Gynge P/L. It has a stepped footprint with two stair wells with a vertical strip of windows. The windows to the flats are configured in bands, including panels of grey ceramic tiles to the east elevation. The balconies have an inwardly canted front, lined with sheeting, and metal railing to the side.

16 Lansdowne Road, comprised of 18 flats, was designed in June 1960 and also constructed by A M & R R Gynge P/L. This narrow site has a long rectangular footprint. Distinctive elements include the inverted L-

shaped brick projections to the east elevation, band of white and grey ceramic tiles, and splayed balconies with metal balusters and panels.

8 Westbury Street (Wolverton), comprised of 18 flats, was designed in February 1960 and constructed by Martin Adams & Co. P/L. It also has a stepped footprint with two stair wells. The balconies are also splayed with a combination of metal balusters and panels. The front windows (north and west elevations) have a staggered configuration and there are spandrel panels to the west elevation.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

The flats at 8 Westbury Street (Wolverton), 16 Lansdowne Road and 306 Dandenong Road (Leaworra), are of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

The group of three flats are historically significant as part of the extensive flat building activity that has characterised much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of the municipality but especially this part of St Kilda East and which gained pace after World War II with the introduction of the Own-Your-Own (OYO) option. These three sites are also significant as they reflect a common pattern of land development in this part of the municipality whereby the extant building replaced an earlier house/mansion, some of which had been converted to flats in the interim. The postwar flat typology evolved with the work of several émigré architects, who were responsible for a high proportion of the architect-designed examples and who often worked with Jewish developers. These imbued the area with a more progressive, International character, and which was supported by the often local Jewish community. The group also have associations with the architect Mordecai Beshemesh, 'Mr Highrise', who was prolific in this domain but also at the forefront of postwar flat design. (Criterion A)

The group of three flats are of aesthetic significance as a distinctive group of Modernist flats designed by the Palestinian born émigré architect Mordecai Benshemesh who with this group was developing a more elaborate/articulated approach, characterised by the incorporation of balconies with angled geometry either in the vertical or horizontal plane. This aspect in particular distinguishes his work from many of his contemporaries and this phase of flat construction. In addition, there was a shift away from a 'pure', rigorous Modernism, especially as the International style variant became codified, and some architects started to include more decorative elements or treatments to provide some differentiation (in these instances, ceramic tiling, some panels to the balustrades, projecting bricks, and/or staggered glazing bars to the windows). Where possible (wider sites), he favoured a stepped plan to open up views across the building. (Criterion E)

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## Thematic context

### Victoria's framework of historical themes

6. Building towns, cities and the garden state: 6.3 Shaping the suburbs, 6.7 Making homes for Victorians

### Port Phillip thematic environmental history

5. Buildings and cultural landscapes: 5.2 Shaping the suburbs (5.2.2 Private development), 5.3 Diverse Housing (5.3.5 Higher-density housing)

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## History

### Contextual history

The early twentieth century saw a marked decline in the viability of large mansions across Melbourne's suburbs in general, but it was particularly felt in the more affluent inner southern suburbs such as St Kilda and Brighton, where land was highly sought-after by a new generation of homebuilders seeking smaller detached dwellings, duplexes or flats. The trend toward higher-density living in St Kilda began with the conversion of mansions and terrace houses into boarding houses in the early 1900s and continued with the first purpose-built flats that appeared at the beginning of World War I. A 1919 newspaper article noted:

*It was held to be no longer necessary to labour with a house and all the domestic drudgery that entailed when by borrowing Continental ideas, people who could afford it could live in flats... Land has become so valuable the villa of the Victorian days, in a crowded thoroughfare, no longer shows anything like an adequate return of interest on the land's present capital value. It is more profitable to pull the house erected thereon down, and to erect flats. When the flat became popular in England the experiment was made in St Kilda, and it did not take long to discover there was a genuine demand for flats (Prahman Telegraph, 18 October 1919, p.4)*

Higher-density housing in the form of boarding houses paved the way to flat development. Flats first appeared in Melbourne around 1906 and slowly spread to the suburbs. They followed a strong pattern of development, appearing close to transport routes, particularly along or within walking distance of tram routes, to allow easy travel to the city. With their proximity to the beach and parklands, good public transport networks and seaside character, the suburbs of St Kilda and Elwood were especially popular locations for flats. Flats became a dominant characteristic of St Kilda and Elwood, and still make up a high percentage of dwellings in those areas. They include some of the earliest surviving flats in Melbourne, some of the best examples of architectural styles and types of flats, and as a group demonstrate the increasing popularity of the lifestyle of flat living from the early twentieth century (TEH).

The opening in 1911 of the electric tramway along Dandenong Road encouraged the building of flats. In 1918 Howard Lawson constructed one of the first blocks on the east corner of Dandenong Road and Pilley Street and in 1920 development of the Ardoch complex began with the conversion of the eponymous mansion to flats ahead of the construction of no fewer than 10 blocks of flats by the developer A M Younger. Flats soon spread into the adjoining streets and a second wave of flat building followed World War II.

There was huge growth in flat development in St Kilda and Elwood in the 1920 and 1930s, attracting migrants, single people, and people of diverse sexuality. In 1920 there were 527 purpose-built flats in 92 blocks in St Kilda municipality. By 1925 this had increased to 884 flats in 164 blocks. By 1935, despite a slowing of development due to the Great Depression, there were more than 2,800 flats in over 500 blocks. A further 2,000 flats were added by 1940; however, the onset of World War II slowed development. Nonetheless, by 1947 St Kilda contained 5,500 purpose-built flats, a quarter of all flats in Melbourne (TEH).

Another boom in flat-building began in the mid-1950s. This was fuelled by population growth and a housing shortage after World War II, changes to building codes and the introduction of company title (and later stratum and strata-title) that enabled flats to be sold individually as 'own your own' units. Between 1961 and 1971, flats increased from 38% to 62% of all dwellings in St Kilda. The boom in flat building saw St Kilda's population increase by 10,000 people at a time when the populations of other inner-city suburbs were declining (TEH).

### Flats, 306 Dandenong Road - Leaworra

According to the Kearney Plan of 1855 (Figure 1), large holdings were indicated in this part of St Kilda East, west of Hotham Street and no development. Given how the holdings are larger than those on the following Parish Plan, it is possible that the extant Crown Portion configuration had not yet been defined by this time.

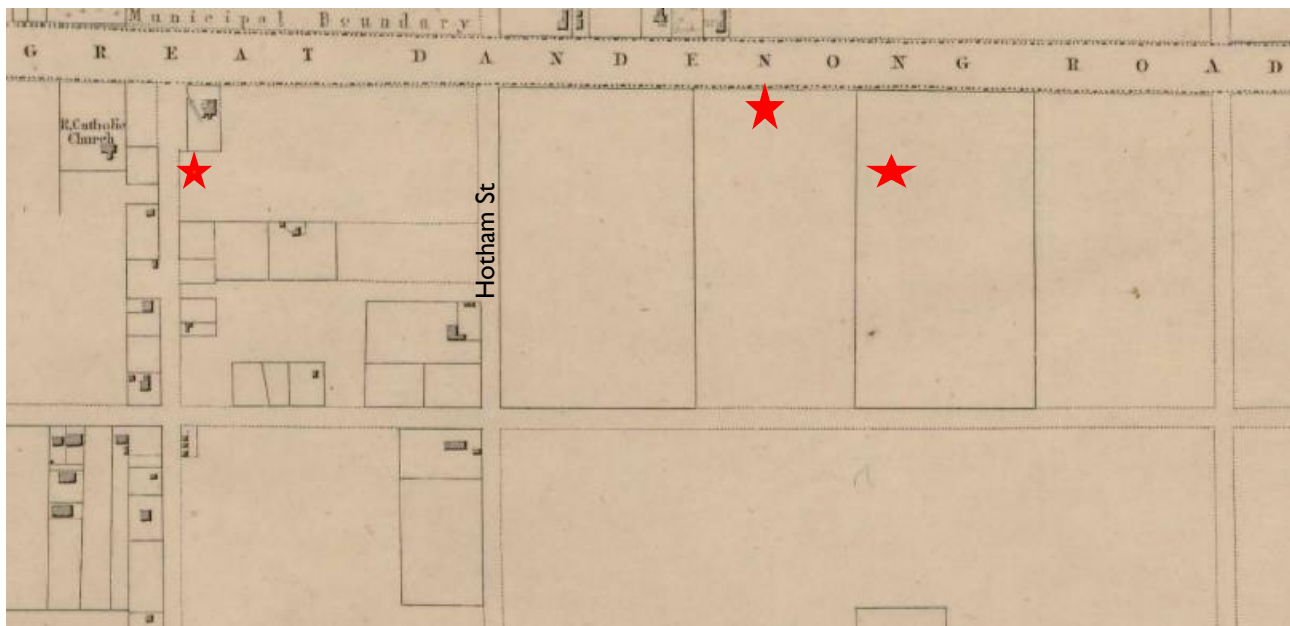


Figure 1 – 1855 Kearney Plan, showing approximate locations of the three blocks of flats (Source: State Library of Victoria)

The site formed part of Crown Portion 164B purchased during the late 1850s (post-1857) by M Benjamin, which likely was Moses Benjamin of M Benjamin & Son, importers (SK, 1859) (PP).

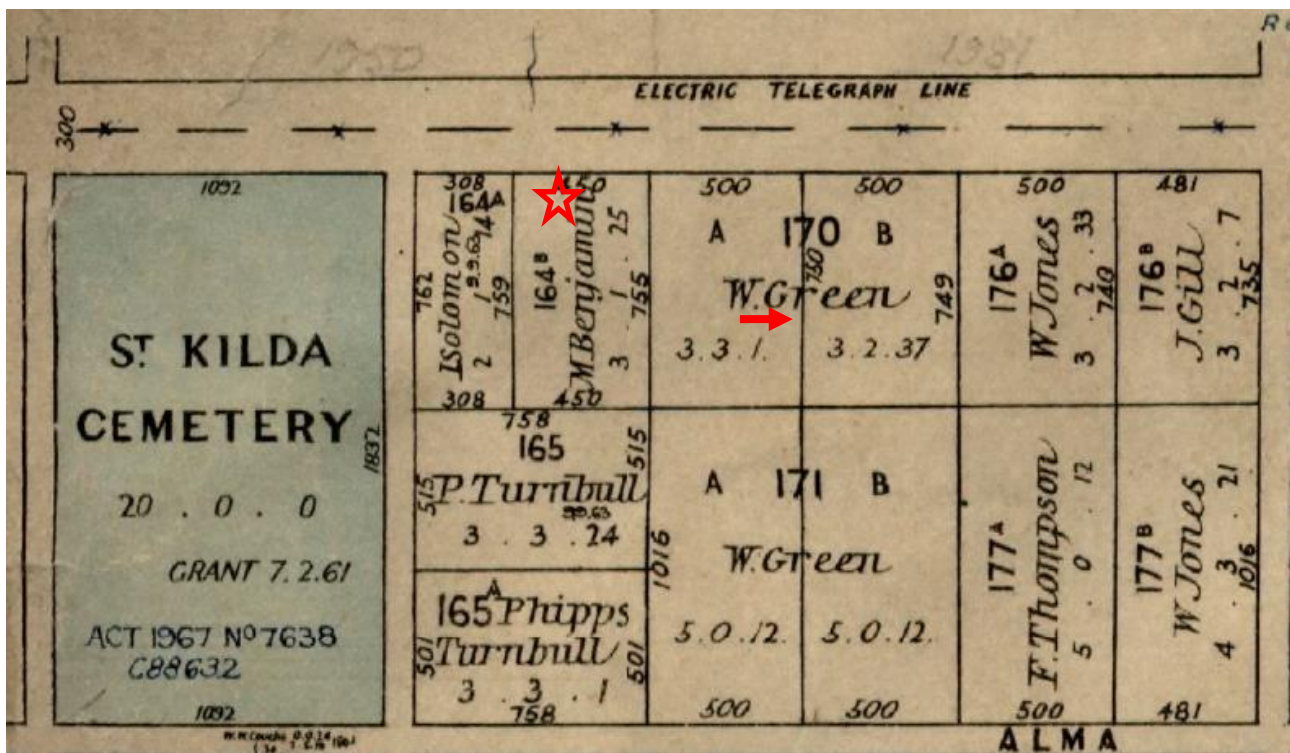


Figure 2 – Parish Plan P81(13), showing approximate location of 306 Dandenong Road (star) and 16 Lansdowne Road, arrow (Source: Land Victoria)

This part of St Kilda East was not included on the 1864 Cox plan, which does not extend past the east side of Westbury Street.

On the 1873 Vardy Plan (NW3) the site was vacant and part of large holdings owned by a Turnbull, possibly Phipps.



In 1882, Shirley Grove was created when Judge Skinner's holdings, then residing at the corner of Albert and Alexandra roads, were subdivided. The parcel of land of which the subject site was part had already been sold when the sale was being advertised. The subdivision plan (Figure 3) however does not precisely conform with the details outlined in a contemporary advertisement (*Argus* 17 Jun 1882 p3).

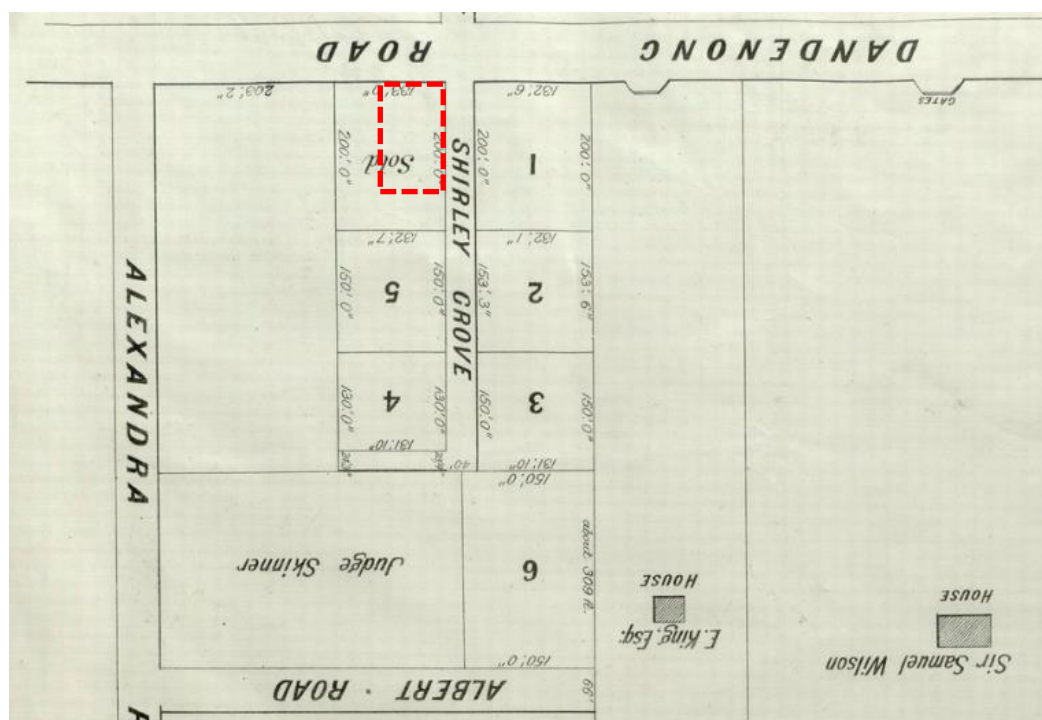


Figure 3 - 1882 subdivision plan of Shirley Grove, showing approximate extent of 306 Dandenong Road (Source: State Library of Victoria, va000987)

The land was subsequently further subdivided to form four allotments relating to 304, 306-308 Dandenong Road and 2 Shirley Grove.

By 1890, a seven-roomed brick house been erected on the eastern part of the site (later no. 308) for C Gordon. At the time, Charles Rogers was the occupant (RB, entry no. 1332). In 1900, by which time, it was listed as 191 Dandenong Road, Dight Scott was the occupant (SM). The western half (no. 306) remained undeveloped.

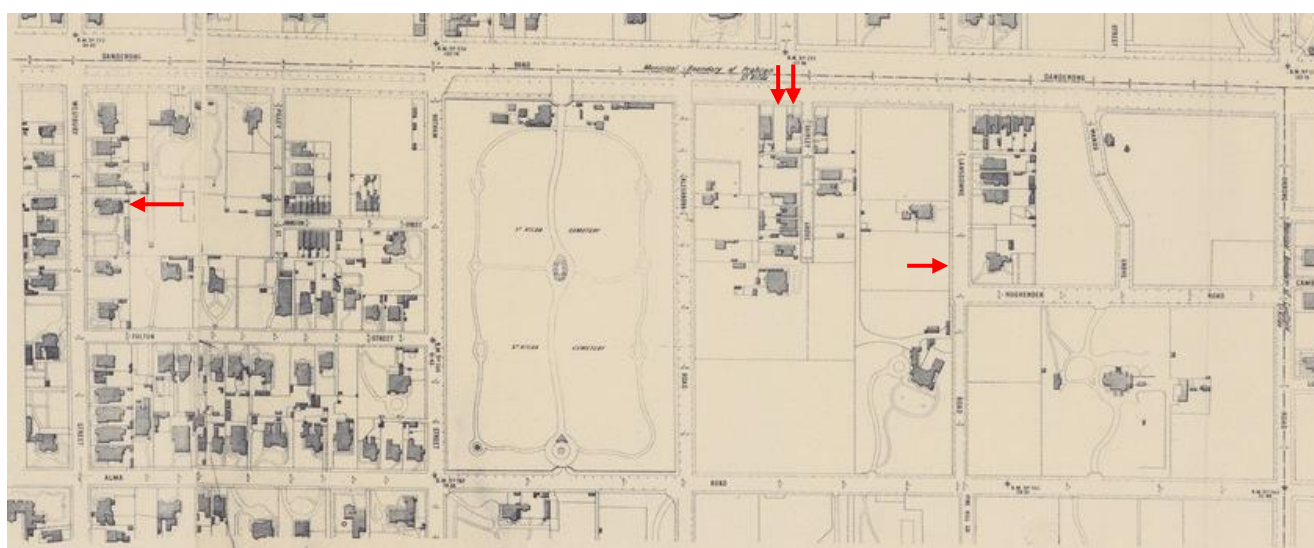


Figure 5 - 1896 MMBW, plan no. 46, showing location of the three sites (Source: State Library of Victoria)

The 1901 MMBW plan shows the house at 191 Dandenong Road was a villa with projecting bay and return verandah (MMBW, no. 1410). About 1912, a house was built on the western part – then 189 Dandenong Road (SM). In 1915, the numbering changed to nos 306 and 308 (SM).

In a 1940 advertisement, the house at no. 306 was identified as 'Strathlyn' and a building of 'Old English Design', when a modern flat on the site is being offered for rent (*Argus* 20 July 1940 p18). The 1945 aerial (Figure 6) shows the footprints and roof form of the two earlier houses that occupied the subject site dating to the late Victorian (no. 308) and late Federation (no. 306) periods.



Figure 6 – 1945 aerial photograph, showing former houses at 304+306 Dandenong Road (left) and 16 Landowne Road (right) (Source: Landata, Proj No 5, Run 18E, Frame 58102)

Drawings for the extant building were prepared by the architect Mordecai Benshemesh and are dated 15 December 1959. The builder was identified as A M & R R Gyngell P/L of Cheltenham and the estimated cost was £40,819. The application was dated 23 February 1960 and the permit was issued on the same day (BP 57/1149). The original drawing includes depictions of each of the four elevations, two sections and a typical floor plan. Some minor differences are evident with the completed building as precast concrete panels were proposed for the front of the balconies however it appears that they are framed metal sheeting and the tall windows to the stair wells were to be more complex and overtly geometric with small glazing bars.

According to contemporary newspapers, the Gyngell company was active during the 1940s and 1950s in Melbourne and across Victoria, mainly in the residential sector, including for the Housing Commission of Victoria, but also constructed some commercial buildings.

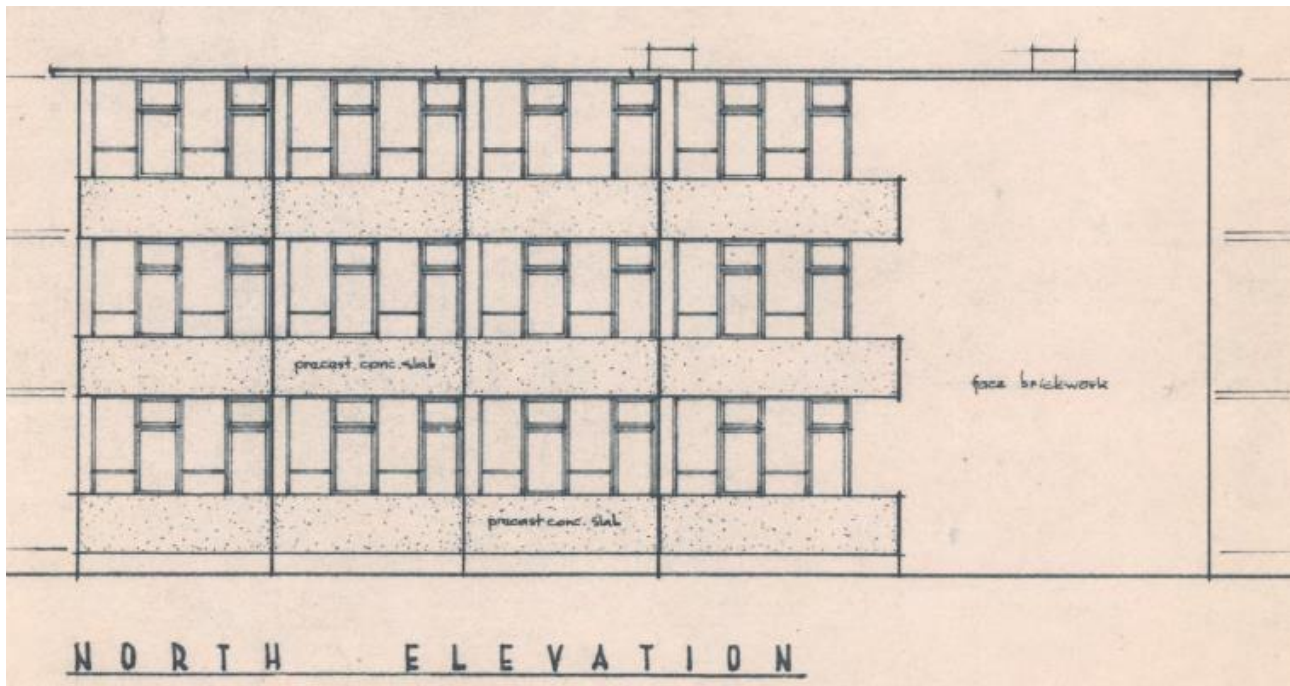


Figure 7 - Front or north elevation, Dandenong Road (Source: Council Building File)

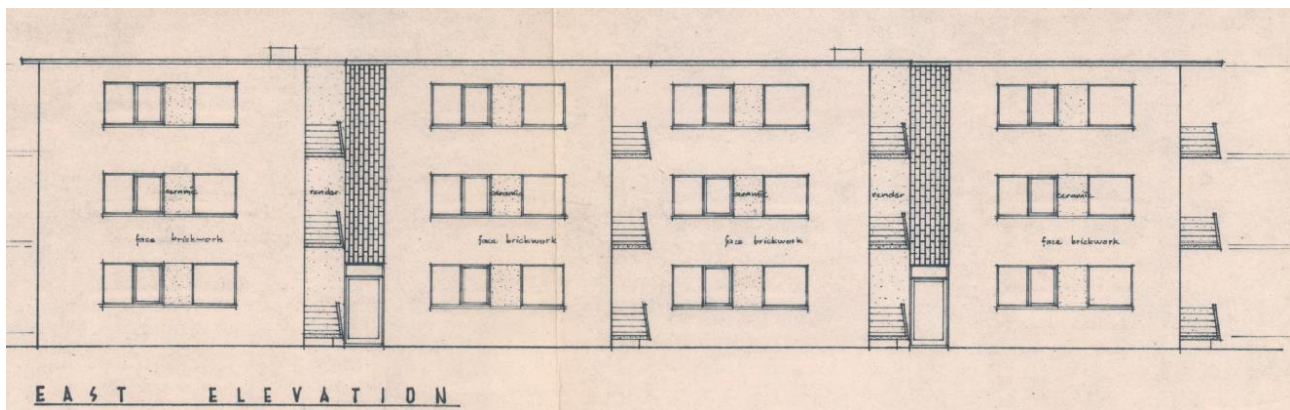


Figure 8 - East elevation, Shirley Grove (Source: Council Building File)

In May 1961, a local real estate agent, A J Tee P/L, were advertising 'a large selection of new flats' for rent in the East St Kilda area, and nearby suburbs, including at *Leaworra*. Features noted were 'two bedrooms, lounge with balcony, rubbish chute, drying facilities on each floor, car port, including Venetian Blinds and light fittings'. In this notice, the company were also spruiking an array of other flat options in the area – investments flats, development sites, and own your own flats (AJN 5 May 1961 p19). By September 1961, A J TEE were promoting the 'remaining six two-bedroom OYO's', which were to be auctioned in a seated marquee on the property (AJN 1 Sept 1961 p22).





**AUCTION**  
**Own - Your - Own - Flats**  
 On The Property "LEAWORRA"  
 In Seated Marquee  
 SATURDAY, SEPT. 9th., 2.30 P.M.  
**306 Dandenong Road,**  
**East St. Kilda**  
**SEPARATE TITLES**  
 Remaining 6 two bedroom O.Y.O.'s. All designed to front Dandenong Road, Large living room, kit. with din. space, bathroom with sep. S.R. and space for W/M. CAR PORT, Venet. L.F. Pol. floors, rubbish disposal. Service charge 20/- p.w. Finance Arranged prior to Auction.  
 AUCTIONEERS IN CONJUNCTION  
**A.J. TEE** PTY. LTD.  
 505 St. Kilda Road, Melbourne. — 26-4526.  
 A.H. BJ 2831, BW 1198, BJ 1877, LB 2945.  
**BOB HAMILTON Pty. Ltd.**  
 436 St. Kilda Road, Melbourne — 26-1724.

Figure 9 - 1961 Advertisement (Source: Australian Jewish News, 1 September 1961, p22)

## Flats, 16 Lansdowne Road

The site formed part of two adjacent Crown Portions – nos 170A and 171A – both of which were purchased by a W Green in 1853 (*Argus* 08 Oct 1853 p5), who also acquired another two portions (refer to Parish Plan P81(13) above). This was probably William Green, who was a land agent and auctioneer, as well as managing director of the Colonial Insurance Company (SK, 1858-59).

The site remained part of much larger holdings until 1904. According to the 1873 Vardy Plan (NW4), the two parcels had not been subdivided - the northern lot (170A), owned by M Benjamin, was vacant and a house had been constructed on the southern lot (171A), which was owned by W H Brake and addressed Alma Road. A quarter of a century later, according to the 1901 MMBW plan (no. 1410), the subject site remained vacant. By that time, Lansdowne Street had been created and there were five houses addressing it. The mansion to the south was then known as *Treccare*. After the death of Sir Archibald Michie, his son William administered the holdings of nearly 5 acres. The northern part, being the subject site, was excised and sold in October 1904 to Agnes Davidson (CT, v3004, f704). At the same time, the Davidsons (Agnes and Alfred) applied for a permit for a weatherboard villa, which was constructed by S Brooke of Canal Road, Elsternwick (AAI, record no. 46230).

The house had been constructed by 1906 and the Davidsons resided there until 1950 (SM). The footprint of the earlier house is evident on the preceding 1945 aerial. Agnes died in April 1950, and in November of that year, the site was sold to Geoffrey Webster, soon after probate was granted to Alfred. A decade later in October 1960, it was acquired by Boloworra Flats P/L (CT v3013 f493).

In June 1960, Pavic Investments P/L applied for permit to construct the extant block of 18 flats (BP 57/1358). The architect was Mordecai Benshemesh and the builder was also A M & R R Gyngell P/L. Dandenong Road and adjoining streets had become a popular location for flats from the Interwar period onwards. The first block of flats in Lansdowne Road was constructed in 1935, however, it was not until the post-war period that flat building really began in earnest.



The single drawing is dated 29 April 1960 and includes depictions of each elevation, two sections and a typical floor plan. Reinforced concrete details, such as for the footings, floor slabs, and stairs, were prepared by the engineer Peter Stojanoff and dated May 1960.

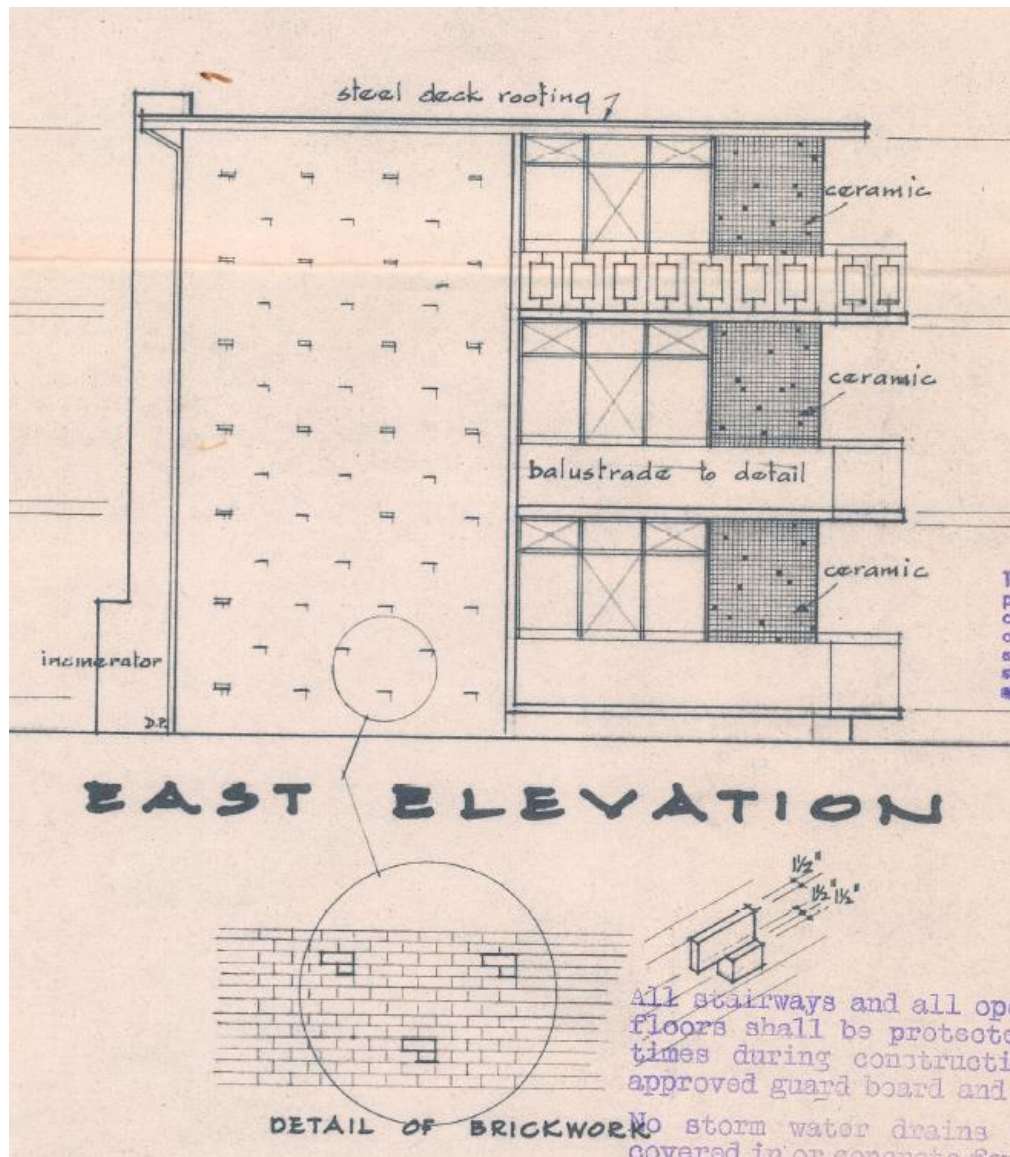


Figure 10 - Front or East Elevation (Source: Building File)

There are six flats to each of the three levels but are organized about three entries along the north elevation. Each flat consists of two bedrooms with the living room and balcony to the north side. Minor differences are evident between the drawings and extant building for instances the balcony balustrading was to consist of only panels, rather than a combination of railing and panels.

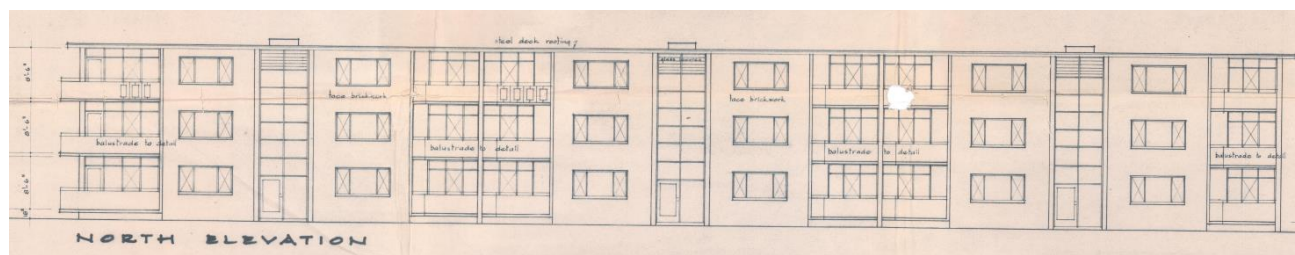


Figure 11 - North elevation (Source: Building File)

The site was transferred to Byalla Investments P/L in May 1961, who then sold the flats to individual owners from 1962 to 1967 (CT v8306 f310).

### Flats, 8 Westbury Street - Wolverson

The site forms parts of two adjoining Crown Portions, both nearly 4 acres in area - 148A, acquired by T Fulton & others (L Mackinnon and F Sargood) and 148B, purchased by J Cook in 1853 (Figure 12). The former conglomerate acquired extensive holdings across Melbourne and were well-known identities.



Figure 12 – Parish Plan P81(13) showing approximate location of 8 Westbury Street (Source: Land Victoria)

By 1855, according to the Kearney plan (Figure 1), Westbury Street had been established and some development had occurred.

By 1873, several houses had been erected in Westbury Street but not on the subject site, which was then parts of two parcels of land. At that time, most of the land was owned by G Mills, who owned the house to the north (Figure 13). The first Torrens title was issued in the following year (CT v629 f726).

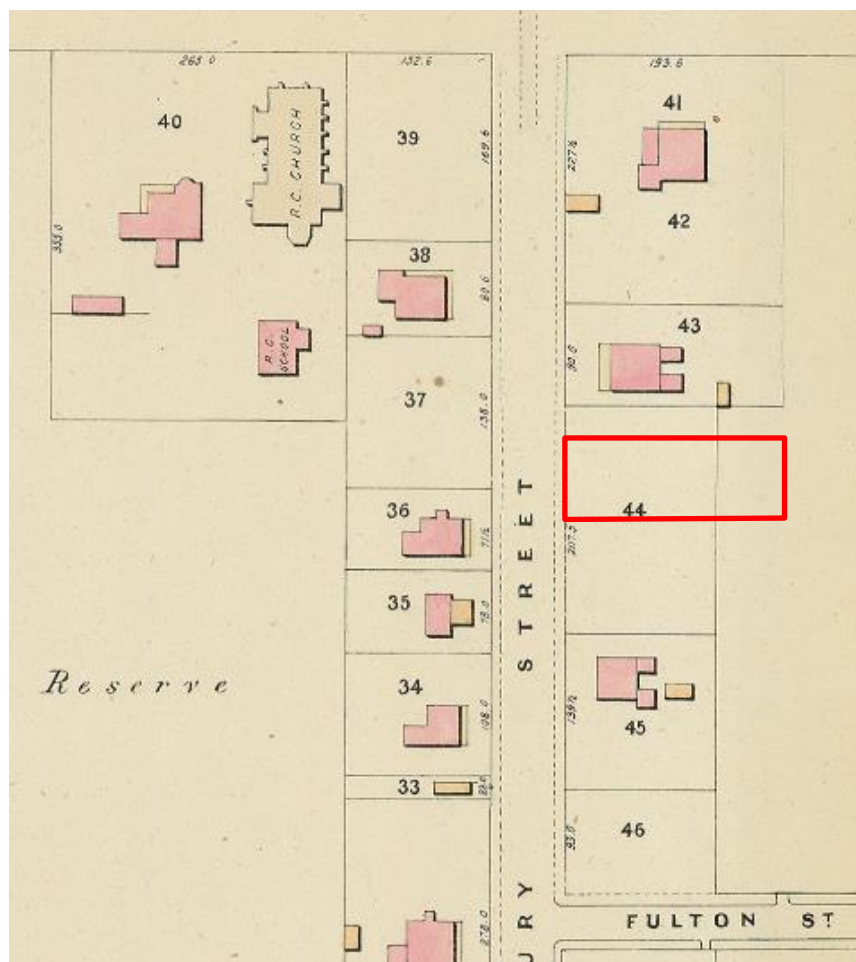


Figure 13 - 1873 Vardy Plan NW2, showing approximate location of 8 Westbury Street (Source: SKHS)

Within three years, a substantial house had been constructed at the site probably by Henry Everist (RB, 1875, no. 701). Everist had purchased the site in 1874 (Ct, v659, f775) and was a Toorak-based builder who became insolvent in 1878 (*Australasian* 21 Dec 1878 p23). A noted judge, James Warrington Rogers (1822-1906), resided there for about five years from 1875 however was initially listed as Walter Rogers (ADB, SM, RB). At this time, the brick house was listed as consisting of 8 rooms with a NAV of £126 (RB, 1875, no. 701, 1876, no. 739). Rogers purchased the house site in February 1878, then associated with nearly half an acre (CT v1017 f220).

In 1881, Lauchlan Charles MacKinnon of East St Kilda became the proprietor (CT v1284 f737). A key establishment figure, MacKinnon (1848-1925) was manager and proprietor of the *Argus* overseeing a dramatic increase in circulation (ADB).

The house came to be known as *Corry* and by the end of the century, had extensive garden areas, mainly to the south, now associated with no. 12, and a large stables (MMBW, no. 1407).

Mackinnon resided there for about 20 years before Edward Fanning becomes the occupant (SM). In 1907, Fanning purchased the site, which was inherited by his widow, Kate, in 1918 (CT v3212 f323).

On a 1917 drawing, prepared by the noted architects – Klingender & Alsop – the building is referred to as *Corramin*. At this time, the two-story building was subdivided into four flats with an additional stair being introduced on the north side (BP).



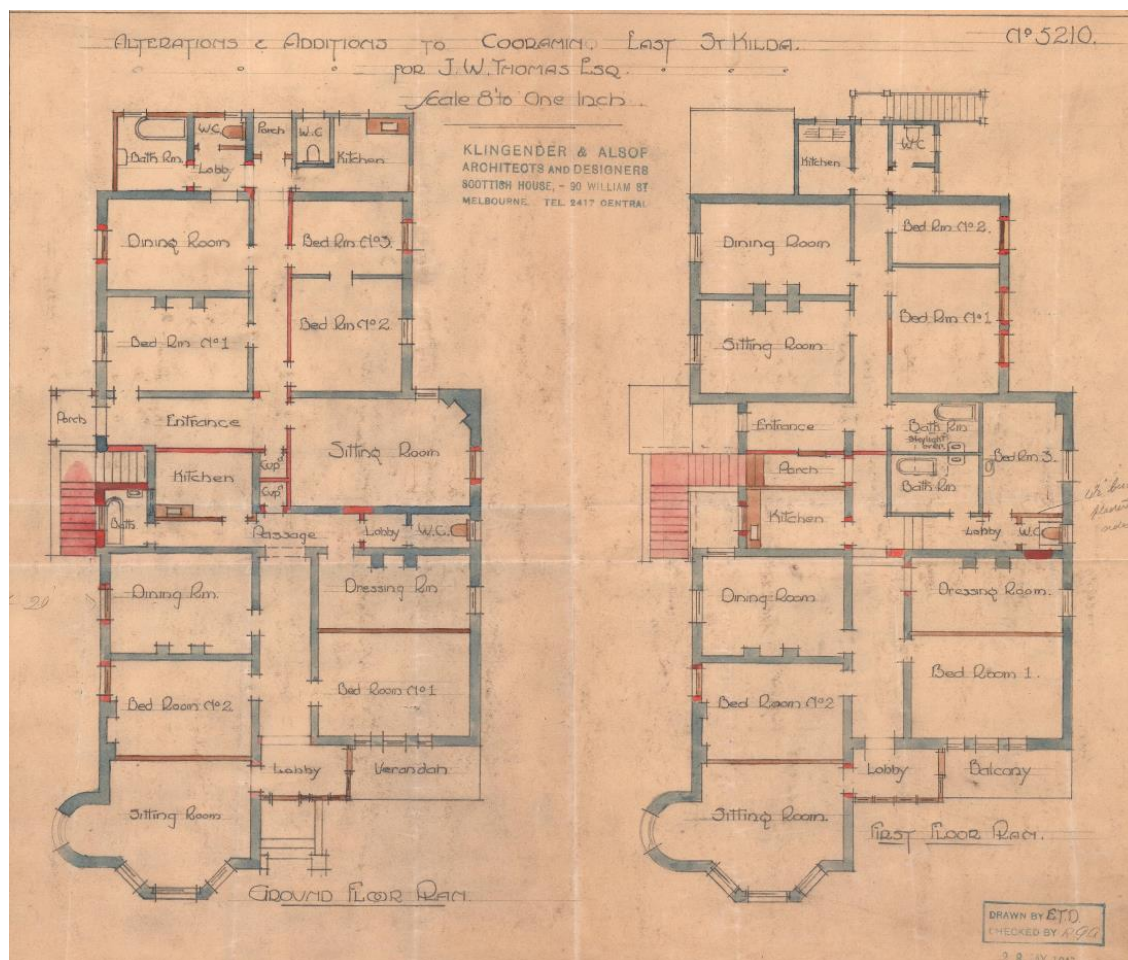


Figure 14 – 1917 drawing of conversion of the original house at 8 Westbury Street to 4 flats (Source: Building File)

The current extent of the site was established in 1919 when part of the adjoining Crown Portion to the east, no. 148B, added to holdings by John William Thomas (CT v4210 f914).

From the mid-1930s, it became known as Westbury (Mansion) flats (SM). An auction notice of 1956 indicates that the 'substantial two storey investment building with slate roof' was comprised of four self-contained flats (Argus 18 Apr 1956 p14).

This was in keeping with the changes in the locale as Westbury Street, with access to Alma Park and tram routes at either end, became a popular location for flats during the interwar period. The first block, constructed in 1927 at the south end of the street (now 127 Westbury Close), was to remain the only flats until 1934, when a further three blocks were built. This was the start of minor boom in flat building, which saw a further 13 blocks constructed in the five years from 1935 to 1940. The building of flats continued apace during the post-war period.

The 1945 aerial photograph shows the extent of the earlier building in relation to its site (Figure 15).



Figure 15 - 1945, showing former house at 8 Westbury Street (Source: Landata, Proj No 5, Run 18E, Frame 58014)

Thomas died in 1951 and later the site was sold to Victorian General Investment Corporation Ltd in February 1960, and then transferred about a year later to Pavic Investments P/L and Elgram Trust Company P/L in April 1961 (CT v4210 f914). In February 1960, Wolverton Flats P/L are also recorded as the manager/owner (BP).

The application for the extant block of 18 flats was made on 10 March 1960 and a permit was issued by St Kilda Council six days later (BP no. 57/1185, 16 March 1960). Designed by Mordecai Benshemesh, it was constructed by Martin Adams & Co. P/L of Burwood at a cost of £54,000. Martin Adams & Co. was residential builder/developer who was active by the early 1950s when the then Hartwell-based company advertised that European Languages were spoken in the *Australian Jewish News* indicating their clientele included the immigrants coming to Australia at that time (AJN 11 Dec 1953). The company still exists as Martin Adams Property.

One drawing was prepared by Benshemesh dated 3 February 1960 which included four elevations, two sections, a block plan and typical floor plan. There are some minor differences between the drawings and constructed building – primarily the detailing of the window bay of the front/west elevation. On the original drawing, render is indicated for the spandrel panel alternating with a band of windows with only three window panes, however the extant building has timber-framed spandrels with sheeting and a wider band of windows with staggered glazing bars the same as those on the north/garden elevation.

The south elevation was similar to that of 16 Lansdowne Street as was the generally planning, though was only partly mirrored about the three entries as there was a consistent separation of the balconies (taking advantage of the wider site and opportunities for views). The louvres to the upper part of the circulation areas was an innovation as was the introduction of an incinerator to the rear wall (servicing a pair of kitchens). Steel deck was to be employed to the flat roof. The ground floor has a timber-framed floor with concrete slab to the two levels above. There was allowance for 13 car spaces to the south-western part of the site.



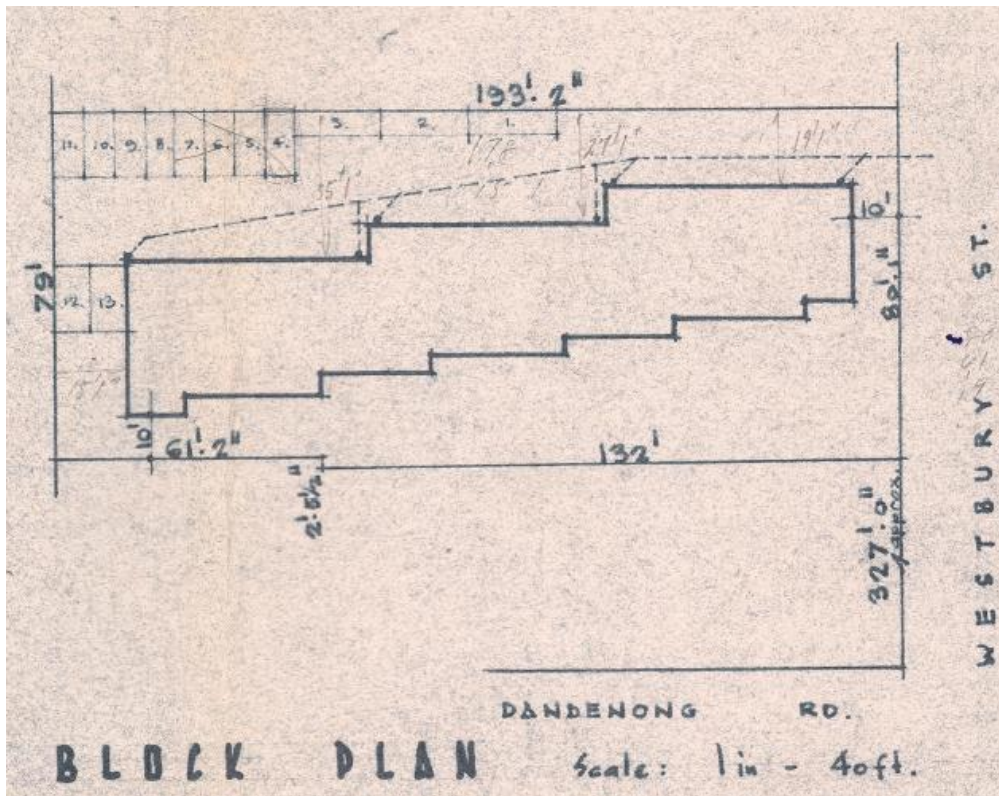


Figure 16 - 1960 drawings, Block Plan showing building footprint (Source: Building File)

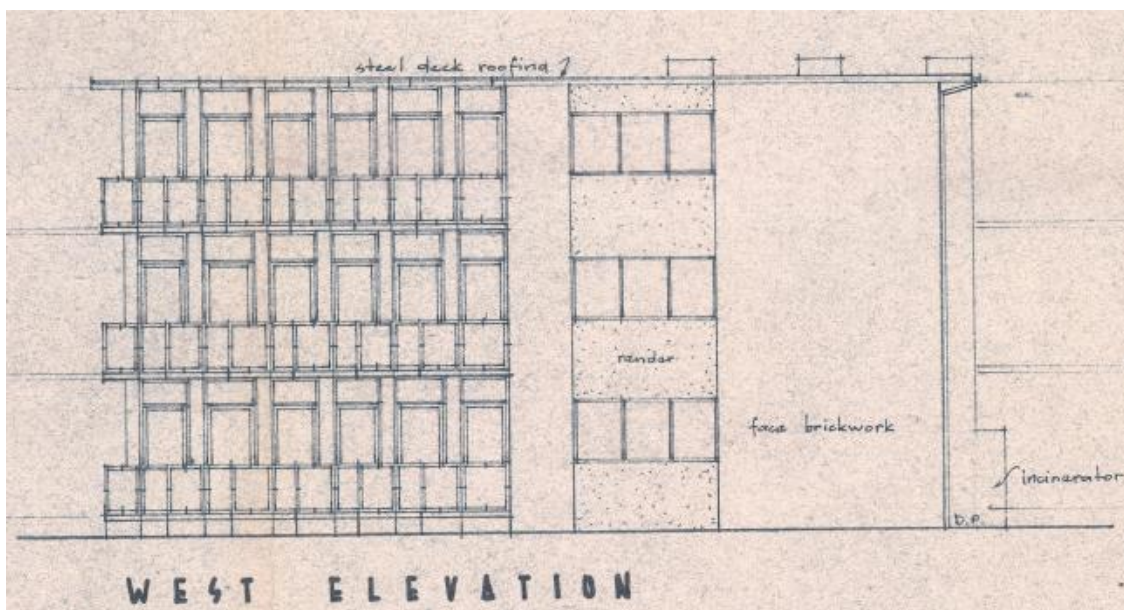


Figure 17 - 1960 drawings, front or west elevation (Source: Building File)

The engineer Peter Stojanoff was engaged again to develop the reinforced concrete details, such as for the footings, floor slabs, and stairs, and prepared drawings dated February 1960.



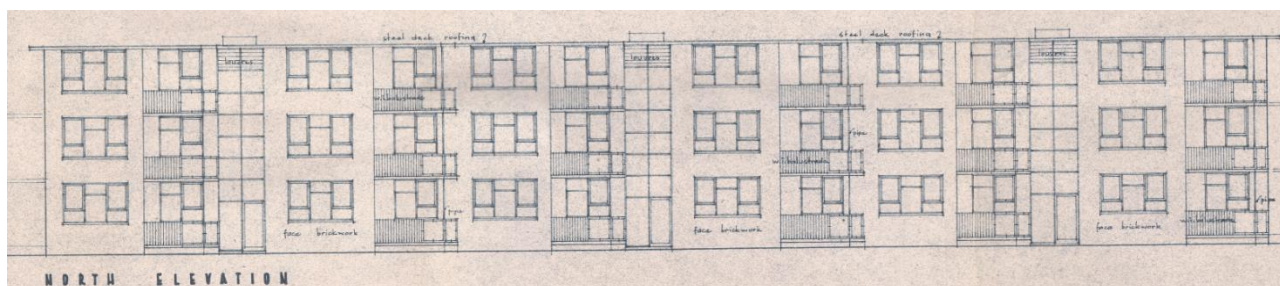


Figure 18 - 1960 drawings, north elevation (Source: Building File)

## Mordercai Benshemesh

Born in Palestine in 1912, Benshemesh spent three years (1930-1933) at the Montefiori Polytechnical School in Tel Aviv, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. He subsequently travelled to London where he initially studied a year of engineering before completing a degree in architecture in 1937 (Edquist, 2012).

In 1939 Benshemesh migrated to Australia where he worked in the offices of notable Melbourne architects including Arthur W Plaisted (1940-1941) and Harry (Ray) Johnson (1946-49), where he was the lead designer. The office specialised in blocks of flats often designed in a streamlined moderne style. Several of these were built in the St Kilda area where he was living at the time (Edquist, 2012).

In 1943 he enrolled in an engineering course at the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University). Benshemesh established his own practice in 1948 where his projects continued to focus on apartment style living. He soon gained a reputation as 'Mr Highrise,' and was known as the city's leading designer of high-density residential developments (BH). In 1961 Benshemesh and Sydney architects Harry Seidler and Neville Gruzman, were invited as specialists in high-rise development to contribute to a forum on multi-storey apartment buildings (Edquist, 2012).

Benshemesh passed away on 22 December 1993.

## References

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MMBW, plan no. 46 (1896), and detail plan nos 1407 (1897) + 1410 (1901)

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Parish Plans, P81(11), P81(13) (PP)

*Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History* (TEH), February 2021

Rate books (RB)

St Kilda Council building permit files (BP)

Sands & Kenney Directories (SK),

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1955-1965

Sawyer, Terry, (1982) 'Residential flats in Melbourne: the development of a building type to 1950', Honours thesis, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne

Vardy Plans, 1873

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## Description

The individual blocks of flats have some similarities in that they are all three storey, have walls of cream brick in stretcher bond, flat roofs clad in sheet metal with a wide fascia and soffit lined with battened sheeting. They all have timber-framed openings.

The three buildings are all in good condition and have a high level of external intactness.

### 306 Dandenong Road - Leaworra

Leaworra is located at the west corner Dandenong Road and Shirley Grove. The building occupies much of the flat site with an area of about 1160m<sup>2</sup>. There is lawn and perimeter planting to the front, the latter partly obscuring the building from the public domain. To the rear, the land is concrete paved providing access to the carports. The carports are configured in two sections, each with walls of cream brick and skillion roof clad in corrugated sheet metal. Steel poles divide each block into bays.

The front boundaries have a low cream brick fence with a wide-toothed/staggered profile. The rear boundary backs onto a laneway and there is a timber paling fence to the west boundary.



Figure 19 - Aerial photograph showing approximate boundaries (Source: Nearmap, 29.04.2021)

The building steps across the site in four sections, with a total of 12 flats. The two entries, each providing access to six flats, consists of a narrow strip of windows – alternating fixed and awnings – above the glazed door.





Figure 20 - Leoworra from Shirley Grove

The articulation of each section is consistent. A balcony extends in front of the full height openings of the living room on the north (Dandenong Road) elevation. These windows have a staggered pattern of glazing bars and the balustrade is inwardly canted to the front and lined with a panel, though open to the side with metal railing. The east elevation has narrower banks of windows, each divided into four sections with one having small grey ceramic tiles and including two fixed panes and one openable.



Figures 21 & 22 – East elevation (Shirley Grove) and north elevation (Dandenong Road)

The west side is only partly visible, however smaller groups of windows are evident and shared rear balconies, accessed from the respective kitchens.

## 16 Lansdowne Road

The block of flats at 16 Lansdowne Road is located on the west side of the street near the intersection with Hughenden Road. The long, narrow site has an area of about 1320m<sup>2</sup> and access to the rear, concrete paved car parking area is by a basalt-lined laneway emanating on Dandenong Road (between nos 314 and 316).

Across the front boundary is an original, low cream brick fence with metal palisading introduced above. There is a brick bay with letterboxes at the north end and the other boundaries have timber paling fences.





Figure 23 - Aerial photograph showing approximate boundaries (Source: Nearmap, 29.04.2021)

The building occupies much of the land with narrow side setbacks with a concrete path on each side. There is limited planting to the front setback, where there is a well-established cypress tree, and along the northern boundary.

The front/east elevation, like the other two buildings in the group is blank to one half (the south end), but in this instance features L-shaped projections in the brickwork. The north end has a wrap-around, concrete balcony, which is faceted at the corner and angled on its continuation along the north elevation. The balustrade consists mostly of thin metal components with some white, framed panels – two at the south end and one at the faceted corner. The handrail is also white which contrasts with the black balusters. The rear balconies are barely visible from the public realm. According to the original drawings, they are partly recessed into the building, however also have a similarly splayed form and presumably similar balustrading.

There are openings to both sides of the front balcony. To the front/east side is a bank of three windows – with highlights – above a glazed, brown brick sill. Adjacent to the bank of windows is a section of geometric, mosaic tiling with a central, speckled grey square tile framed by a white border with a smaller dark tile at the corners (Figure 26). To the north side, there is full-height glazing with doors/windows.



Figure 24 –North-east corner, showing splayed balconies



From the drawings, the north elevation is organised into bays, mirrored about the three circulation cores. The latter are glazed, possibly all fixed panes, except for the upper section of glass louvres. The banks of windows either side of the stairwells also have glazed brown sills and it seems that the windows to all the balconies except the front also have the same brown sills (that is, are not full height). The only likely change to an opening is that to the lower front flat, whose opening to the east elevation has been extended to floor level.



Figures 25 & 26 - Front/east elevation and detail of tiling

## 8 Westbury Street - Wolverton

The Wolverton site is located on the east side of Westbury Street, at about the mid-way point between Dandenong Road (to the north) and Fulton Street (to the south). The long, rectangular site has an area of 1425m<sup>2</sup> and the terrain falls about two metres from the north-east to the south-west.



Figure 27 - Aerial photograph showing approximate boundaries (Source: Nearmap, 29.04.2021)

The front boundary has a low brick fence, which steps down the site, with a decorative metal balustrade above (possibly not original) and a matching pedestrian gate at the north end leading to a concrete path.



Near the latter is a low wall containing letterboxes. Along the southern boundary is a concrete paved driveway providing access to the car parking area to the south-east part of the site. The front north-west part is extensively planted with shrubs, bushes, etc. providing considerable privacy.



Figure 28 - North/garden elevation

The building has a stepped footprint in three blocks in order to optimise the solar access. Given the slope, the roof of each section is separate and has a splayed profile above the similarly faceted balconies. The fan-like concrete balconies are similar to those at 16 Lansdowne Road but all sit forward of the wall, whereas at the former all but the front group are partly recessed. Similar to the latter, the balustrade consists of fine metal balusters and two panels to the front, splayed part. In this instance, all parts have a white finish.

The extent of glazing to the front parts of *Wolverton* overall is greater than the other two blocks. The banks of windows to the front/west elevation alternate with a spandrel, also timber-framed but with white painted sheeting. All the banks of windows to the front part of the building (west and north elevations) feature staggered configuration of glazing bars. The circulation areas have spandrels at the floor level and louvres to the upper part. Like the other two blocks of flats, there are smaller windows to the rear (south and east elevations). The projections to the south wall which extend above the roofline initially accommodated incinerators.

The flats are all two-bedroomed floor plans though the floor plans alternate across each level as the kitchens were mirrored about the incinerator but the front parts (lounge and a bedroom) were not. The name of the building is applied to the front section of blank wall in large metal lettering.





Figure 29 - Front/west elevation showing spandrels and staggered window configuration

## Comparative analysis

The southern parts of the municipality – St Kilda (East) and Elwood - have manifold Post-war flats. Whilst many are generic, there is a relatively high concentration of architect-designed examples which are more finely detailed or distinguished by their site responsiveness. Mordecai Benshemesh was one of several émigré architects that were active in the area and at the forefront of the evolution of this building type along with Theodore Berman, Michael R E Feldhagen, Dr Ernest Fooks, Kurt Popper and Sol Sapir, often working for Jewish clients and accommodating the influx of Central and Eastern European Jewish refugees who were accustomed to apartment living. In addition, several Australian-born architects were responsible for flats but rarely multiple examples.

The subject group are indicative of the approach that evolved during the end of the Postwar period – circa mid to late 1950s/early 1960s. Moving further into the 1960s, there was a shift to what is often defined as the late 20<sup>th</sup> century period, when the influence of Brutalism becomes apparent in the bolder forms and use of brown brick. Although cream brick was also common during the earlier phase of the Postwar period, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, a Functionalist mode held sway at that time with parapets and steel-framed windows. From about the mid-1950s, whilst roofs were typically flat, they were usually expressed with soffits, often deep, and openings were typically timber framed.

Several blocks of flats designed by Mordecai Benshemesh are included within the heritage overlay (with others yet to be assessed), though only one is directly comparable to the subject group (that at 22 Westbury Street) as they are in a different design mode, mainly either Functionalist or International style.

- The earlier examples, dating to 1951 - Burnett Lodge at 9-11 Burnett Street, St Kilda (Citation 2444, HO5 precinct) - and to 1956 - Barkly Lodge, 289 Barkly Street, St Kilda (Citation 2444, HO35). Both are overtly Functionalist in their cuboid volumetric expression with a taller, separate circulation zones

(stairs and galleries), parapeted roofs rather than having a wide eaves overhang, and steel-framed windows. The glazing to the circulation tower of the former has a horizontal emphasis whereas that to the latter has a strongly contrasting vertical emphasis.

- Two notable blocks were completed in the year prior, 1959. The iconic Edgewater Towers at 12 Marine Parade, St Kilda (Citation 2049) and another nearby to *Wolverton* at 22 Westbury Street (contributory within HO6 precinct). The former is in a different category, as it is a multi-storey International style building in white painted concrete with continuous bands of glazing to each elevation. The latter bears some similarities with the subject group in the material palette, the balcony detailing (metal balustrade with panels), fully glazed stairwells with louvres, but has more regular patterns of glazing and lacks some of the more distinguishing details of this group such as fan-like balconies and decorative treatments (e.g. tiling or projecting brick work).

Two known later examples are currently not graded within their respective precincts:

- 318 Beaconsfield Parade, 1963 (HO444, non-contributory). A block of three storey flats with a L-plan with canted side walls. They are largely intact with the brick being overpainted and most of the recessed balconies enclosed.
- Another multi-storey block - *Questa Heights* - at 21 The Esplanade, St Kilda of 1965 (HO5, non-contributory). Of a similar ilk to Edgewater Towers, the walls are white painted concrete with continuous bands of glazing. The projecting balconies are like those on the subject group in their combination of metal balusters and panels.

In terms of other flats of the late 1950s and early 1960s, *Park View* by the Slovakian-born Dr Ernest Fooks (originally Fuchs) is comparative.

- *Park View*, 5 Herbert Street, St Kilda, 1958-59 (Citation 2427). This is an earlier, seminal example of the approach evident in the subject group. *Wolverton* has some similar detailing – stepped footprint to maximise views, splayed balconies with some panels, the timber-framed spandrel panels. The circulation is however different being along external galleries to the rear rather than divided into more discrete and enclosed access zones.

The work of the Viennese Kurt Popper is generally indicative of a restrained version of contemporary Modernism. Although his contemporary work shares a similar material palette, he generally employed more contained footprints and forms.

- Flats, 124-126 Alma Road, 1954 + 47 Westbury Street, St Kilda, 1956 (Contributory within HO6). Similar, adjacent blocks in a Functionalist mode. Cream brick (one on red brick plinth), with parapeted roof, steel-framed windows, some with concrete framing and balconies with concrete decks and metal railing.
- Flats, 22A Acland Street, St Kilda, 1957 (Contributory within HO5). Of a similar type to the subject site, though with a regular footprint. Cream brick with panels of pale blue tiles to the façade and balconies with metal balustrading with diamond pattern. It however has a tile clad, hipped roof.
- Flats, 17 & 17A Burnett Street, St Kilda 1958-59 (Contributory within HO5). More conventional with a hipped roof clad in tile in two mirror-image blocks. Distinguished by the expressed rendered frame to the corner windows.
- Flats, 21 Dickens Street, Elwood, 1965 (Contributory within St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs precinct). A relatively late cream brick example with minimal eaves overhang as the balconies, with faceted metal panels to the balustrade, are recessed.

The work of Michael R.E. Feldhagen forms a discrete sub-group, which is not readily comparable to the work of his contemporaries. His flat architecture is often distinguished by the use breeze block and other contrasting materials to create more varied and decorative exteriors, usually in a Featurist mode:

- Flats/duplex, 247-249 Inkerman Street, Balaclava, 1962 (Citation 2025, HO315 precinct). A two storey, Featurist example with concrete Roman bricks and paneled concrete.
- Surf Side, 46 Ormond Esplanade, Elwood, 1963-64 (Citation 755, HO353), Bichrome brick – cream and brown – with steel poles and railing. Breeze block or the like to the balconies. Also has a stepped footprint to maximise views of the bay.
- Flats, 99 Westbury Street, Balaclava, 1963 (Citation 2445) – Featurist, wider upper floor with stacked concrete Roman bricks and decorative concrete panels, over a cream brick base.

Among the contemporary work of other designers/architects, the main comparison is with Chudleigh Court and to a lesser extent the blocks at 33 Pine Avenue and 21 Redan Street, where some triangular or splayed geometry has also been employed.

- *Chudleigh Court*, 9 Dickens Street, Elwood, 1958, Bailey and Tilley Home Plan Service (Citation 2426). The three-storey, cream brick block has a skillion roof form with triangular projections and balconies on the east (garden) elevation. The garden side openings are timber-framed, whereas steel-framed windows are employed to the gallery side. The metal balustrading features a triangular pattern.
- Flats, 21 Redan Street, St Kilda, 1958, John & Phyllis Murphy (Citation 785, HO503). An unusual two-storey red brick building, comprised of two-level flats with separate entries, with a prow-like form and gable roof. Triangular forms are employed under the encompassing roof to provide privacy.
- Flats, 33 Pine Avenue, Elwood, 1959, Leslie J W Reed (Citation 2339, HO429). Cream brick, tile-clad hipped roof, with a flat roof, stairwell block to the front, screen walls, and a splayed profile to the upper-level balconies, which have a standard railing detail. The windows are timber-framed, including spandrels to the facade.
- Flats, 39 Southey Street, Elwood, 1959, L.G. Grant & Associates (Contributory within St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs precinct) Cream brick but with extensive use of decorative brickwork and screens to the front and a bowed concrete canopy to the entrance supported on steel poles.
- Flats, 63-69 Tennyson Street, Elwood, 1959-60, A V Jennings (Citation 2344, HO436). A series of four mirrored blocks, cream brick, stepped form with undercroft carparking, spandrels and banks of windows.
- *Rocklea Gardens*, 46-40 Hotham Street, St Kilda East, 1960, designed by Theodore Berman. (Citation 2017, HO293). International style, continuous band of windows/openings with balconies, and spandrel panels at either end of the elongated façade.

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## Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

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## Recommendations

Add to the Heritage Overlay as an individual place.

Apply fence controls in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (original fences).

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## Primary source

RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2*, 2021

## Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

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## Other images

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## Area to be included in HO



306 Dandenong Road, St Kilda East



16 Lansdowne Road, St Kilda East



8 Westbury Street. St Kilda