

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Chudleigh Court  
**Other names:** -

**Citation No:**  
**2426**

**INSERT MAP**



**Address:** 9 Dickens Street, Elwood

**Heritage Precinct:** Not applicable

**Category:** Residential: Flats

**Heritage Overlay:** TBC

**Style:** Postwar - Modernist

**Graded as:** Significant

**Constructed:** 1958

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Designer:** Bailey and Tilley Home Plan Service

**Amendment:** TBC

**Comment:** New citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

Chudleigh Court at 9 Dickens Street, Elwood, designed by Bailey & Tilley Home Plan Service in 1958 and constructed by Ronald Wilfred Sheldon for Abraham and Deborah Rosenberg, is significant.

Chudleigh Court consists of two adjoining blocks – front/main block and small rear/southern block. The cream brick buildings have an elongated form with a skillion roof clad in metal sheeting. The roof has a wide eaves overhang whose soffit is lined with timber-boards and there are exposed rafter ends and brackets. The narrow north/street elevation has steel-framed windows to the west end and metal lettering to the east end. The triangular balconies to the east/garden side have timber-framed openings, whereas there are steel windows to the gallery on the west/driveway side. The metal balustrading to both sides features a triangular pattern.

Other contributory elements include the low brick front fence and the two blocks of original garages in the south-west corner (northern and southern), with communal laundry facilities and a small caretaker flat above the southern block.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

Chudleigh Court at 9 Dickens Street, Elwood is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### Why is it significant?

Chudleigh Court is historically significant as being demonstrative of the extensive flat building program that has characterised much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of the municipality but especially the southern parts and which gained pace after World War II with the introduction of the Own-Your-Own (OYO) option. The postwar flat typology evolved especially within the Jewish community and imbued the area with a progressive, international character. The site is also significant in that it reflects a common land development circumstance in this part of the municipality as a substantial Victorian period villa on a relatively large allotment that was replaced with a block of flats. During the mid to late 1950s, the demand for flat development in the area, recognised as Melbourne's flat epicentre, was so great that many individuals/couples entered the development market. In this case, the Rosenbergs capitalised on their large holdings in a desirable area near to amenities, such as cafes etc. for 'flatites' (as flat dwellers were known) and the synagogue for the Jewish community. (Criterion A)

Chudleigh Court is aesthetically significant as an intact and distinctive block of Modernist flats from the latter part of the post-World War II period. The use of cream brick and geometric patterns to the metal balustrading characterises the period however it is an early example of this emerging trend and distinguished from the norm by the skillion roof form and triangular projections on the east elevation creating relatively generous, semi-private garden zones in front of each flat which also allow for large windows to that side. (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 (Prahlan 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).

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, including large complexes such as the Ardoch flats in Dandenong Road. 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).

During the early 1950s, a crisis was developing however as the number of building permits being issued for flats was woefully inadequate – in 1952, the St Kilda municipality issued 6 permits (of 42 across the city) for 49 units and (Argus, 1 March 1954, p10).

*The erection of more blocks of flats is one of the most urgent housing needs of Melbourne.*

*Agents find it impossible to meet the big inquiry for this type of home.*

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 (TEH).

In an 1956 article entitled 'St Kilda Grows as Flat Centre' the zeitgeist was well articulated (Argus, 27 April 1956, p17):

*In recent years the major portion of new building work in St. Kilda has been in flats, and this will continue.*

*The district can still do with many more flats to meet the demand of the big floating population associated with a quickly growing city like Melbourne.*

*St. Kilda has all the advantages for flat life of a big city. It is well-served by transport from and to the city – less than four miles distant.*

*Shops have developed to meet the needs of "flatites;" and there are now numerous cafes serving meals at all hours.*

*Real estate agents have- waiting lists of tenants for flats and apartments of all kinds.*

*... A feature of real estate activity in St. Kilda at present is the sale, of "own-your-own" flats. Since it has become possible for each flat owner to have a certificate of title, sales have been made more freely.*

*The buildings which are being subdivided in this manner must be of modern construction with concrete floors, and comply with certain regulations.*

*... New Australians are reported to be showing, interest in this form of home ownership.*

*... Investors are showing a renewed interest in blocks of flats, and are reported to be buying where the net return is below bank interest rate. They regard the present return as a minimum.*

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 increased by 10,000 people at a time when the populations of other inner-city suburbs were declining (TEH).

## Chudleigh Court

The subject site formed parts of Crown portions 95 and 96 in the Parish of Prahran which were sold in the 1850s (pre-1857). Crown portion 95, comprised of two and a half acres, was purchased by T L M Winter, a land agent and territorial magistrate. Crown portion 96, comprised of just over two acres, was purchased by merchant Thomas James Nankivill.

In 1882, the larger part of the subject site was excised from Crown portion 95 and acquired by William Richards of High Street St Kilda (CT v.1332 f.342). It appears that a house was erected on the site soon after. The rate book for December 1883, records a 9-roomed brick villa, with a NAV of £120, owned and occupied by grocer William Richards in Dickens Street (RB no.1447).

The site changed hands several times over the next few decades. In 1887, ownership was transferred to William Brown, solicitor, of 79 Chancery Lane Melbourne. For a brief period between 1910 and 1911, it was owned by architect Sydney Wigham Smith of noted practice Sydney Smith, Ogg & Serpell. Then in 1911, it was acquired by Simon Davis, clothing manufacturer of Villiers Street North Melbourne, who owned it until his death in 1931.

The 1898 MMBW plan (Figure 1) shows the villa at 9 Dickens Street with a stables and other outbuildings at the rear. At that time there was a rear lane. It was one of several villas in this part of Dickens Street between Tennyson Street and Brighton Road, and to the south were a number of substantial properties.

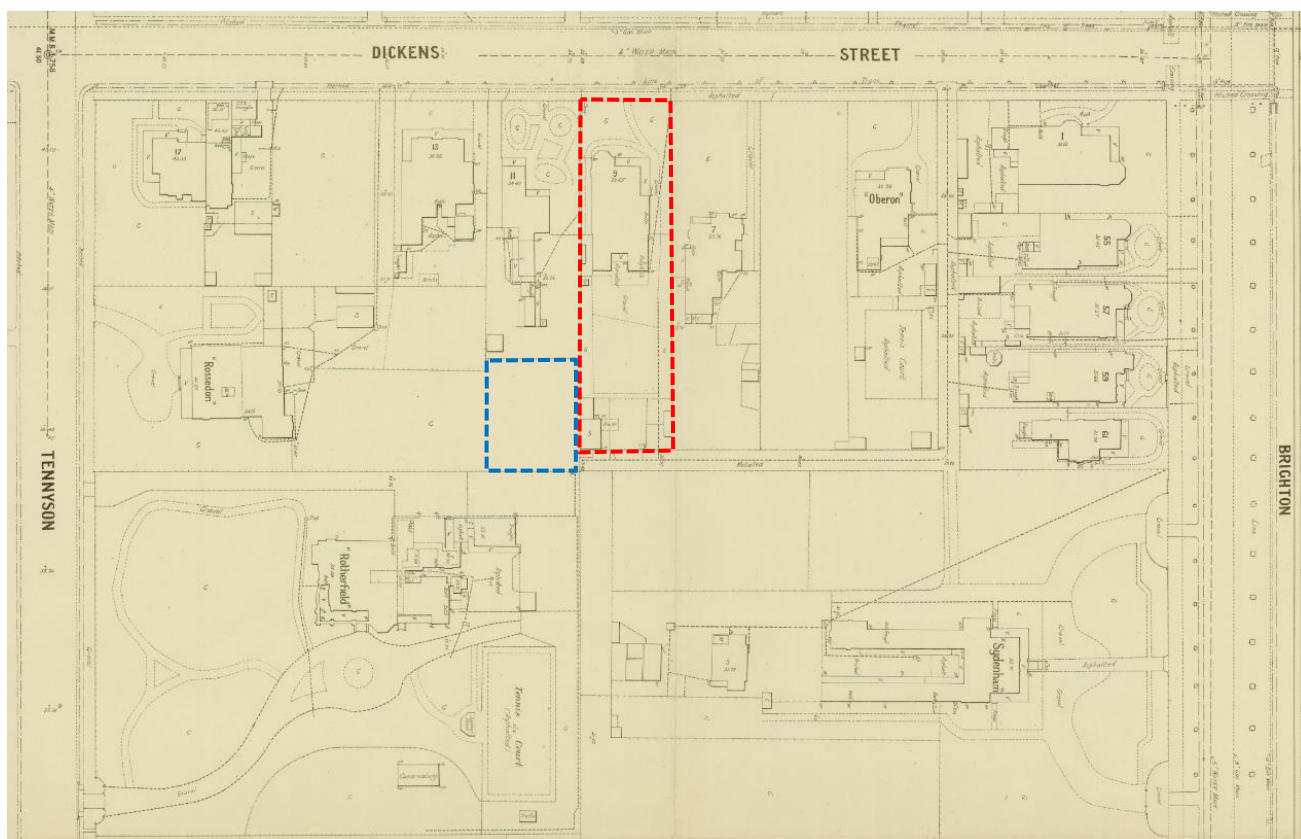


Figure 1 - MMBW detail plan no. 1384, dated 1898. The subject site is outlined, the original parcel associated with no.9 (red) and the additional parcel (blue). (Source State Library of Victoria)

A 1924 aerial photograph (Figure 2) shows the villa at 9 Dickens Street during the early Interwar period, as the area was becoming more densely developed with the subdivision of larger estates and the creation of new streets (e.g. Hennessy Street). Dickens Street, with ready access to the electric trams along Mitford Street (from 1906) and Brighton Road (from 1926) and proximity to the St Kilda Botanic Gardens became a popular location for flats during the Interwar period when seventeen blocks of flats were built, including ten in the five years from 1933 to 1938.



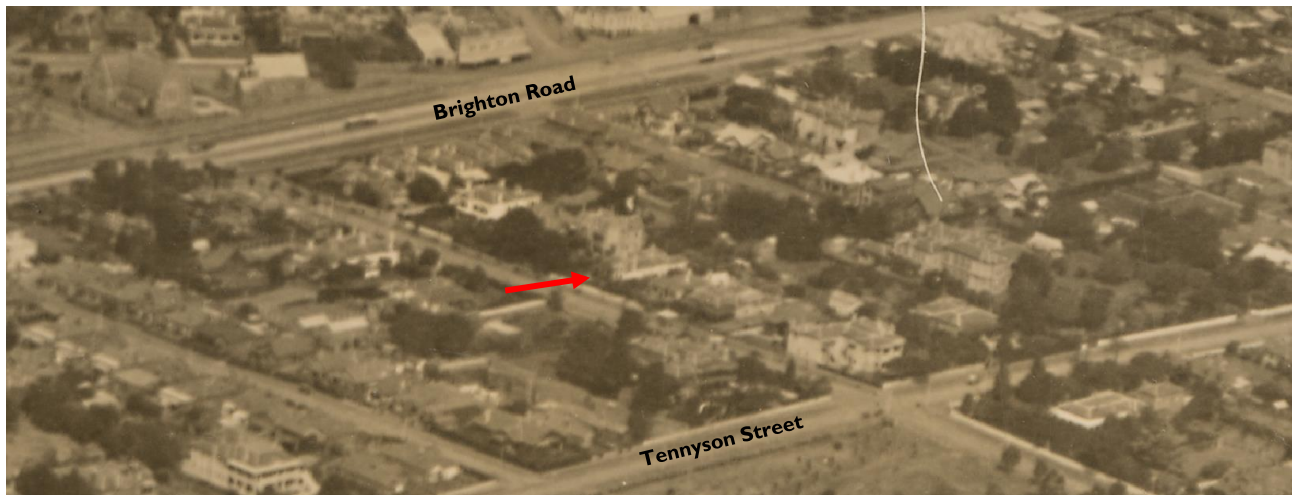


Figure 2 - Aerial photograph, 1924. ('Just above St. Kilda looking towards Luna Park', E Ebell) (Source: State Library of Victoria, H91.365/3)

From about 1929, 9 Dickens Street was tenanted by Moritz and Adelaide Rosenberg, and Moritz's adult daughter Ruth (SM). Moritz, who had migrated to Australia from Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, died in 1934 (Age 26 Feb 1934 p1). The following year the property was purchased by his widow and his two daughters, Ruth and Deborah (CT v.5967 f.315). Adelaide died in 1947 (BDM 6265/1947). In June 1949, ownership was reassigned to Deborah and her English-born husband Abraham Rosenberg, a shoe retailer.



Figure 3 - Aerial photograph dated 1945, showing the approximate boundaries of the subject site. (Source: Landata, Proj No 5, Melbourne and Metropolitan Area Project, Run 16, Frame 57848)

Chudleigh Court was constructed on the cusp of the next boom in flat building in the street. In the decade from 1959 to 1969 15 blocks of flats were erected in Dickens Street. Chudleigh Court was conceived, and likely also constructed, in two stages between 1957 and 1958.

In March 1957, a building permit was issued to the Rosenbergs for 8 brick flats estimated to cost £15,000 (BP U3444). The undated stamped permit drawings, prepared by Bailey & Tilley Home Planning Service, shows these flats located to the rear of the retained 19<sup>th</sup> century villa (BF). The builder was Ronald Wilfred Sheldon of 3 Riverside Avenue East Kew. This is the only site Sheldon is associated with in the municipality.

In April 1957, a second building permit was issued for brick garages, caretaker's quarters and laundry, for an estimated cost of £4,000, located on neighbouring land on the west side (BP U3530). The land for the garages was however formally acquired by the Rosenbergs in October 1957, creating an 'L' shaped parcel. At the same time, the Rosenbergs placed ownership of the property in the name of Chudleigh Court P/L (CT v.8190 f.709).

In February 1958, a third building permit was issued for an additional eight flats, in place of the 19<sup>th</sup> century villa at the front of the site, to be constructed as an extension to the earlier building and replicating the floor plans and external design (BP 57/131). The previously approved flats appear to have been constructed by this time as they are indicated as 'existing flats' on the drawing. Again, the undated stamped permit drawings were prepared by Bailey & Tilley Home Planning Service, and the builder was Ronald Wilfred Sheldon.



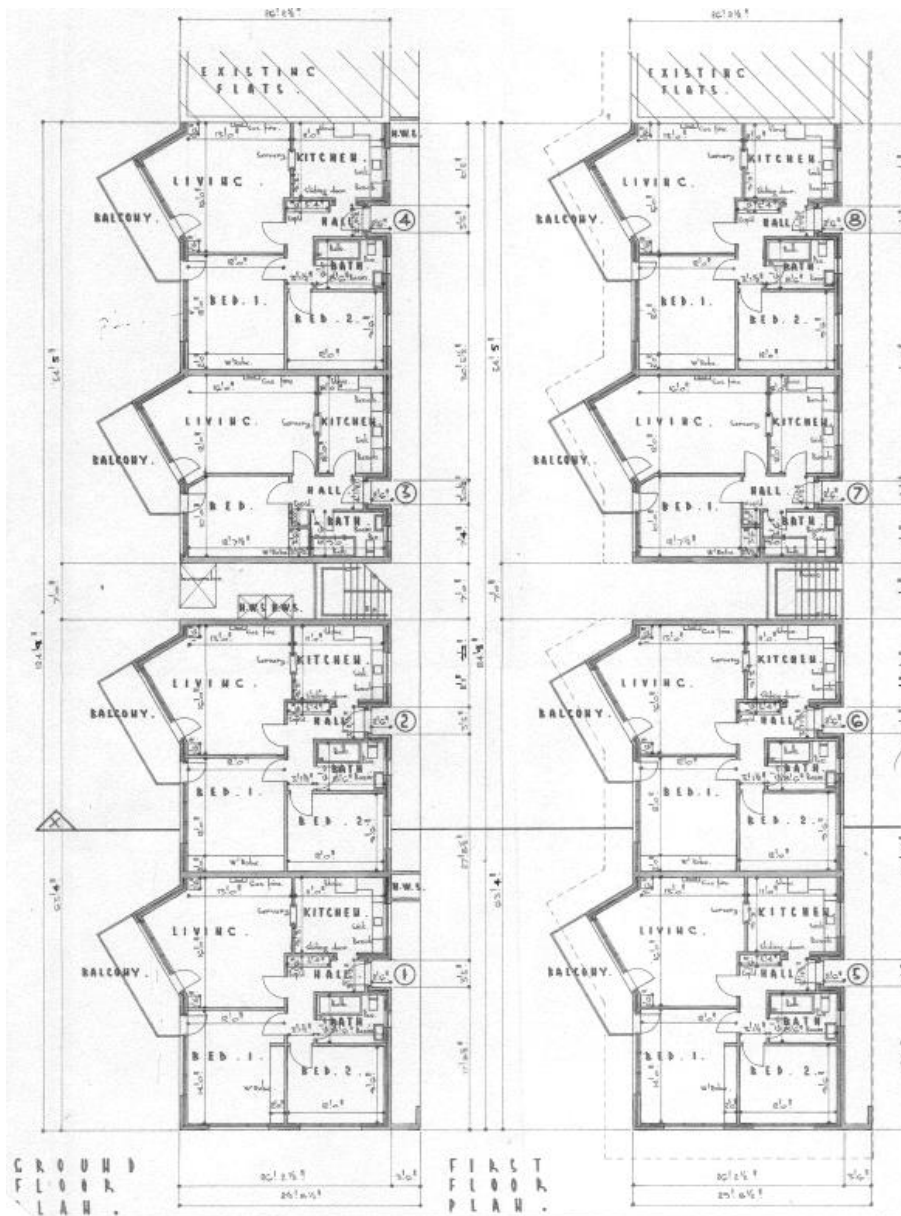


Figure 4 - Undated drawings (elevations and plans) relating to building permit 57/131 issued February 1958. (Source: Council Building File)

The flats were largely built as depicted in the drawings except there is only one window to each flat on the north/Dickens Street elevation.

All sixteen flats had been completed by September 1958, when they were advertised for sale in the *Australian Jewish News* (Figure 5) as 'superb own your own luxury units' located just a few minutes from the 'beach, tram, synagogue'.

In April 1960, a building permit was issued for a brick fence (BP 57/1264).



**FOR PRIVATE SALE**  
**"CHUDLEIGH COURT"**  
**9 DICKENS STREET, ELWOOD**  
 16 Superb Own Your Own Luxury Units, cont. 1 or 2 Bed-rooms, Spacious Kitchen, Large Living room, SUNDECK, GARAGE. Beautifully fitted throughout with B.I.C., B.I.R., El. H.W.S. Few mins. Beach, Tram, Synagogue From £5,200.  
 TERMS: £2,500 DEP, Bal. £10 p.w. incl. 6½% p.a. Int.  
 OPEN FOR INSPECTION ANY SATURDAY AND SUNDAY 2—4 p.m.  
 or by Appt. with AUCTION SPECIALISTS  
**I. A. WATT & CO. R.E.S.I.**  
 (Princ. FRANK DURRA)  
 358 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE. MU 2111 — MU 4516  
 After Hours: XJ 5134 — FW 2181.

Figure 5 – Newspaper advertisement (Source: *The Australian Jewish News*, 19 Sept 1958, p15)

## Bailey & Tilley Home Plan Service

Bailey & Tilley Home Plan Service was a partnership between Norman Victor Tilley and Harold Edwin Bailey. The business was established by at least 1949, when an advertisement for a 'boy' for draughting appeared in the *Argus* (12 Feb 1949 p26). Their offices were located at 583 Glenhuntly Road, South Caulfield. While the partnership was supposedly dissolved in June 1955, the business evidently continued to operate (*Argus* 19 Mar 1956 p10). In 1956, one article describes the business as 'plan drafting and building', and another advertises 'house, shop, factory, and renovation plans prepared by experienced draughtsmen at moderate prices' (*Argus* 19 Mar 1956 p10; *Argus* 4 Oct 1956 p15). Although Bailey & Tilley were listed as architects in the 1955 and 1960 Sands and McDougall's directories, they appear to have primarily operated as a drafting service.

## References

Ancestry.com

Births Deaths & Marriages Victoria records (BDM)

Certificates of Title (CT)

Newspapers: *Argus*, *Australian Jewish News*

O'Hanlon, Seamus, 'Home together, Home apart: Boarding house, hostel and flat life in Melbourne c.1900-1940', PhD Thesis, History Department, Monash University

Parish Plan - at Elwood, Parish of Prahran, P81-13 (PP)

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

Realestate.com.au (RE), images dating to early 2021

Sands & McDougall's Directories (SM)

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

St Kilda Council Building File (BF)

St Kilda Council Building Permits (BP)



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## Description

The flat, L-shaped site has an area of 2000m<sup>2</sup>. There is a concrete-paved driveway along the west boundary and garden areas to the east side of the block with lawn and perimeter garden beds. A low cream brick fence with curved ends extends across the front, north boundary allowing views of the building and garden area from the public domain.

The building consists of 16 flats in two blocks – the front/main block has seven flats to each level, and the smaller rear/southern block has one flat to each level. The rear block is partly visible to the west side.

In the south-west corner, are two blocks of garages (six each). There are communal laundry facilities above each garage block in addition to a small caretakers flat above part of the southern garage block. The rear wall of the caretaker's flat is visible from Hennessy Street.

The larger front building has an elongated form with a skillion roof clad in metal sheeting. The roof has a wide eaves overhang whose soffit is lined with timber-boards and there are exposed rafter ends to the east side and brackets to the north side.

The walls are cream brick in stretcher bond. The narrow north elevation presents to the street. It is largely blank with a steel-framed window at each level at the west end and name of the building in metal curvilinear lettering at the east end.

To the east side, the rectilinear footprint breaks forward (northwards) with triangular projections attached to which is a triangular balcony. These projections serve to create semi-private zones in front of each flat. The balconies have concrete decks and metal balustrading with a continuous, elongated triangular pattern. The windows to this side are tall, timber-framed, and comprised of an upper highlight and double-hung sash below.

The entry to individual flats is from the west side – recessed at both levels and accessed by a concrete gallery to the first floor with the same metal balustrading as employed to the east side. The windows to the west side are steel casements set in a timber frame (RE).

Internally, the floor plan was consistent to the 14 flats in the main/front wing. There was a central entry hall (with cupboard) and bathroom, with two bedrooms to the northern end (the main one with built-in-wardrobes) and living and kitchen connected by a servery to the southern end. The floor plan of the two flats to the rear wing was more elongated.

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## 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 distinctive examples. Many of the latter are architect-designed examples, although builders/developers with draughting services were responsible for some. There is poor documentation for how the latter (builder/developers) operated, that is what personnel were employed and what training or experience they had. Among the architects, several were émigrés who were active in the area and at the forefront of the evolution of this building type such as Mordecai Benshemesh, Michael R E Feldhagen, Dr Ernest Fooks, and Kurt Popper, 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 building is 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.

Among the contemporary work of non-émigré architects, there is considerable variety though limited compass except for some with the blocks at 21 Redan Street and 33 Pine Avenue, where some triangular or splayed geometry has been employed.

- 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 conventional railing detailing. 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) Flat roof, cream brick with extensive use of decorative brickwork and screens to the front, as well as 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 in cream brick with flat roofs, stepped form with undercroft carparking supported by piloti, and banks of windows with spandrels.

Among the émigré architects, comparison can be drawn with some of the work of Mordecai Benshemesh and Ernest Fooks, but less so with Kurt Popper and Michael R.E. Feldhagen, Popper's contemporary output 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. The early work of Feldhagen, beginning in the early 1960s, is typically distinguished by the use breeze block and other contrasting materials to create more varied and decorative exteriors, usually in a Featurist mode.

Several blocks of flats designed by the Palestinian-born, Australian educated architect Mordecai Benshemesh are included within the heritage overlay (with others yet to be assessed). His early work, dating from about 1951 to 1956, was overtly Functionalist. Subsequently his work varied with the group constructed in 1960 bearing comparison with *Chudleigh Court*.

- Two notable blocks were completed in 1959. The iconic *Edgewater Towers* at 12 Marine Parade, St Kilda (Citation 2049) and another 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 site in the general material palette but has a flat roof and circulation is by glazed stairwells, which serve to separate adjacent balconies and so provide some privacy for neighbouring occupants.
- Group of three at 306 Dandenong Road (*Leaworra*), 16 Lansdowne Road and 8 Westbury Street (*Wolverton*), St Kilda East, 1960 (Citation 2429). All three buildings are intact and three storey, have cream brick walls and flat roofs with wide, sheet-lined soffits to the front/main elevations, and timber-framed openings. They have balconies with angled geometry either in the vertical (canted) or horizontal (splayed) plane orientated to take best advantage of the solar access and the site configuration. The stairwells have louvred glass. Decorative elements or treatments include ceramic tiling, some panels to the balustrades, projecting bricks, and/or staggered glazing bars to the windows. All retain their original low cream brick fence and associated letter box enclosures. The circulation is different in that the flats are divided into blocks with either two or three enclosed stairwells (at the front) rather than the open stairs and galleries to *Chudleigh Court*.

Locally based, Slovakian-born Ernest Fooks (originally Fuchs) designed many buildings in the municipality, but to date only a few of these have been recognized within the heritage overlay, though several are

currently under review. *Park View*, built about the same time, similarly has a varied footprint however the massing is different to that of *Chudleigh Court* as is some of the detailing

- *Park View*, 5 Herbert Street, St Kilda, 1958-59 (Citation 2427). Triangular/splayed balconies have been employed to create private zones however in the case of *Park View* the stepped configuration was primarily to optimise views of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens opposite. The building has a flat roof and the circulation is similarly along external galleries, though the stair is in a separate/discrete unit with projecting bricks. Window units to the garden elevations (west and north) feature spandrel panels and the balconies have a combination of glass and metal balustrading.
- Flats, 5 May Street, Elwood 1957 (Not in HO). Cream brick, two storey flats with a tiled hip tile roof, in a U-plan around a central garden courtyard. Typically Fooksian elongated window proportions with some larger mullions and coloured spandrels. Concrete balconies with metal balusters.
- Flats, 12 Milton Street, Elwood 1961 (Contributory within St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs precinct). Intact, cuboid form being slightly stepped at front, cream brick with spandrels and elongated window proportions. Similar to *Park View* but on a narrower site.

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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.

In the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay apply:

- outbuilding controls (original garages).
- fence controls (original front fence)

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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



*Building from the east side*



*Building from the west side*

## Area to be included in HO

