

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Elbe  
**Other names:** House

**Citation No:**  
2437

**INSERT MAP**



**Address:** 22 Blenheim Street, Balaclava

**Heritage Precinct:** Not applicable

**Category:** Residential: House

**Heritage Overlay:** TBC

**Style:** Victorian

**Graded as:** Significant

**Constructed:** 1872, additions 1890s

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Designer:** Unknown

**Amendment:** TBC

**Comment:** New citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

Elbe at 22 Blenheim Street, Balaclava, built 1872 for gardener John (Johannes) Sprunkel and wife Anne and added to during the 1890s for subsequent owners John and Margaret Maher, is significant.

The freestanding single storey weatherboard house is comprised of the original 1872 'L-shaped' three-roomed house and the later 1890s additions on the south side. The roof, clad in corrugated sheet metal, is a transverse gable to the front with a perpendicular gable wing and a section of skillion roof behind. There are two brick chimneys with corbelled caps and a dogtooth course. The full width front verandah (dating from the 1890s, although a shorter version may have previously existed) has a hipped roof with an ogee profile and is supported by non-original square timber posts. Although the façade was originally symmetrical (windows either side of central door) the 1890s addition has created an asymmetrical composition. The windows are all timber framed double hung sashes (single pane) with moulded timber architraves. There is a highlight above the door.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century additions to the rear are not significant. The current paint colour scheme is not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

Elbe at 22 Blenheim Street, Balaclava, is of local historical and representative significance to the City of Port Phillip.

## Why is it significant?

Elbe is historically significant for its association with an early phase of development in the Balaclava area which accelerated following the 1859 introduction of the railway. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century modest timber cottages proliferated in pockets of St Kilda East and Balaclava, particularly on the lower lying land known as the 'Balaclava Flats', contrasting with more substantial houses on nearby surrounding higher ground. *Elbe* is amongst the earliest surviving houses in Balaclava/St Kilda East and one of only a comparatively small number dating from pre-1880. (Criterion A)

Elbe is of representative significance as an uncommon example of a modest pre-1880 timber house in the municipality, of which many were built (particularly in the St Kilda East/Balaclava area) but few survive. Although altered (as early surviving timber cottages almost invariably are) the original 1872 'L' shaped extent has been fully retained and the 1890s additions have been made in the manner of the original by extruding the transverse gable roof form and replicating detailing (window and chimney). The transverse gable roof is highly indicative of the 1860/70s. The front verandah was not part of the house initially, although such a feature was common in the 1870s and one may well have been introduced prior to the 1890s when it is confirmed to have existed. The ogee profile of the verandah is relatively uncommon. (Criterion D)

## 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: 5.1 Early dwellings, 5.2 Shaping the suburbs (5.2.2 Private development), 5.3 Diverse Housing (5.3.2 Workers and artisan housing)

## History

### Contextual history

The development of St Kilda began following the first land sales in 1842 and by 1854 there were over two hundred houses. The plan compiled in 1855 by James Kearney shows that most of these were situated to the west of Brighton Road (later High Street and now St Kilda Road). The St Kilda East and Balaclava areas by comparison, were largely undeveloped, particularly east of Chapel Street.

In 1859, the railway to Brighton was opened, spurring subdivision and development in the St Kilda East and Balaclava areas. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, modest timber cottages proliferated in pockets of St Kilda East and Balaclava, particularly on the lower lying land known as the 'Balaclava Flats', contrasting with more substantial houses on nearby surrounding higher ground.

### 22 Blenheim Street

The subject site formed part of Crown portion 146B, Parish of Prahran, County of Bourke. The approximately three-and-a-half-acre allotment (which relates to the northern half of Blenheim Street) was purchased in November 1853 by the Robinson brothers (PP).

The Kearney plan of 1855 (Figure 1) shows that Blenheim Street was not yet in existence and there was no development in the vicinity. By 1859, at least the southern part of Blenheim Street (Crown portion 147B) had been formed when it was subdivided into 26 40ft allotments (RB 1859 nos 1317-1336). The 1864 Cox

plan (Figure 2) shows Blenheim Street extending between Inkerman and Carlisle streets, albeit in a straight alignment (without a bend at the north end), with some limited development in the southern half and none in the northern half. Both plans show the subject site vacant.

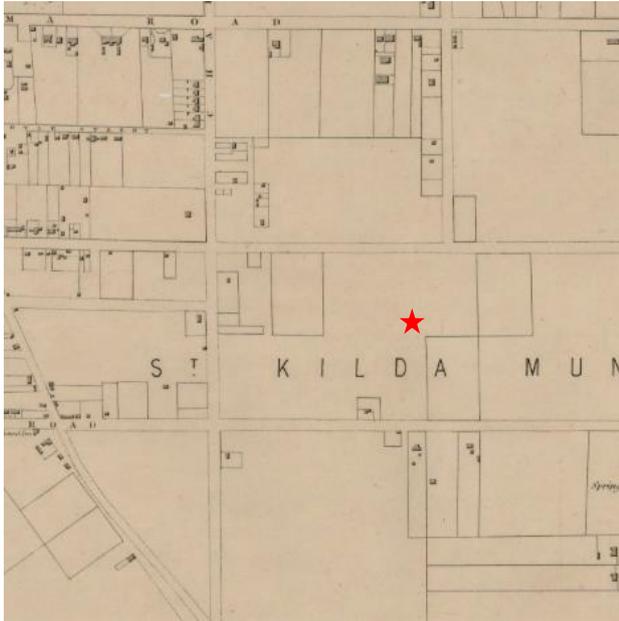


Figure 1 - Plan dated 1855 'Melbourne and its suburbs' compiled by James Kearney.

Figure 2 - Plan dated 1864 'Hobson Bay and River Yarra leading to Melbourne' surveyed by Henry L Cox. (Source: State Library of Victoria)

The northern part of Blenheim Street (i.e. Crown portion 146B) was subdivided in the early 1870s, by the then owners Andrew Bridges White, merchant of Geelong, and Samuel Sextus Ritchie, meat preserver of Queen Street Melbourne (CT Vol.456 Fol.180).

The subject site was transferred to John Sprunkel in December 1871 (CT Vol. 463 Fol. 531). Sprunkel had recently rented nearby houses in Sebastapol Street (RB Jan 1872 no. 747) and Blenheim Street (RB 1870 no. 1329). The November 1872 rate book lists John Sprunkel, gardener, as the owner and occupier of a 3-roomed weatherboard house with a NAV of £13 (RB no.1564). The 1873 rate book records that Sprunkel was one of five gardeners living in Blenheim Street at that time, some of whom may have been employed at George Brunning's nearby nursery in Inkerman Street (RB Jan 1872 no.1414).

The 1873 Vardy plan (Figure 3) shows the subject house had an 'L'-shaped footprint (no front verandah) and there was a brick outbuilding to the rear on the north boundary. The subject house was one of four adjacent weatherboard houses on the east side of the street, including one with a similar footprint. The north part of Blenheim Street was dominated by the 8-roomed brick residence *Alderstead* set in approximately 1 acre of grounds on the east corner of Inkerman Street. This plan shows the north part of Blenheim Street according to its current alignment.

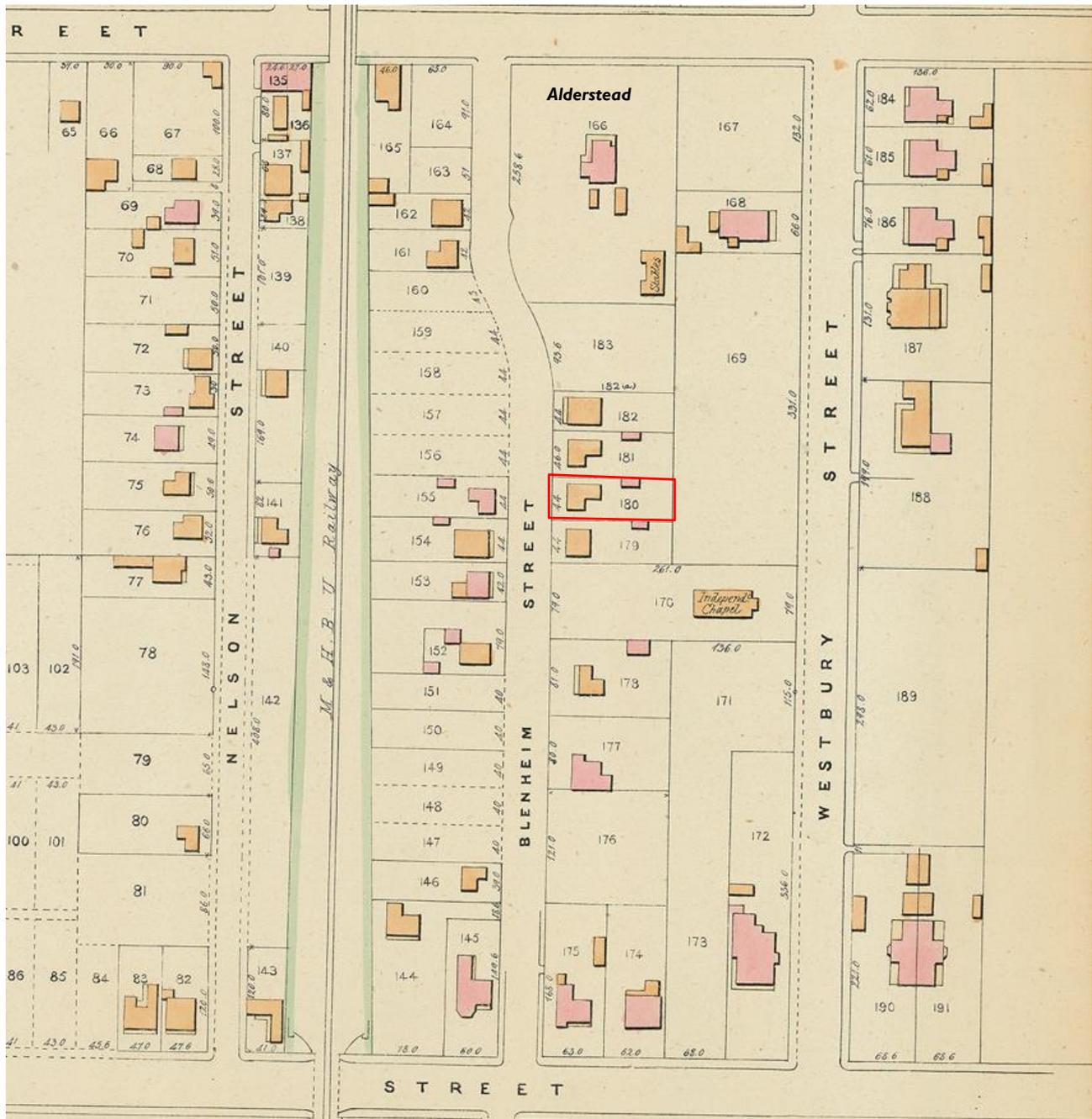


Figure 3 - Plan of the Borough of St Kilda, South Ward No. 2 (J.E.S. Vardy, 1873). The subject site is outlined. Timber buildings are shaded orange and brick buildings are shaded pink. (Source: St Kilda Historical Society)

John (Johannes) Sprunkel and his wife Anne (married in 1866) lived at the subject house they named *Elbe* until their deaths. ‘Elbe’ probably references the Elbe River, one of the major rivers of central Europe which arises in the Czech Republic and traverses north-eastern Germany to the North Sea. John died in 1888 aged 53 years (Age 26 Oct 1888 p5) and Anne in 1892 aged 64 (Age 10 Mar 1892 p1). The couple had three children who had died in infancy (St Kilda cemetery records).

The house was subsequently owned by John Maher, a machinist. John and his wife Margaret had a young growing family and they soon expanded the house, apparently in stages. The 1894 rate book records 5 rooms (RB no. 2990) and the 1897 rate book records 8 rooms with a NAV of £25 (RB no. 3014).

The 1898 MMBW plan (Figure 4) shows the footprint of the subject house after it had been expanded by

the Maher family. It shows that additional rooms were introduced on the south side and at the rear, and that there were also verandahs to the front and rear. An asphalt path led to the main entry, but there was also a second path along the southern boundary. The MMBW plan also shows that by this time, Blenheim Street was almost fully developed, mostly with weatherboard houses.

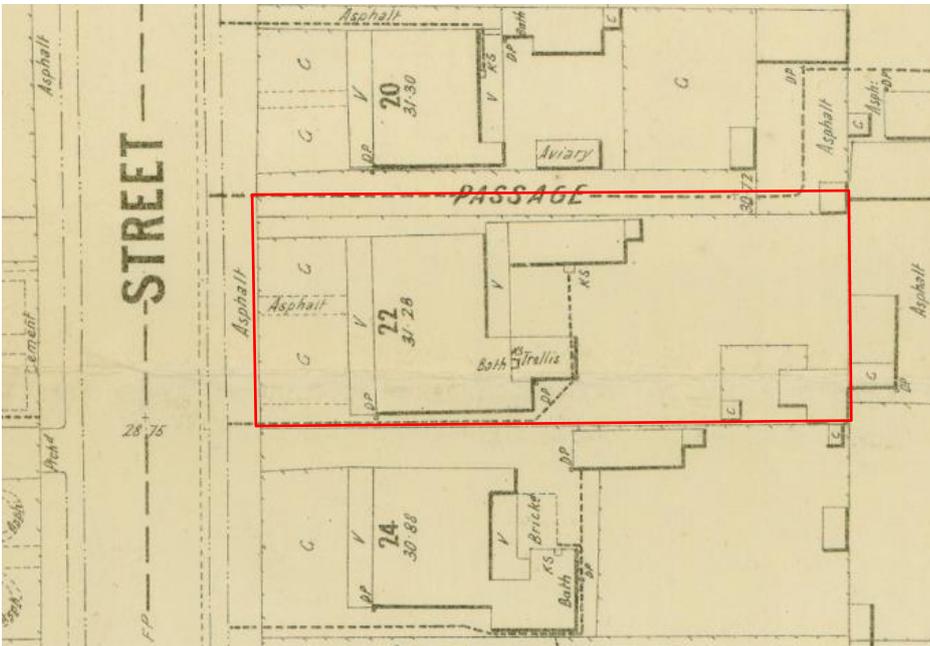


Figure 4 - MMBW Detail Plan No. 1425 (dated 1898) (Source: State Library of Victoria)

John Maher lived at the house until his death in 1921 (Herald 11 Aug 1921 p20) and Margaret Maher until her death in 1933 (SM; BDM). The 1945 aerial photograph shows the footprint of the subject house consistent with the earlier MMBW plan. The roofing appears to be slate to the original section, with corrugated sheet metal to rear parts and outbuilding.



Figure 5 - Aerial photograph dated 1945, showing the subject house. (Source: Landata, Proj No 5, Run 17E, Frame 58014)

During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, further rear additions were introduced to the house. The earlier brick outbuilding on the north boundary has been removed.

## References

Certificates of Title (CT): Vol. 7448 Fol.536; Vol. 463 Fol. 531; Vol. 456 Fol. 180; Vol. 339 Fol. 749.

Cooper, J.B., 1931, *The History of St Kilda. From its settlement to a city and after. 1840 to 1930*, Volume 2

Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works plan, scale 160 feet to 1 inch. no. 45, Prahran & St Kilda (dated 1896)

Newspapers: *Age*, *Herald*

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

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

Sands and McDougall's street directories (SM)

St Kilda Rate Books (RB) 1859-1900 viewed at Ancestry.com

## Description

The site is rectangular and located on the east side of Blenheim Street. The freestanding single storey weatherboard house is set back a few metres from the front boundary and is partly obscured by plantings.

The building footprint to the front largely survives consistent with the 1898 MMBW plan. It is comprised of the original 1872 three-roomed house and the later 1890s additions on the south side. The front verandah also dates to the 1890s, however it is possible that a shorter one may have been constructed earlier (that is after 1872 but prior to the 1890s). Refer Figures 6 and 7. At the rear of the 19th century house is a late 20<sup>th</sup> century part one, part two storey addition.



Figures 6 & 7 - Floor plan (left) and recent aerial photograph showing the front part of the house. The original extent of the three-roomed 1872 cottage is shaded red, and the 1890s additions are shaded blue. (Source: McGrath Real Estate and Nearmap)

The roof is a transverse gable to the front with a perpendicular gable wing behind forming an L-shaped footprint and a section of skillion roof. The roof is clad in corrugated sheet metal. Two brick chimneys survive with corbelled caps and a dogtooth course. Although the chimneys relate to different phases of development (north chimney 1872, south chimney 1890s) they have a similar design.

The walls are clad in horizontally orientated weatherboards. The full width front verandah is supported by non-original square timber posts. The hipped verandah roof is clad in corrugated sheet metal and has an ogee profile. The deck is timber.

Although the façade was originally symmetrical (windows either side of central door) the 1890s addition on the south side has resulted in an asymmetrical composition. The additional room has French doors onto the verandah and may have been a 'stranger's room' or a room that was leased out (i.e. a room without internal access). The windows are all timber framed double hung sashes (single pane) with moulded timber architraves, although the south window is not as tall. The front door is obscured. There is a highlight above the door.

The front garden has various plantings including trees and bushes. The timber picket front fence is neither original nor early.

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## Comparative analysis

The subject house is an example of a modest 1870s timber house in the St Kilda East/Balaclava area, of which many were built but few survive. Such houses were commonly replaced with brick from the latter part of the 19th century onwards.

While there are comparatively many modest timber cottages dating from the late 1880s and early 1890s represented in the Heritage Overlay, examples from pre-1880 are much rarer. Other surviving examples of comparable pre-1880 single storey timber houses within the St Kilda East/Balaclava area include:

- 34 Young Street, St Kilda East (1870). (Citation 2309, HO401). Double fronted, symmetrical, full width straight-roofed verandah built to the front boundary with timber frieze, transverse gable roof, short brick chimney.
- 16 Balston Street, Balaclava (c.1863). (Citation 2303, HO395). Double fronted, symmetrical, full width bullnose verandah with non-original timber posts and cast iron, transverse gable roof, brick chimney to gable end, altered windows.
- 62 Octavia Street, St Kilda (c.1862). (Citation 2389, HO6 precinct). Double fronted, symmetrical, full width verandah with straight roof with timber frieze and cast-iron bracket (possibly not original), transverse slate-clad gable roof, brick chimney.
- 41 Rosamond Street, Balaclava (thought to be pre-1873). (Contributory within HO439). Double fronted, symmetrical, full width verandah with early 20<sup>th</sup> century type of cast iron frieze, hipped roof, brick chimney, windows possibly altered.
- 149 & 151 Argyle Street (1872) and 1 Queen Street (1876) (Citation 2418). An attached pair and a freestanding house, built by the same owner builder. Symmetrical/mirrored façade compositions, transverse gable roofs, brick chimneys and full width front verandahs. 149 & 151 Argyle Street are an unusual early (pre-1880) paired example that share an undivided gable roof.
- 2 and 4 Queen Street, St Kilda East (1878) (Citation 2442). Attached pair with mirrored façade compositions, transverse gable roofs, brick chimney (one surviving) and full width front verandahs.
- 51-57 Leslie Street, St Kilda East. No. 53 thought to be built in 1873 and nos 51+55 in 1875. The date for no. 57 is unclear. (Not in heritage overlay). Double fronted, symmetrical, full width verandahs, transverse gable roofs, some with brick chimneys.

The subject house and the examples listed above have all undergone some level of change, as almost invariably occurs with early timber cottages. Importantly however, they retain original building formats, and where fabric has been replaced it has generally been in a similar manner or in keeping with the original character/period. Despite the 1890s additions to the subject house, the full extent of the original 1872 'L'

shaped house remains intact, and the additions have been made in the manner of the original 1870s house by extruding the transverse gable roof form and replicating detailing (window and chimney). The transverse gable roof remains highly indicative of the 1860/70s (by the 1890s hipped roofs were prevalent). While the house did not initially have a front verandah, such a feature was common in the 1870s and one may well have been introduced prior to the 1890s when it is confirmed to have existed. The ogee profile of the verandah is uncommon.

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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 external paint controls in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (to ensure complementary colour schemes are employed).

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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

