

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Maison Parisienne  
**Other names:** Flats

**Citation No:**  
2424

**INSERT MAP**



**Address:** 122 Brighton Road, Ripponlea

**Heritage Precinct:** Not applicable

**Category:** Residential: Flats

**Heritage Overlay:** TBC

**Style:** Interwar: Mediterranean

**Graded as:** Significant

**Constructed:** 1932

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Designer:** E Jennings & Sons (builder)

**Amendment:** TBC

**Comment:** Revised citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

Maison Parisienne, constructed in 1932, at 122 Brighton Road, Ripponlea is significant. The building was designed and erected by builders E Jennings & Sons for clients Ernest Morris and his French-born wife Elise, who resided in one of the flats upon its completion.

The flats are three-storeys and have a uniform rectangular plan beneath a tiled high hipped roof. Walls are finished in textured render, with smooth render dressings. The front façade is asymmetrically arranged, though there is repetition of forms on each of the three levels: windows beneath an abstracted Serlian window hood to the northern bay, arched openings with curved balconies to the upper levels to the central bay, and arched openings with inset entry or porches to the southern bay. Front windows retain geometric leadlights in upper window sashes.

The garages at the rear also contribute to the significance of the place.

Alterations and additions, including the front fence and rear escape stairs, are not significant. The current paint colour scheme (over the rendered finish) is not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

Maison Parisienne at 122 Brighton Road, Ripponlea is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### Why is it significant?

Maison Parisienne is of historical significance as flats constructed during the Interwar period, when huge growth in flat development characterised St Kilda and Elwood as the transition from detached single family dwellings to flat living became increasingly popular. While this transition began with the conversion of large dwellings to boarding houses, and then the architectural conversion of some to separate apartments, Maison Parisienne was part of the final phase of development: purpose-built flats. Built on a main thoroughfare, it also demonstrates the importance of public transportation in fuelling flat development. The cable tram along Brighton Road was electrified and extended south from a previous terminus at Brunning Street to Glen Huntly Road in the mid-1920s, which encouraged an acceleration of flats development along this part of the road from 1926 until World War II. (Criterion A)

Maison Parisienne is of aesthetic significance as a distinctive and intact example of Interwar period flats in the popular Mediterranean style as executed by a designer-builder. It exhibits key characteristics of the Mediterranean style, such as textured rendered walls, arched openings, and classical forms such as corbels and dentils. This is married with chunky detailing and the highly abstracted Serlian window hoods that were a hallmark of E Jennings & Son's Interwar designs. (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 (Pahran 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. 370 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).

The first flats in Brighton Road were constructed at the end of World War I. One of the earliest was 'Yurunga', designed by local architect Harry R Johnson, which was constructed in 1920 at the south corner of Brunning Street directly opposite the cable tram terminus. The electrification of the cable tram in Brighton Road and its extension, by 1926, from the terminus in Brunning Street, Balaclava to Glen Huntly Road in Elsternwick encouraged the construction of flats along the route. Between 1926 and 1941 no fewer than 21 blocks of flats were constructed between Carlisle Street and Glen Huntly Road.

### Maison Parisienne, 122 Brighton Road

The subject site formed part of Crown portion 259, parish of Prahran at Elsternwick. The approximately 5½ acre allotment was purchased in November 1853 by J M Holloway (PP).

By 1873, as recorded on the Vardy Plan (Figure 1), most of this land was owned by W Kesterson (Allots. 12 & 14), while a small block (No. 13) was owned by W Cheerington and developed with a small house at the front boundary and an outbuilding on the south side boundary.

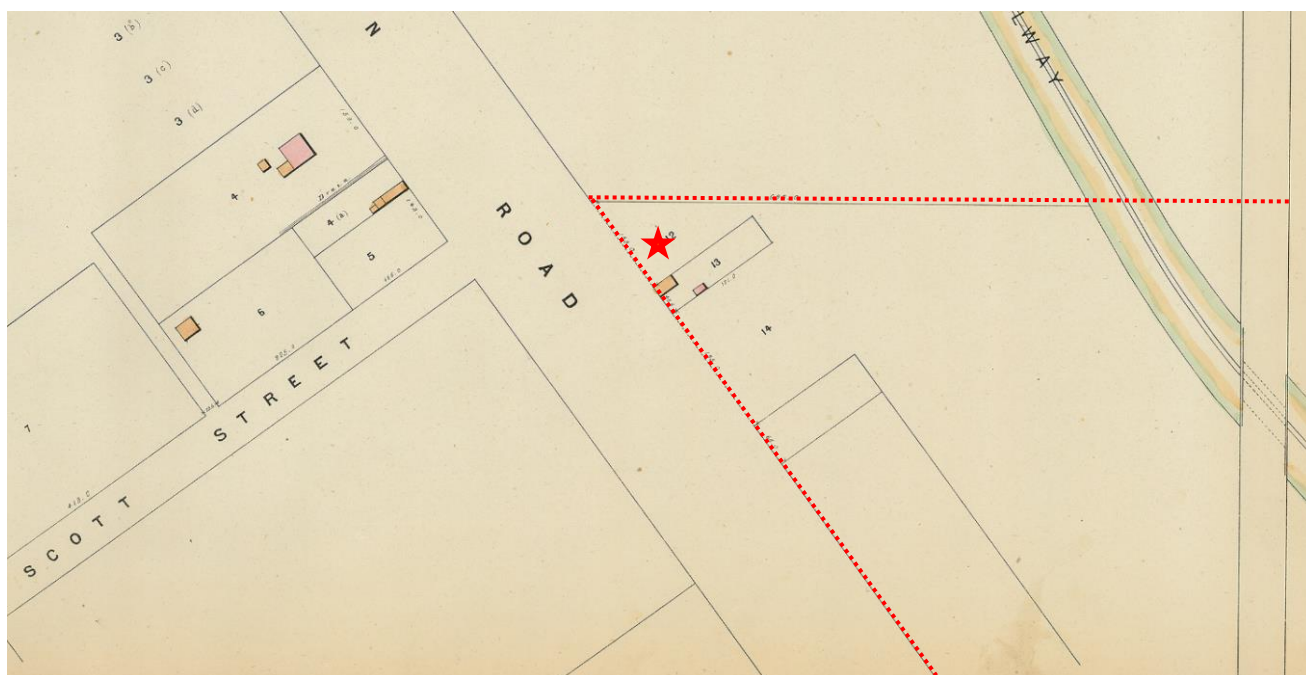


Figure 1 - Plan of the Borough of St Kilda, Sheet No. 14 SW (J.E.S. Vardy, 1873). Showing partial boundaries of Crown portion 259 (outlined), and the location of the subject site (star). (Source: St Kilda Historical Society)

The land that now comprises the subject site was created from the consolidation and re-subdivision of two blocks of land. The southern part of the subject site was purchased in 1888 by William Cutler, a gentleman of Charles Street, St Kilda (CT v.2078 f.496). Cutler mortgaged the land with the National Bank of Australasia, but apparently defaulted as the bank issued a series of writs against him with the Supreme Court, and then took possession of the property. The bank then sold the land to George Henry Billson, an aerated water manufacturer, in 1894.

The northern part was transferred to Lily Ann Rose, of 62 Clara Street, South Yarra, on 15 August 1894 (CT v.2531 f.144). Two days later, the land was transferred to James Wallace, a gardener of Bell Street, Elsternwick. Five years on, it was reacquired by George Henry Billson who held it until 1919. Billson developed the land with an aerated water factory, which is shown on the 1905 MMBW plan (Figure 2). A large stable was at the rear of the block that would later become the subject site. The single-fronted house shown on the Vardy Plan appeared to survive at this point, fronting Brighton Road.

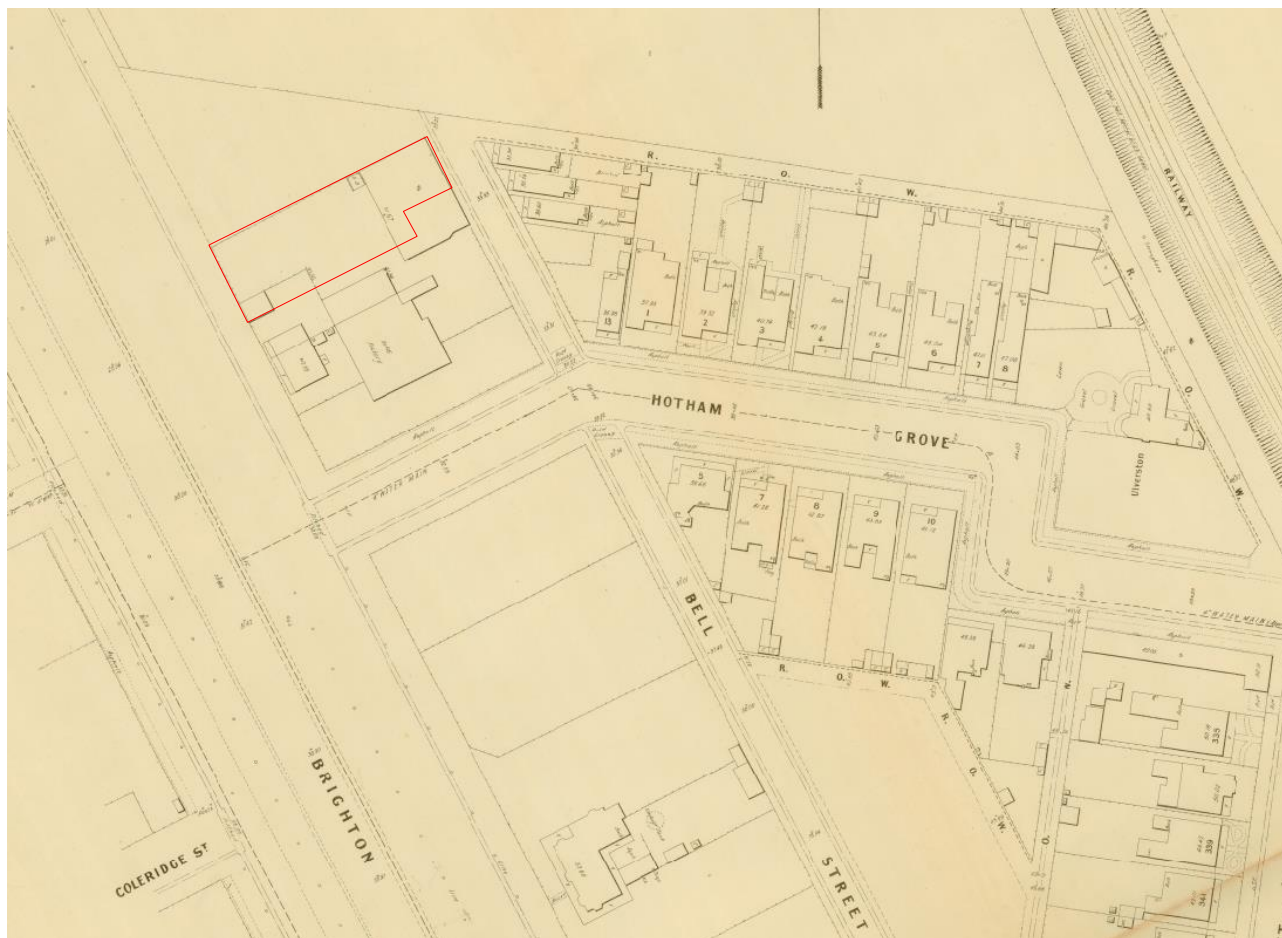


Figure 2 - Extract from MMBW Detail Plan no. 1465 (1905) showing approximate boundaries of the subject site (dotted outline). There is a large stable partially on the subject site as well as the pre-1872 house. To the south is a 'Factory' with two attached dwellings in front of it. (Source: State Library of Victoria)

George H Billson was born in England in 1844 and settled with his parents and siblings in Victoria in 1852. In 1879, Billson purchased the Colonial Porter Brewery in Albury. His father and a brother ran the Ovens Brewery in Beechworth. While in Albury, Billson served as an alderman and mayor of Albury, before moving to Elsternwick in 1896 to set up a cordial and aerated water factory on the subject site. He was elected to the City of St Kilda Council in 1901 and served until 1911, including a year as mayor.

In 1915, the George H Billson & Co. aerated water factory was the only occupant listed on Brighton Road between Fuller Road and Hotham Grove. This was soon followed by residential development on this part of Brighton Road, with five houses occupied or under construction by 1919. It appears that the factory closed that year, as it was listed under a caretaker's name in the 1919 street directory, and not listed at all in 1920. George H Billson died in 1927, at the age of 83, reportedly after retiring some years earlier (*Prahran Telegraph* 16 Sep 1927 p5).

With the closure of the factory, residential development of the large block at the corner of Brighton Road and Hotham Grove was soon underway. John Dixon, a 'gentleman' of Beach Road, Mentone, consolidated the land that today comprises 118-126 Brighton Road and 1 Hotham Grove on 9 December 1920 (CT v. 4414 f.651). He then subdivided and sold off the land as six parcels between 1921 and 1925.



Margaret Hunt, a married woman of 18 Grosvenor Street, St Kilda, became the owner of the subject site with its current boundaries on 3 October 1922 (CT v.4627 f.352).

Of the blocks sold off by John Dixon, the subject site was the last to be developed. A 1931 aerial photograph (AP) shows that the rest of the aerated water factory site had been developed with detached houses.

Margaret Hunt sold the subject site to Ernest John Podesta Morris on 23 July 1932. Morris commissioned local builder E Jennings to design and construct a three-storey block of flats, and a building permit was granted just four days after the transfer of land was finalised (BP no. 8096 issued 27 July 1932).

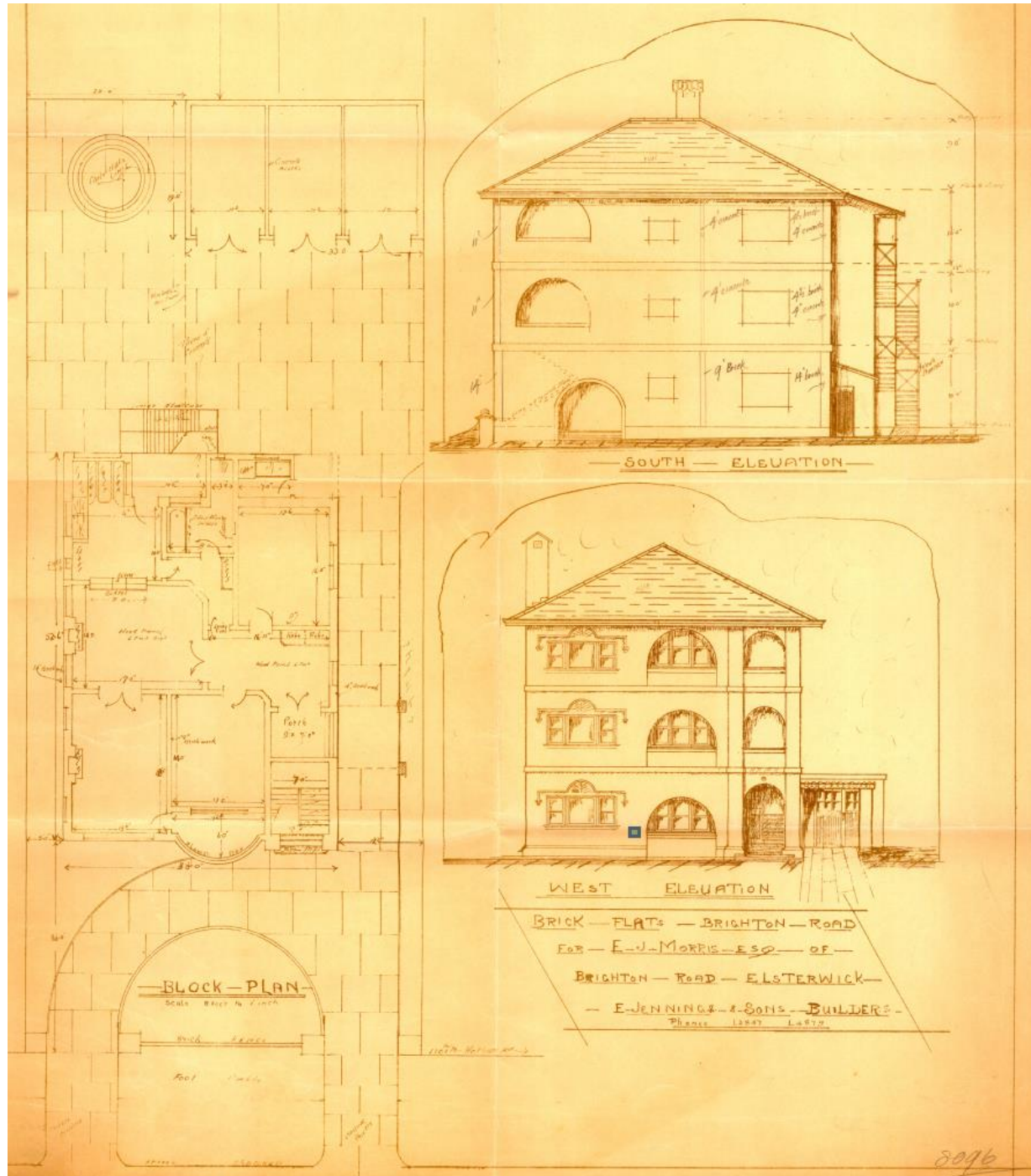


Figure 3 - 1932 building permit plans and elevations for the flats at 122 Brighton Road. Note the curved front drive and garages at the rear. (Source: St Kilda Council Building Permit no. 8096, 27 July 1932)

Morris named the flats 'Maison Parisienne', apparently in honour of his wife, Elise Francoise Morris. Ms Morris was French and had worked as a chorus girl in Paris before moving to Bombay (Mumbai) in 1921 where she ran a cabaret and nightclub. There she soon met Ernest Morris, an Australia jockey also working in India, and they married some years later in 1930. After their marriage, they moved to Australia, and apparently 6000 pounds of Ms Morris' money was used to purchase the subject site and erect the 'Maison Parisienne' flats. Ms Morris also purchased the Railway Hotel in Windsor and the Napier Hotel in Richmond. (*Herald* 8 Aug 1940 p3; *Age* 9 Aug 1940 p11; *Argus* 10 Aug 1940 p11).

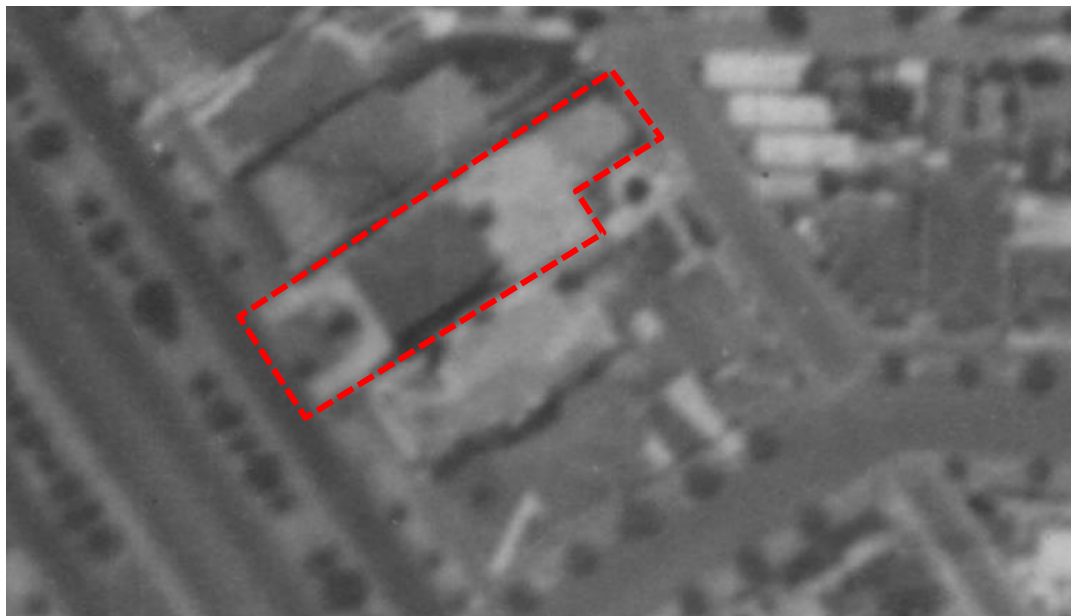


Figure 4 - Aerial photograph dated 1945, the subject flats indicated (red outline). Note the curved driveway in front. (Source: Landata, Proj. No. 5, Run 16, Frame 57846)

The Morris' marriage however declined in 1939. Their divorce settlement called for Mr Morris to pay his ex-wife 5000 pounds. This may have been in the form of Maison Parisienne, as Ernest Morris transferred the subject property to his ex-wife in 1948. By that time, she was residing in the Streamlined Moderne 'Kia Ora' flats at 449-453 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, and is recorded as a manufacturer.

Elise Morris mortgaged the subject property four times between 1948 and 1957. She died on 1 August 1966, with the probate of her will granted to ex-husband Ernest Morris and Henry Noel Evans, an accountant. Ernest became the sole proprietor again in 1967 and died on 8 June 1986.

In 1983, timber fire escape stairs were installed to the rear of the flats (Figure 5) (BP no. 9675 issued 7 Mar 1983).

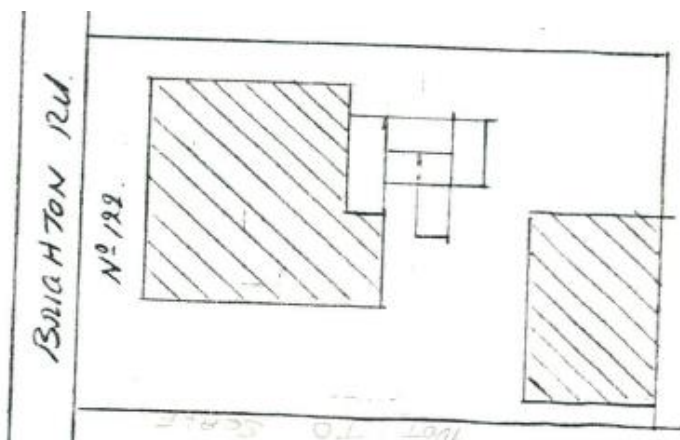


Figure 5 - Site plan of the subject property in 1983. The block of flats is to the left, with new escape stairs behind it. The garages are shown to the right. (Source: St Kilda Council Building Permit No. 9675, 7 Mar 1983)

## References

Aerial Photograph (AP) - Landata, Proj. No. 1931, Maldon Prison, Run 15, Frame 2750

Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P., (1989) A pictorial guide to identifying Australian architecture. Styles and terms from 1788 to the present.

Certificates of Title (CT)

Cuffley, Peter (2007) Australian houses of the twenties and thirties, (2nd edition)

Newspapers, various

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

Raworth, Bryce (1993) 'A question of style: Inter-war domestic architecture in Victoria', Thesis (M.Arch) University of Melbourne

St Kilda Council building permits (BP)

Sands & McDougall's street 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

Wooding, Joe, (n.d.), 'Billson Family Breweries', Albury and District Historical Society website, Billson-Family-Breweries.pdf (alburyhistory.org.au)

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## Description

The Maison Parisienne flats stand on the east side of Brighton Road, just north of Hotham Grove. This part of the street is characterised by Interwar detached houses and flats, though there are also more recent blocks of flats. The flats have a medium-sized front setback that once held a curved driveway. While presumably it would have originally had a low masonry front fence, this has been replaced with a high, solid brick fence that is bagged and painted. The height of this fence, and the dense plantings behind it partly obscure views to the flats from the street.

The building is three-storeys tall and has a uniform rectangular plan beneath a tiled high hipped roof. There is one rendered chimney at the centre of the north side elevation (the cap is flat but the original plans show a dove-cote top). Walls are finished in textured render, with smooth render dressings (including beltcourses, window surrounds, balcony detailing). Stylistically, it can be considered an example of the Mediterranean Revival style.

The front façade is asymmetrically arranged, though there is repetition of forms at each of the three levels. Each floor level has an arched opening to the southern bay (this is an entrance to the ground floor, and arched balconies to the upper levels). In the central bay, each level has a wide, semicircular arched opening with a bank of three windows set behind. The upper levels each have a curved balcony projecting below this arch, with an integral planter box along the top edge and chunky decorative corbels. The north bays all feature a Chicago-format window (picture window between double-hung sashes), with a decorative cast-cement hoods. The hoods are very stylised, with an arch between two flat sections, creating a faux Serlian window. The hoods rest on thin brackets at either end. Many upper sashes retain geometric leadlights of clear glass.

The south side elevation also has a tripartite division, with arched openings near the front, highlight windows at the centre, and pairs of double-hung sash windows in box frames toward the rear. There are

similar windows on the north side elevation. Recent aerial photography, and some limited visibility from Bell Street, suggest that the block of three original garages survives at the south-east corner of the site.

There are some differences between the building permit plans and the building as constructed, including the size and position of the arched windows to the south side, and a porte-cochere to this elevation shown on the plans but not apparent in the 1945 aerial photo.

The building is in good condition and has a relatively high degree of external intactness. There have been some minor, mostly reversible external alterations to Maison Parisienne. These are the glazed infilling of porches to the south side of the façade, and replacement of the front fence.

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## Comparative analysis

Maison Parisienne is a good and intact example of Mediterranean flats which illustrate the work of Interwar designer-builders. The Mediterranean style appeared in Australia in the late 1910s in response to the temperate climate and sunlight, which were conducive to 'an architecture of simple shapes, light and shade, bleached pastel colours and accents of classical detail', according to Leslie Wilkinson, who helped popularise the style in Australia after his arrival in 1918. Through his influence, and that of architect Hardy Wilson, the style gained popularity and was first applied to domestic architecture in upper and upper-middle class suburbs. In the 1920s, many saw Mediterranean-based design as a potential basis for a future national style.

While related to the Spanish Mission style, the Mediterranean usually has subtler features, in a simple yet elegant form. Details take on an austere classical or Renaissance mode, which subtly evokes a vaguely Mediterranean feel, in comparison to the more blatant and bold Iberian features of Spanish Mission architecture. In particular, Interwar Mediterranean domestic architecture often incorporates pergolas, balconies, arcaded loggia and a formal entrance, with sidelights and highlights, while Tuscan columns appear in verandahs and porches. The walls are lightly bagged or cement-rendered. The more restrained examples of the Mediterranean share much with the Georgian Revival buildings of the day, sometimes to the point that the two influences cannot be unravelled in a single building.

By the 1930s the style had been popularised and entered the vocabulary of designer-builders and suburban developments. It moved away from its pared back and elegant beginnings and was often seen combined with a larger amount of classically inspired ornament.

There are many examples of this eclectic Mediterranean approach seen amongst flats built in Port Phillip in the late 1920s and 1930s, including a number constructed by the same builder, E Jennings, who built Maison Parisienne. Other individually significant Interwar flats of this variety included in the HO in St Kilda and Elwood include:

- Colombo Court, 52A Acland Street, St Kilda, built 1927 (Citation 389, HO5 Precinct). Constructed by Jennings & Co. (probably same as E Jennings & Co.).
- Harley Court, 52 Acland Street, St Kilda, built 1927 (Citation 390, HO5 Precinct). Constructed by E Jennings & Son.
- Corinthian, 5 Robe Street, St Kilda, built 1933 (Citation 789, HO5 Precinct). Constructed by E Jennings & Son.
- Shelley Court, 59 Shelley Street, Elwood built 1933 (Citation 805, HO8 Precinct). Constructed by E Jennings & Son.
- Wyndham, 20 Princes Street, St Kilda, built 1927 (Citation 781, HO5 Precinct). Designed by W H Merritt.
- Mount Tabor, 23 Dickens Street, Elwood, built 1936 (Citation 2081, St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs Precinct). Designed by Archibald Ikin.



Amongst the comparative examples listed above, Mount Tabor is the most characteristic example of the Mediterranean, featuring arcading and bottle balusters to balconies. The most idiosyncratic example is Bayton, which combines the typical roughcast rendered walls and arcaded balcony with the more unusual faux machicolation and Cordova tiles to the front parapet, Baroque-inspired mouldings above ground-floor windows, and scalloped render aprons and corbels beneath the first-floor windows.

E Jennings & Son's early flats, Colombo Court and Harley Court both of 1927, share common features such as chunky corbels beneath the oriel windows, which are also seen at Maison Parisienne. With Maison Parisienne, they introduced a key decorative feature that would become a hallmark of their flats in the 1930s: the abstracted serlian window hood, also used at Corinthian, and Shelley Court.

Maison Parisienne is closely comparable in its composition to E Jennings' Corinthian flats, as both buildings are rendered, have three storeys and front facades delineated in three bays. Both buildings use the serlian window hood to the left-hand bay, and a projecting element (curved balconies and canted bay windows, respectively) in the centre. They differ in their right-hand bays (plain eight-over-one windows at the Corinthian, instead of arched openings), and the use of a corner parapet at the Corinthian which rises above the hipped roof.

E Jennings employed the same serlian window hood at Shelley Court, as well as an abstracted triangular pediment above the entrance. This block of flats is two storeys and quite wide, giving it a restful, horizontal emphasis. The use of Tuscan columns to the entrance arcade and the first-floor balcony, and quoins to the corner give it a more Georgian Revival feel.

A similar serlian window hood is also used at Wyndham, designed by architect W H Merritt. This is a large, U-shaped block of flats with a front courtyard. It has a more sophisticated quality of detailing, with mouldings to the window hood and incised patterns below it, and semi-circular porch and balconies supported by Ionic columns.

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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 the following controls in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay:

- external paint controls (to ensure complementary colour schemes/finishes are employed)
- outbuilding controls for the garages (original garages)

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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



## Other images





## Area to be included in HO

