City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name:	**Ravelston**	**Citation No:**
Other names:	**-**	**371**

Address:	**17A Tennyson Street, Elwood**	**Heritage Precinct:**	**St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs**
Category:	**Residential: Mansion**	**Heritage Overlay:**	**HO7**
Style:	**Victorian: Italianate**	**Graded as:**	**Significant**
Constructed:	**1869-70, c.1896**	**Victorian Heritage Register:**	**No**
Designer:	**John F. Matthews**		
Amendment:	**TBA**		
Comment:	**Revised citation**		

Significance

What is significant?

Ravelston, designed by John F. Matthews and built in 1869-70 for Frederick William Heinecke, and its c.1896 additions at 17A Tennyson Street, Elwood is significant.

Non-original alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

Ravelston at 17A Tennyson Street, Elwood is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Ravelston is historically significant for its associations with the early residential development of this area, near the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. It is representative of the mansion estates that established the character of this area as a desirable residential neighbourhood in the nineteenth century. (Criterion A)

Ravelston is historically significant for its associations with the program established by the City of St Kilda, with the assistance of the State Government, to retain affordable housing in the municipality, which led to the creation of the St Kilda Housing Association. Ravelston was one of the first rooming houses managed by the Association, and the project led to the establishment of a joint five-year housing plan between the Council and the State Government, which commenced in June 1990 and increased the range of affordable rental accommodation for low-income residents in the St Kilda area. Ravelston continues to be managed by Housing First, the successor to the SKHA. (Criterion A)

Ravelston is of aesthetic significance as a fine example of a mid-Victorian mansion, demonstrating restraint in embellishment in contrast to later mansions built in this locale in the Land Boom that tended to be more ornate and have more pretence. Ravelston demonstrates in its restraint, fine proportions and its sparing use of embellishment is well-detailed, which includes rendered quoining at corners, chimneys with rendered panels, and canted bay windows. The verandah, which was reconstructed in 1990, is a faithful reconstruction of the original, using fabric salvaged from the earlier verandah. It contributes much to the exterior character of the house and its mid-Victorian charm. (Criterion E)

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 (5.3.1 Mansions and grand villas)

7. Governing: 7.4 Health and welfare (7.4.2 Community housing and development)

History

Contextual history

Private development in the City of Port Phillip began from the time of the first sales of Crown land in the 1840s and 1850s. The gradual development of infrastructure, including roads, public transport networks and utilities, paved the way for increasing development of private land. Private subdivision within the broad framework set out by Hoddle's survey saw neighbourhoods in the City of Port Phillip grow into populated, thriving communities (TEH).

Mansion estates – large, detached homes on generous allotments – defined early, permanent housing in Elwood and St Kilda, in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the oldest surviving houses in Elwood – such as Vautier House, built in the mid-1850s – are terrace houses, it was mansions on large allotments that came to characterise the neighbourhood in its early years. The estates were located in four distinct clusters: St Kilda Hill; the semi-rural estates occupying the high ground on the south side of Dandenong Road from the Nepean Road (now St Kilda Road) to Orrong Road; those surrounding the St Kilda Botanical Gardens and along Brighton Road; and the remote 'sea-side' estates along Ormond Esplanade. Kearney's 1855 map of the area shows the contrast between dense residential development in St Kilda, and the large mansion estates to the east of the Nepean Road including Charnwood and Marlton, south of

Carlisle Street (then known as Beach Road), and on both sides of Brighton Road, including Erindale and Chiverton, and Bramshaw, Osborne House and Wiltonia further south (TEH).

As demand for housing grew, mansion estate subdivisions commenced as early as the 1870s when part of the Charnwood Estate in St Kilda was subdivided to create Charnwood Crescent and Charnwood Grove, where detached villas were erected. The original mansion often survived the first two rounds of subdivision, only to be demolished by the interwar or post-war periods. Those that were retained on much smaller blocks of land were rarely used as single dwellings. Instead, many were converted into boarding houses or flats and this often ensured their survival. Examples include Eildon and Marlton in St Kilda and Rotherfield, Tiuna and Thalassa in Elwood. Others that were demolished are remembered in street names such as Charnwood Avenue, Cintra Avenue, and St Leonards Avenue (TEH).

By the 1980s, some St Kilda residents were alarmed at the increasing gentrification in the area. They were concerned that increasing land prices, rising rents, and subdivision and development of old boarding houses and hotels could leave many long-term local residents homeless. When the private boarding houses of the Regal, the Majestic and the Waldorf were sold to developers, one local paper identified that 160 people now faced eviction and homelessness. Unlike South Melbourne and Port Melbourne, there were not as many developments by the Housing Commission of Victoria in St Kilda. Community groups like Shout, the Rooming House Issues Group and the St Kilda Community Group banded together to raise public awareness, putting pressure on the council and lobbying to try and save long-term St Kilda residents from being squeezed out of their suburb. By 1986, community housing had become a priority for St Kilda Council (TEH).

Ravelston

The development of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens from c.1860 led to the surrounding area becoming a desirable residential neighbourhood. By the end of the nineteenth century Blessington, Tennyson, Dickens and Herbert streets were lined with substantial villas, and mansions set in large grounds.

This mansion, later known as Ravelston, was built for prominent wholesale and retail tobacconist Fredrick William Heinecke in 1869-70. The architect was John Felix Matthews who called tenders in January 1869 (*Argus*, 16 January 1869, p.3). Heinecke lived in the house until 1874, when he moved to Hartpury, situated diagonally opposite, which had been built almost a decade before for Captain Howard S. Smith. Ravelston and Hartpury were among several mansion estates established along Tennyson Street in the mid to late nineteenth century. The earliest of these are shown on the Vardy plans of St Kilda prepared in 1873.

The Vardy Plan No.9 (South Ward) shows Ravelston with a return verandah on the east and south sides, what appears to be the attached rear wing, and two brick outbuildings (see Figure 1). To the north of Ravelston at the corner of Dickens Street was Chesterfield. Between these properties was the Ascog estate, which extended from Tennyson to Southey streets. On the opposite side of Tennyson street was Bosslborn and another villa at the corner of Dickens Street. Hartpury is just out of view on this plan. Also not included on this plan are the mansions to the north of Dickens Street opposite the Botanical Gardens: Woodlands, Himalaya and Corinella.

Not shown on the Vardy plans are the mansions built later, which included Evora, established c.1875 at the northeast corner of Tennyson and Milton streets directly opposite Ravelston, Rotherfield (1890-91) to the south of Bosslborn, Pladda (c.1890) at the northeast corner of Dickens Street, and Bundalohn (1884-5) further north between Woodlands and Himalaya.
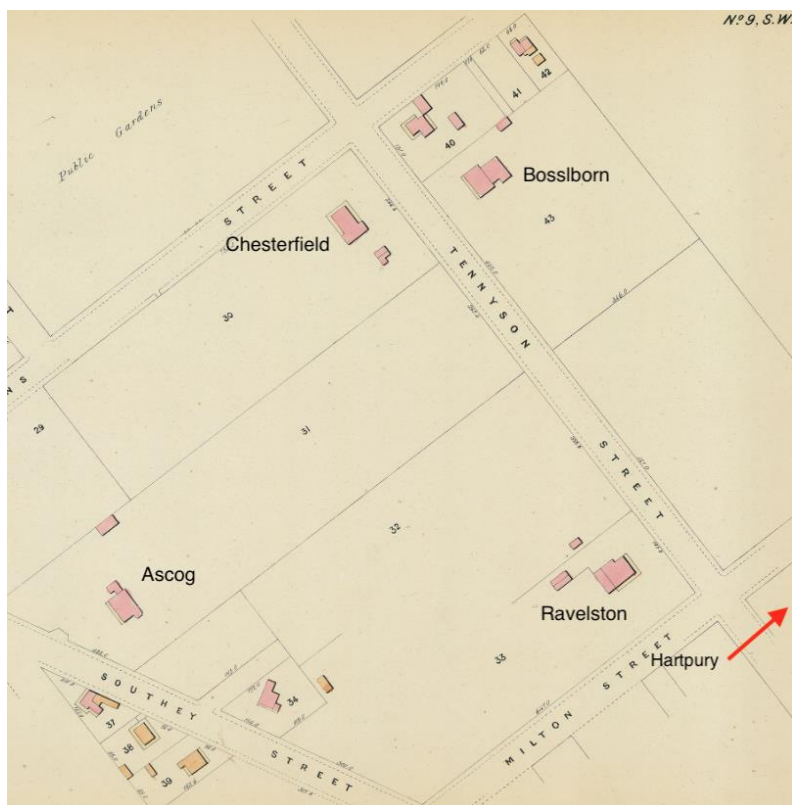
Figure 1: Vardy Plan South Ward No.9 (detail) with annotations listing the names of the mansions

William Kennedy, squatter, was the next owner of Ravelston but he also did not remain long, selling the house in 1877. Then known as the Salerno Estate, the auction notice described Kennedy's house as a 'large, commodious and elegant family residence' and called attention to the 'very desirable position' close to the public gardens, proximity to St Kilda and Balaclava railway stations and surrounded by 'first-class residences':

*The house - approached by a neat carriage drive - is most substantially built of brick, on bluestone foundations, and a slated roof, with verandah and elegant balcony, over 100ft. long, from which there is a splendid view. On Ground Floor. Large entrance hall, three elegant and commodious reception rooms. On First Floor. Large and convenient bedrooms, dressing and bathrooms, day and night nurseries, with every domestic and convenient requirement suitable for a gentleman's residence. (*Argus*, 14 April 1877, p.2)*

By 1884 William Calder was the owner and it may have been he who bestowed the name 'Ravelston' upon the property. In 1887 when the nearby Salerno estate subdivision (comprising villa sites in Southey, Milton, Browning and Dryden streets) was once again offered for sale it was described as being in 'The most Select and Fashionable part of St Kilda … adjoining the Mansion and Park of Gavin Gibson Esq. (Ascog) and the Mansion and Charming Grounds of W.H. Calder, Esq. (Ravelston)' (*The Argus*, 8 January 1887, p.2 Advertising).

Calder extended the mansion c.1896, which increased in size from nine to 14 rooms (RB) and this is shown on the 1905 MMBW plan (see Figure 2), which also depicts the extensive landscaped grounds extending from Tennyson Street to Browning Street. The main entry was via a circular carriage drive leading from the corner of Tennyson and Milton streets, while a second pedestrian entry led directly from Tennyson Street to the portico added c.1896. Surrounding the mansion was a tennis court, a network of pathways and hedges and several outbuildings.

The Calder family were prominent members of Melbourne's upper-class society and regularly hosted many functions for 100 guests or more at Ravelston. Mrs. Calder was known as a fine hostess:

When she entertains Mrs. Calder does so most successfully, and on this occasion those present left with a feeling of having spent a delightful few hours in the company of a charming hostess. (*The Australasian*, 3 May 1913, p.37 'Tea at Ravelston).

When their youngest daughter Evelyn was married in 1904 the reception was held at Ravelston in a marquee on the lawn where the health of the bridge and groom was proposed by the then Premier of Victoria, Mr Irvine (*Punch*, 11 February 1904, p.24).
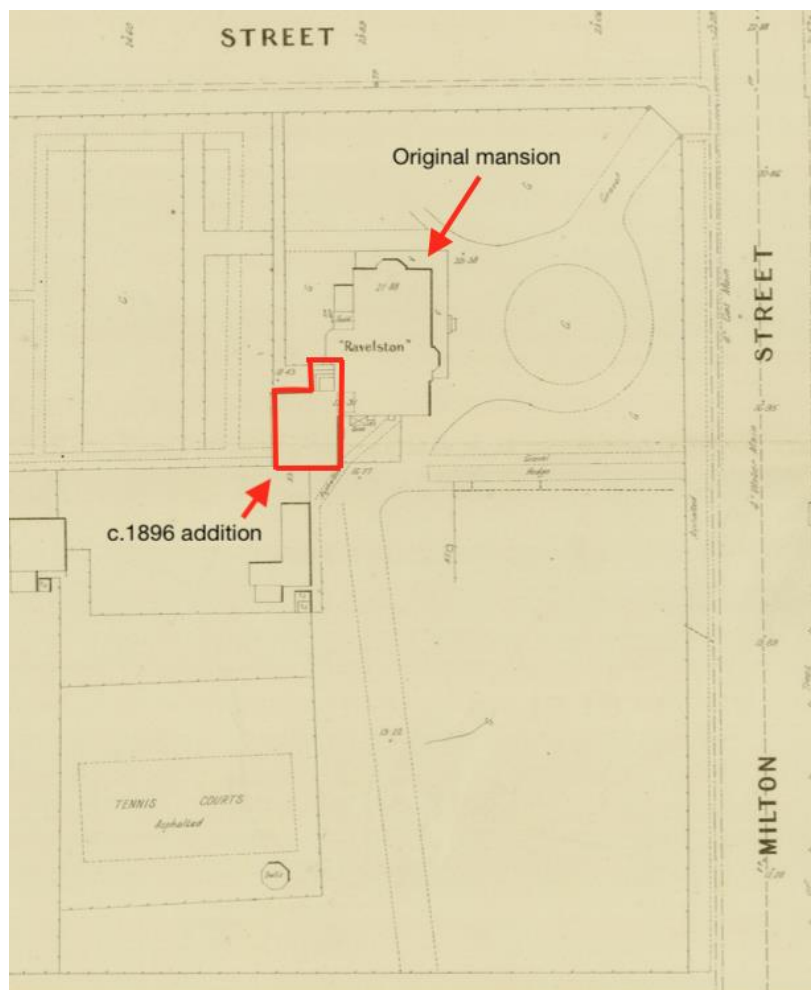

Figure 2: Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan No.1385 (detail)

In 1915 the Ravelston estate was subdivided and offered for sale. The mansion was retained on a 1.5 acre allotment and 12 building sites were created fronting to Tennyson, Milton and Browning streets (*The Herald*, 7 October 1915, p.9 'Tennyson and Milton streets, St Kilda'). The Ravelston allotment had its primary frontage to Milton Street with a narrow secondary frontage to Tennyson Street aligned with the path shown on the 1905 MMBW plan. From c.1920s onwards Ravelston was listed under Milton Street in the directories and by 1925 had been converted to flats with seven residents listed (SM).

In 1947 flats were built on the Milton Street frontage. An original proposal envisaged the demolition of Ravelston and the construction of an elongated block fronting to Milton Street. In the end, only the three storey brick block containing nine flats now at 28 Milton Street was constructed for the owner, A.H. Sicree. Bernard Evans was the architect (BP).

The next chapter in Ravelston's history began in 1987 when a joint venture agreement between St Kilda City Council (SKCC) and the Ministry of Housing & Construction (MHC) was developed to develop and use the property for various types of rental housing accommodation for elderly persons, singles, couples and families. Specifically, the agreement provided for the construction of elderly persons units on vacant parts of the land, the conversion of Ravelston to a rooming house, and lease of the flats at 28 Milton Street

to Council. Ravelston and the flats were to be managed by the newly formed St Kilda Housing Association (SKHA). The project was jointly funded by the SKCC, and State and Federal Governments using funds from the Rooming House Program and the Local Government Community Housing Program (Ravelston Council File).

The refurbishment of Ravelston was designed by architect Lindsay Holland with expert advice provided by the Historic Buildings Branch (HBB) of the MHC and Council's heritage adviser, Robert Sands, in relation to the restoration and reconstruction of the building. On the advice of the HBB and Mr Sands many original features were restored or reconstructed, and an appropriate paint scheme was developed. Internally, this included decorative skirtings, architraves, and ceiling decoration. Externally, non-significant additions were removed, the façade was repaired and restored, and the elaborately decorated timber verandah was reconstructed with input of the HBB (see Figure 3), which noted the enclosed space at the north end of the verandah was formed using louvered shutters that may have been taken from the building itself (this feature was retained) (Ravelston Council File).

Figure 3: At left, building plans showing the reconstructed verandah (Source: Ravelston Council File) and, at right, an image of the verandah c.1985 (Source: Bick, 1985)

Construction commenced in July 1989 and completed by November 1990 at a cost of $1.5 million. Upon completion Ravelston contained 19 sole occupancy rooms (17 singles and two doubles) with shared facilities and a self-contained flat for the manager (Ravelston Council File).

The refurbished Ravelston Rooming House was officially opened on Wednesday, 6 March 1991 by Andrew McCutcheon M.L.A., State Minister for Housing, assisted by Cr. John Enticott and the Mayor of St Kilda, Cr. Melanie Eagles, Gary Spivak, Housing Development Officer, City of St Kilda, and Karen Barnett of the St Kilda Housing Association (Ravelston Council File).

In the 1991 R.V.I.A. architecture awards Ravelston was the recipient of an award in the Residential Renovation and Extension category (Ravelston Council File).

The Ravelston project also led to a joint five-year housing plan between SKCC and the State Government, which commenced in June 1990. The plan aimed to increase the range of affordable rental accommodation for low-income residents who have traditionally lived in the St Kilda area, by generating about $15 million in local and State Government funds to provide about 160 rental units. SKCC contributed at least $660,000 each year with the contribution increasing over the five year period to a total of $5 million. The State Government committed two dollars for every dollar spent by the Council (Ravelston Council File).

The rooming house at Ravelston and the flats at 28 Milton Street were among the first properties acquired by the SKHA and followed the acquisition of Broxted, the former residence of prominent architect and developer Howard Lawson, in Dandenong Road in 1987, which became the first rooming house managed by the Association (Housing First website).

The SKHA was created after community pressure was applied to the former City of St Kilda to stop the loss of affordable housing and followed the successful establishment of the St Kilda Community Housing

Program in the previous year. The purpose was to provide secure and affordable community rental housing for local residents with long-term links to the area and who were eligible for public housing. The program became 'a tangible expression of a community culture supportive of social diversity and inclusiveness' (Housing First website).

The Association's role was to undertake property and tenancy management of the housing program projects, which grew steadily in number and included existing taking over existing rooming or boarding houses as well as purpose built facilities. When St Kilda became part of the City of Port Phillip in 1994 the Council resolved to continue its direct provision and development of community housing. Subsequently, the St Kilda Housing Association changed its name to the Port Phillip Housing Association in 2001 and is now known as Housing First. Ravelston and 28 Milton Street are now managed by Housing First and in 2021 were among over 1200 properties in the Association's portfolio (Housing First website).

John F. Matthews

John Felix Matthews (1810-1896) architect and surveyor practised in Melbourne between 1852 and 1896. After arriving in Melbourne in 1852 he worked in the office of architect, Charles Laing until he commenced practice on his own in 1855. Matthews designed a range of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings, nearly all in inner Melbourne. He also designed several buildings for the Presbyterian church at Richmond, Ballan, and Bacchus Marsh (Tibbits).

In the City of Port Phillip, the first stage of Oberwyl, constructed c.1856 at 33-35 Burnett Street, St Kilda, for John Gomez Silva, is attributed to Matthews.

References

Bick, David & Wilson Sayer Core Pty Ltd, *St Kilda Conservation Study, Area 2*, 1985

City of Port Phillip, 'Milton St Joint Housing Venture – Milton Street Housing Project' (Record No. E110344/21) (Ravelston Council File)

Housing First website: https://www.housingfirst.org.au/about (viewed 31 March 2021)

J.E.S. Vardy, surveyor, 'Plan of the Borough of Kilda' complied under the direction of the Borough Council Hamel and Ferguson, Melbourne, 1873, map number 9 South Ward

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan no.1385, dated 1905

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) Version 1, July 2020

St Kilda Council building permit (BP) no. U.233, 28 August 1946

St Kilda Council rate books (RB) 1895 (no. in rate 1916), 1897 (1928)

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1920-1950

Tibbits, George, 'Biographical index of Australian architects', n.d., Faculty of Architecture & Building, University of Melbourne, viewed online (9 August 2021) https://issuu.com/graemebutler21/docs/architects_bios-_tibbits

Description

Ravelston, is a large, mid-Victorian, two-storey, mansion, mostly concealed by surrounding built form erected after its grounds were subdivided in 1915. The front elevation of the house faces south, towards Milton Street, and is now concealed by a block of flats in that street.

Ravelston has a hip roof, clad in slate tiles on the front portion of the house (apart from the valleys clad in corrugated steel sheeting). There are three rendered brick chimneys with panels on their shafts, and expressive rendered mouldings on their tops. The hip roofs of the early additions to the house are clad in corrugated steel sheeting.

The walls of the house are rendered brick, with a rendered quoining detail at the corners. The house has timber frame double-hung sash windows, some arranged in tripartite arrangements on the ground floor,

and single on the first floor, and in three canted bay windows. A two-storey timber verandah extends across the south elevation, and returns along the east (side) elevation. The verandah, was built in c1990 and is a reconstruction of the original verandah, using some timber members and cast ironwork salvaged from the earlier one. It has paired timber posts at corners, and single intermediate posts. Timber fretwork is relieved in places on the verandah with cast iron filigree that is set in timber framework. The base of the verandah is finished in timber boards. The porch to the secondary entrance facing toward Tennyson Street is supported on Tuscan columns and has a parapetted roof with cornice.

Minor alterations and additions have been made to the house, but it retains much of its early character. Some window openings on the addition have been replaced with glass blocks, and steel stairs have been added, which are less responsive to the original character of the house.

Otherwise Ravelston is in good condition and has a relatively high degree of external integrity.

Comparative analysis

By the boom of the 1880s, many mansions were built in the Italianate style and were asymmetrical in plan, often with projecting bayed windows and corner towers. They featured elaborate cement decoration and two-storey cast iron or colonnaded verandahs. Surviving examples in the South Melbourne area include Airlie and Ulimaroa in St Kilda Road and Lanark and Netherby House in Queens Road, while in St Kilda and Elwood there are Halcyon, Rotherfield, Ravelston, Tiuna and Thalassa. Bendigonia in Queens Road is an unusual example of the Picturesque Gothic style.

Earlier mansions, built prior to 1880, by comparison were characterised by more restrained and subtle decoration, and simple, often symmetrical massing.

The mansions were usually set within spacious grounds with landscaped formal gardens and were accessed by a carriage driveway. Most included a complex of outbuildings, including stables. Later re-subdivision has resulted in the loss of most original gardens, although sometimes remnant buildings or trees remain on the same or sometimes different lots. For example, while the Hammerdale mansion was demolished, two trees from its once extensive gardens – a palm and a stone pine – survive in the rear yards of houses on the west side of Hammerdale Avenue, St Kilda (TEH).

Most of the pre-1880 mansions or large villas in the area surrounding and to the south of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens have been demolished (for example, Ascog), or significantly altered and converted to flats (for example, Himalaya at 10 Tennyson Street). Other surviving examples, all situated on allotments that have been reduced by subdivision from the original, include:

- Barnesfield House (c.1860), 3 & 3A Mitchell Street, St Kilda (No citation). Two storey rendered brick villa with reconstructed timber verandah. Converted to two residences.

- Hartpury (c.1865, Crouch & Wilson) 9 Milton Street, Elwood (Citation 2098). Two storey rendered brick mansion. Reconstructed cast iron verandah and major additions to the rear.

- Wimbledon (1869) 2 Wimbledon Avenue, Elwood (Citation 2299). Two storey rendered brick mansion with two storey cast iron verandah. Converted to flats and extended.

- Whin Bank (1875-76, J.A.B. Koch) 34 Mitford Street, Elwood (No citation). Two storey rendered brick mansion with arcaded verandah and pediment to projecting bay. Converted to flats and extended.

Ravelston is a fine example of a mid-Victorian mansion, demonstrating restraint in embellishment in contrast to later mansions built in this locale in the Land Boom that tended to be more ornate and have more pretence. Ravelston demonstrates in its restraint, fine proportions and its sparing use of embellishment is well-detailed, which includes rendered quoining at corners, chimneys with rendered panels, and canted bay windows. The verandah, which was reconstructed in 1990, is a faithful reconstruction of the original, using fabric salvaged from the earlier verandah. It contributes much to the exterior character of the house and its mid-Victorian charm. Compared to the above examples, all of which have major additions, it has higher integrity overall.

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.

Recommendations

Retain in the Heritage Overlay with external paint controls.

Primary source

Peter Andrew Barrett, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations*, 2021

Other studies

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

Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, *St Kilda 20th century architectural study*, Volume 3, 1992

Other images