

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: Himalaya
Other names: Mansion, Flats

Citation No:
932



Address: 10 Tennyson Street, St Kilda

Category: Residential: Flats

Style: Victorian, Interwar

Constructed: 1878, 1922

Designer: Smith & Johnson or Alfred T. Snow (1878)

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Heritage Precinct: St Kilda
Botanical Gardens & Environs

Heritage Overlay: HO7

Graded as: Significant

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Significance

What is significant?

Himalaya, constructed in 1878 for Alfred T. Snow and converted to flats in 1922, at 10 Tennyson Street, St Kilda is significant. Himalaya comprises the two-storey Victorian era mansion, which has rendered walls with decorative quoining to the corners. The symmetrical façade has tripartite windows to the ground floor on either side of the arched timber entry door, and timber sash windows elsewhere. The entry door has sidelights and highlights, and a distinctive detail is the pair of parallel incised lines in the reveals on either side. The hipped roof, now clad in corrugated iron, has a central gablet with a circular window flanked by incised triangles and several rendered chimneys with ornate detailing. Overlaid upon the mansion is the two-level interwar verandah/balcony that returns along the north side, which replaced the original front verandah shown on the MMBW plan. The verandah and access stairs have balustrades with textured render panels and are supported by plain square rendered stepped columns, which in the verandah are paired at the centre below the roof gablet, emphasising the symmetry (these central piers have low balustrades marking the main entry). The verandah piers have pyramidal caps. The flat roof has deep eaves with visible rafter tails. The simplicity of the design and materials reflects the influence of the Arts & Crafts style with the only decorative flourish being the bow shaped balconette at first floor level, which features 'Himalaya' in a decorative script.

The rendered fence along the front boundary is also contributory. It has flat-capped piers, with textured render to the balustrades and a diamond motif at the centre with the number '10'. The taller piers at the driveway openings have 'IN' (north end) and 'OUT' (south end) in raised letters. The openings lead to the half-circular driveway in front of the flats.

The 1959 building, and the 2008 alterations and additions to the 1878/1922 building are not significant.

How is it significant?

Himalaya at 10 Tennyson Street, St Kilda is of local historic, representative, and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

Himalaya is of historical significance as a place that is associated with two key phases of residential development in St Kilda: the establishment of mansion estates for the wealthy in the late nineteenth century and the conversion of these buildings into flats in the early twentieth century as the social demographics of the area changed. It demonstrates the enduring popularity of the residential area surrounding the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. (Criterion A)

Himalaya is significant as a representative example of a Victorian mansion converted to flats during the interwar period, which is a distinctive building type in St Kilda. The resulting design, where the two stages of building remain evident and clearly legible forms part of the stylistically diverse collection of interwar flats in St Kilda. (Criterion D)

Himalaya is of aesthetic significance as a substantial block of mansion flats in a garden setting, which is complemented by the interwar era front fence, and the half-circular driveway. Notable details include the finely detailed cement ornamentation to the chimneys and the bowed balconette front at the centre of the first floor verandah with 'Himalaya' in raised decorative script. (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 (5.3.5 Higher-density housing)

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.

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.

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.

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).

Himalaya

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

Himalaya was constructed in 1878 for Alfred T. Snow. When first listed in the St Kilda rate books it was described as a 11-room brick house with cellar, valued at £100 (RB). The design has been attributed to Smith & Johnson based on some of the original detailing (See Bick, 1984), but it is also possible that Snow who was an architect (employed by the Public Works Department) could have been responsible for the design. Snow lived in the mansion initially but by 1881 it was leased to J.G. Farmer, a Judge's Associate (RB). Later occupiers included the St Kilda Grammar School under Thomas Howell, Principal, the Hon. James Campbell M.L.C. (c.1885-1890), and the Hon. Edward B. Hamilton, a judge (c.1895-1905).

Himalaya was one of five mansions constructed along the east side of Tennyson Street between Blessington and Dickens Street in the nineteenth century. The others included an unnamed residence at the corner of Blessington Street, Bundalohn (c.1884, 1888, designed by Reed, Henderson & Smart) immediately to the north of Himalaya, Corinella and Pladda at the corner of Dickens Street.

In 1922 the mansion was converted into flats for then owner, Colman Liefman. W.R. Munchre was the builder (BP).

In 1959 a two-storey building containing two additional flats was constructed in the front garden adjacent to the south side boundary (BP).

The complex was refurbished in 2008 and major additions were built to the rear of the 1878/1922 building and the 1959 building.

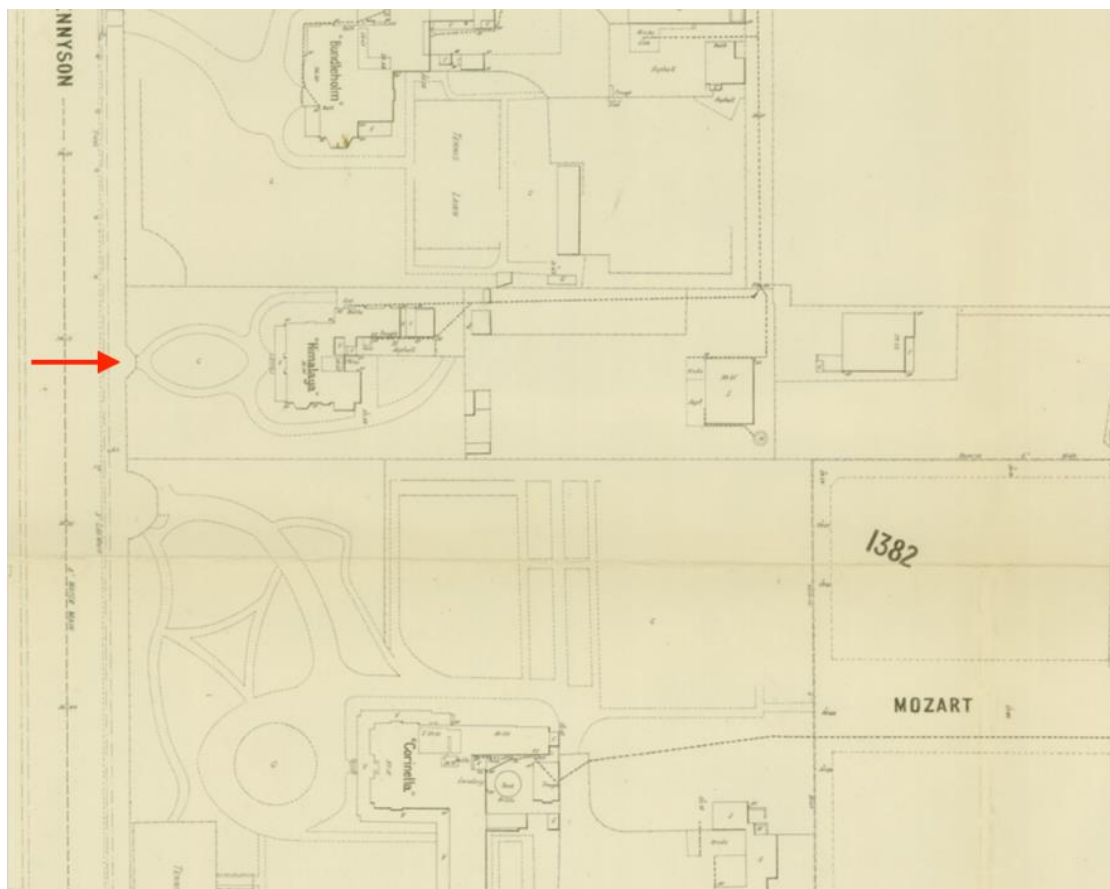


Figure 1: Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Detail Plan No. 1382 (extract) dated 1897. Himalaya indicated by red arrow with Bundalohn to the north and Corinella to the south.

References

Bick, David, *St Kilda Conservation Study Area 2*, 1984

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan no. 1438, dated 1898

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

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

St Kilda Council building permits (BP) no. 4936, 10 August 1922; 57/864, 28 August 1959

St Kilda Council rate books 1878 (no. in rate 1289, 11 rooms, £100), 1879 (1301, 11 rooms, £130), 1880 (1315, £148).

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM) 1925, 1930

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

Description

The core of Himalaya is the two-storey Victorian era mansion, which has rendered walls with decorative quoining to the corners. The symmetrical façade has tripartite windows to the ground floor on either side of the arched entry door, and timber sash windows elsewhere. The entry door has sidelights and highlights, and a distinctive detail is the pair of parallel incised lines in the reveals on either side. The hipped roof, now

clad in corrugated iron, has a central gablet with a circular window flanked by incised triangles. Of note is the sophisticated chimney treatment, which resembles extruded segmental pediments.

Overlaid upon the mansion is the two-level interwar verandah/balcony that returns along the north side, which replaced the original front verandah shown on the MMBW plan. The verandah and access stairs have balustrades with textured render panels and are supported by plain square rendered stepped columns, which in the verandah are paired at the centre below the roof gablet, emphasising the symmetry (these central piers have low balustrades marking the main entry). The verandah piers have pyramidal caps. The flat roof has deep eaves with visible rafter tails. The simplicity of the design and materials reflects the influence of the Arts & Crafts style with the only decorative flourish being the bow shaped balconette at first floor level, which features 'Himalaya' in a decorative script..

Along the front boundary is a rendered fence with similar detailing to the verandah (and is very similar to the front fence of the house to the north at no.8). It has flat-capped piers, with textured render to the balustrades and a diamond motif at the centre with the number '10'. The taller piers at the driveway openings have 'IN' (north end) and 'OUT' (south end) in raised letters. The openings lead to the half-circular driveway in front of the flats.

The front garden contains a mature Cedar, but it is in poor condition.

Himalaya is in good condition and has a relatively high degree of external integrity to the interwar period.

The 1959 building is to one side and does not obscure views to Himalaya and the 2008 additions at the rear are almost fully concealed from view.

Comparative analysis

Most of the nineteenth century mansions in the area surrounding and to the south of the St Kilda Botanic Gardens have been demolished (for example, Ascog, Corinella, Pladda), or significantly altered and converted to flats (see below). The most intact surviving example is the former Rotherfield at 14 Hennessy Avenue (Citation 336). While it was converted to flats, the elaborate boom-era exterior remains largely intact. Other surviving examples, apart from Himalaya, which have all been converted to flats, include:

- Hartpury (c.1865, Crouch & Wilson) 9 Milton Street, Elwood (Citation 2098, Individual HO191). Two storey rendered Italianate. Verandah rebuilt and significant additions to the side and rear.
- Ravelston (1869-70, John F. Matthews), 17a Tennyson Street, Elwood (Citation 371). Two storey rendered Italianate. Verandah reconstructed.
- Wimbledon Mansions (1870), 2 Wimbledon Avenue, Elwood (Citation 2299). Two storey rendered Italianate, asymmetrical in plan with projecting bay and cast iron return verandah.
- Whin Bank (1875-76, 1890-91, J.A.B. Koch) 34 Mitford Street, Elwood (No citation). Asymmetrical with arcaded return verandah and projecting bay with decorated pediment.

As a nineteenth century terrace row converted to flats in the early twentieth century, Himalaya is representative of a distinctive St Kilda building type. 'Conversions' were among the earliest flat types to emerge in Port Phillip and according to Sawyer (1982:61) the poor quality of some brought flats 'into disrepute'. Sawyer cites a 1923 *Australian Home Builder* article that was highly critical of the practice:

Take any old house, dress up the front with a coat of roughcast and an outside staircase; insert a bathroom and lavatory somewhere on the upper floors, also a stove and a sink. If there is room at the back, add a back verandah – platform rather – to the upper floor...

However, at the other end of the scale there were also several conversions of exceptional quality such as the 1911 transformation of the former *Cliveden* in East Melbourne into *Cliveden Mansion Flats*. Many of these transformative conversions were designed by architects.

Port Phillip has examples of both types of conversions. One of the earliest examples of a terrace row conversion is 'Marli Place', 3-7 The Esplanade, St Kilda, which was converted to flats around 1911 (Significant within HO5). This is an example of a basic conversion with prominent external staircases being the most visible change. Otherwise, the terrace largely retains its mid-Victorian character.

Examples of more sophisticated architect-designed terrace conversions include Grosvenor Mansions (1919, plans prepared by Howard R. Lawson) at 74-88 William Street, Balaclava (Individually Significant within HO7) and Carnong Courts (1926, plans prepared by A & K Henderson) at 29-33 Robe Street, St Kilda (Individually Significant within HO5). Both have Arts & Crafts detailing, and Carnong Court is notable for the arrangement of semi-enclosed stairwell towers at the front of the building as an integral and distinctive part of the design.

Himalaya is a good example of a mansion to flats conversion where the two architectural layers remain clearly legible and overall, the building has good integrity to the 1920s and is complemented by the front fence. In the other examples in the surrounding precinct there is little external evidence of the conversion process - at Hartpury a new rendered balcony added during the interwar period when it was converted to flats was demolished and replaced by the present cast iron verandah, which is based on the original nineteenth century design.

The design of Himalaya in the nineteenth century has been attributed to Smith & Johnson due to overall austerity of the design and one of their 'trademarks', a pair of parallel incised lines, in this case located adjacent to the original entrance door (Bick). If Himalaya is a design by Smith & Johnson, the alterations mean that it is not an outstanding example of their domestic work. In the City of Port Phillip, the only other known building by Smith & Johnson is the former Elmwood at 29 Chapel Street, St Kilda, which now forms part of St Michael's Grammar School. It is relatively intact. Other examples outside of the municipality include Bailleau (now St Catherines School) Heyington Place Toorak, and Carmyle, Carmyle Place, Toorak.

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 as a Significant place within the St Kilda Botanical Gardens & Environs heritage precinct. Specific controls (external painting, internal alterations etc.) are not required.

Primary source

City of Port Phillip, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations (Part 2)*, 2022

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



