

# City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

**Place name:** Benshemesh Flats Group Listing I  
(1948-1954)

**Other names:** Barkly Lodge, Burnett Lodge, Francelaw Flats

**Citation No:**  
2444

**INSERT MAP**



**Address:** 289 Barkly Street & 11 Burnett Street, St Kilda and 62 Hotham Street & 38 Westbury Street, St Kilda East.

**Heritage Precinct:** St Kilda Hill (11 Burnett Street)

**Heritage Overlay:** TBC

**Category:** Residential: Flats

**Graded as:** Significant

**Style:** Postwar: Functionalist

**Victorian Heritage Register:** No

**Constructed:** Late 1940s to early 1950s

**Designer:** Mordecai Benshemesh

**Amendment:** TBC

**Comment:** New citation

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## Significance

### *What is significant?*

The Benshemesh Flats Group Listing I (1948-1954) comprising four separate blocks of flats, constructed during the late 1940s to early 1950s, at 289 Barkly Street & 11 Burnett Street, St Kilda and 62 Hotham Street & 38 Westbury Street, St Kilda East – all designed by the émigré architect Mordecai Benshemesh (or, in the case of 62 Hotham Street, presumed to have been designed by Benshemesh) - is significant.

All four buildings are intact, are three storey, and have (predominantly) cream brick walls, cuboid forms, and steel-framed openings. The flat roofs are concealed by parapets and are partly or fully traversable. Three (62 Hotham Street, 289 Barkly Street, 11 Burnett Street) retain original low front fences, and 38 Westbury Street has a likely original brick bay with letterboxes.

62 Hotham Street (*Francelaw Flats*), comprised of 12 flats, was designed in 1948 and constructed by Harry Kinsman in 1948-49. It is comprised of two offset blocks. There is a taller stairwell bay with an elongated, vertically orientated window. Horizontally is emphasised by rendered banding and the wide windows, including corner windows, which have horizontal glazing bars. There are also porthole windows at the front. Corner balconies supported by steel poles have a cantilevered concrete deck and brick balustrade.

38 Westbury Street, comprised of 23 flats, was designed in 1951 and constructed by Harry Kinsman in 1951-52. It has a T-shaped footprint, with the greater part of the building positioned to the rear of the site. The entry bays are recessed and do not project above the main parapet. The balconies have a concrete deck and brick balustrade with a metal rail.

11 Burnett Street (*Burnett Lodge*), comprised of 20 flats, was designed in 1951 and constructed by G Trencher in 1951-52. It has a broadly 'U' shaped footprint. The prominent taller stairwell bay has narrow horizontal bands of windows. The long walkways have brick balustrades and concrete decks.

289 Barkly Street, comprised of 19 flats, was designed in 1953 and constructed by J Trencher in 1953-54. It has a rectangular footprint. There is a taller stairwell bay with an elongated, vertically orientated window. The balconies and galleries have concrete decks and metal balustrades with vertical balusters, the latter also have steel poles.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

### *How is it significant?*

The Benshemesh Flats Group Listing I (1948-1954) is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it significant?*

The Benshemesh Flats Group Listing I (1948-1954) is historically significant as part of the extensive flat building program that has characterised much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of the municipality but especially this part of St Kilda East/St Kilda and which gained pace after World War II with the introduction of the Own-Your-Own (OYO) option. As was common, the flats either replaced earlier Victorian period houses or were built in excised sections of their grounds. The flat typology evolved with the work of several émigré architects, who were responsible for a high proportion of the architect-designed examples and who often worked with Jewish developers. These imbued the area with a more progressive, International character, and which was supported by the local, often Jewish, community. The group also have associations with the architect Mordecai Beshemesh, 'Mr Highrise', who was prolific in this domain but also at the forefront of flat design. (Criterion A)

The Benshemesh Flats Group Listing I (1948-1954) is of aesthetic significance as a distinctive group of flats by the Palestinian born émigré architect Mordecai Benshemesh. They are fine examples of the Functionalist style and are distinguished from the work of other architects in the municipality, particularly in terms of the boldness of their massing. There is a slight shift in the external palette to the four blocks over the time period, with the two earlier buildings (1948 and 1951) being partly red brick, whereas the two later buildings (1953 and 1954) are completely cream brick, possibly reflecting the higher cost of cream bricks, especially in the immediate postwar years when materials were rationed. The three surviving original front fences contribute to the setting of the flats. (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)

## 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 (Prahran 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).

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.

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

In an article entitled, 'St Kilda Grows as Flat Centre' the zeitgeist was captured (Argus 27 Apr 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 increase by 10,000 people at a time when the populations of other inner-city suburbs were declining (TEH).

## 62 Hotham Street, St Kilda East – Francelaw Flats

The site at 62 Hotham Street formed part of Crown portion 161A at East St Kilda Parish of Prahran, County of Bourke. The approximately five-acre allotment was purchased by J Sutherland in or after 1857 (PP).

The 1900 MMBW plan (Figure 1) shows a seven-roomed weatherboard house upon the subject site which at that time was owned and occupied by Mary Castieau (RB 1900 no. 1523).

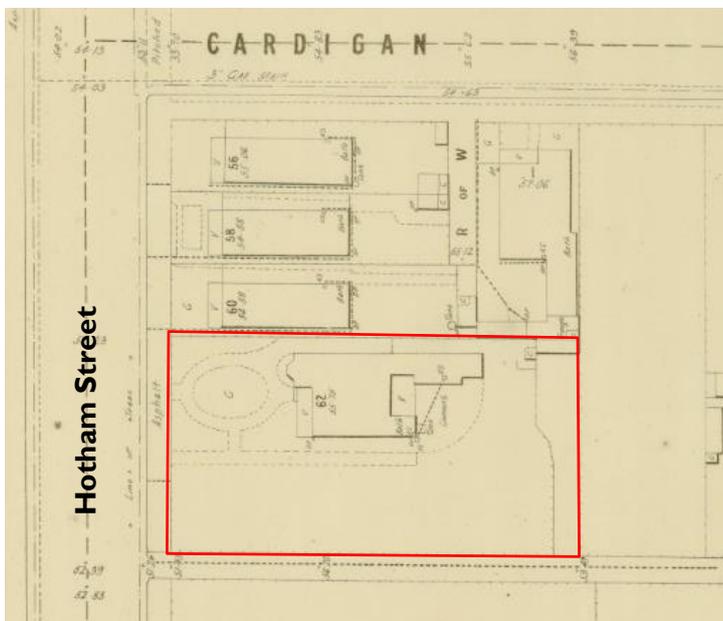


Figure 1 - MMBW detail plan no. 1420, dated 1900 (Source: State Library of Victoria)

In 1948, the subject site was acquired by married couple Leon and Rachel Lipp of 40 Southey Street Elwood (CT v.7180 f.802). Leon and Rachel were post-war Romanian immigrants (Age 27 Apr 1953 p6). In 1949, three others joined the Lippes in ownership of the site: June Surkis, timber merchant and Leo Malcolm

Lawrence, sawmiller, both of 40 Southey Street (that is, the same apartment block as the Lipps), and Simon Grace, sawmiller, of 55 Spencer Street St Kilda (CT v.7261 f.197).

In October 1948, Council issued a permit for a three-storey building containing 11 flats, estimated to cost £22,000 (BP U598). The builder was Harry Kinsman of Kensington. The owner named on the permit was the Record Timber Company (apparently represented by the owners named on the certificate of title), which was based in East Brunswick (SM). In August 1949, a second permit was issued for an additional flat, estimated to cost £2,700 (BP U732). In April 1951, a third permit was issued for a brick garage, estimated to cost £1250 (BP U1086).

Although the original building plans are not available, and the designer has not been confirmed, it is considered highly likely that the architect Mordecai Benshemesh is responsible based on the similarities with other known contemporary examples of Benshemesh's work, both in the municipality (see comparative analysis) and outside (for example, flats at 124 Balaclava Road, North Caulfield built in 1950-51). Furthermore, Benshemesh is also known to have worked with the builder Harry Kinsman on other projects including the aforementioned flats at 124 Balaclava Road, and 38 Westbury Street, St Kilda East (see below).

Following completion, the flats were leased. At least some of the early tenants were European émigrés from countries such as Hungary, Poland and Romania (Age 3 Jun 1954 p17; 4 May 1954 p18; 16 Jul 1953 p7). Between 1957 and 1958, ownership was transferred in stages to St Ninian P/L of 60 Market Street Melbourne (CT v.8198 f.838; v.8198 f.887; v.8178 f.453).

### 38 Westbury Street, St Kilda East

The site formed part of Crown portion 150A and 150B Parish of Prahran, County of Bourke. The approximately five-acre allotments were purchased by T Fulton L Mackinnon & F Sargood (150A) and R B Chomley (150B) in November 1853 (PP).

The 1897 MMBW plan (Figure 2) shows that the subject site formed part of the grounds of a nine-roomed brick house at no. 44 and other land to the rear (RB 1897 Jan. nos 1184 and 1185).

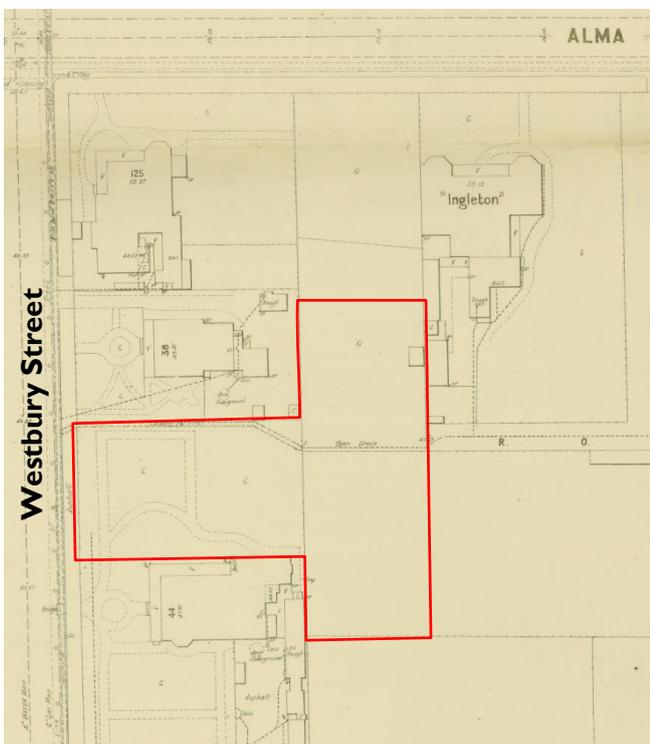


Figure 2 - MMBW detail plan no. 1408 dated 1897. Approximate boundaries of 38 Westbury Street are indicated. (Source: State Library of Victoria)

In 1948, Charles and Fay Brooks of 317 Orrong Road East St Kilda acquired the land associated with the subject site and additional land amounting to approximately 1¼ acres on the east side of Westbury Street (CT v.7100 f.886). Charles (Chaskiel), an importer, and his wife Fay (Faiga) were Polish-born immigrants who were closely involved with Melbourne's Jewish community (*Australian Jewish News* 13 Dec 1963 p20; 17 Jan 1964 p12).

The Brooks' engaged architect Mordecai Benshemesh to design a three-storey building containing 23 flats which is illustrated on plans dated March 1951 (Figure 3). Harry Kinsman was the builder (BP U.1134).

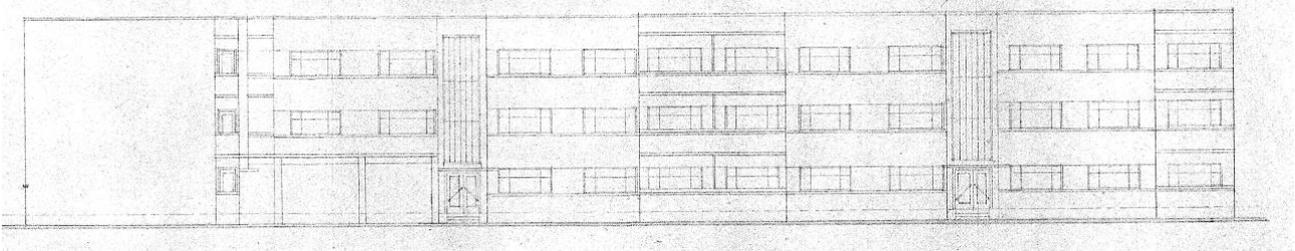


Figure 3 - North elevation (Mordecai Benshemesh, 1951) (Source: Council Building File)

Following completion, the Brookses retained ownership of the building and the flats were leased. At least some of the early tenants were European émigrés from countries such as Germany and Poland (*Age* 16 Jul 1953 p7; 6 May 1954 p17; 22 Apr 1955 p20).

## 11 Burnett Street, St Kilda – Burnett Lodge

The site formed part of Crown portions 25 and 26 at St Kilda Parish of South Melbourne, County of Bourke. The three-acre allotments were purchased by F G Dalgety at an unknown date (PP).

The 1897 MMBW plan (Figure 4) shows the subject site formed part of the grounds of the 8-roomed weatherboard house at 7 Burnett Street (still extant), which at that time was owned and occupied by George Watson (RB 1897 no. 4504).

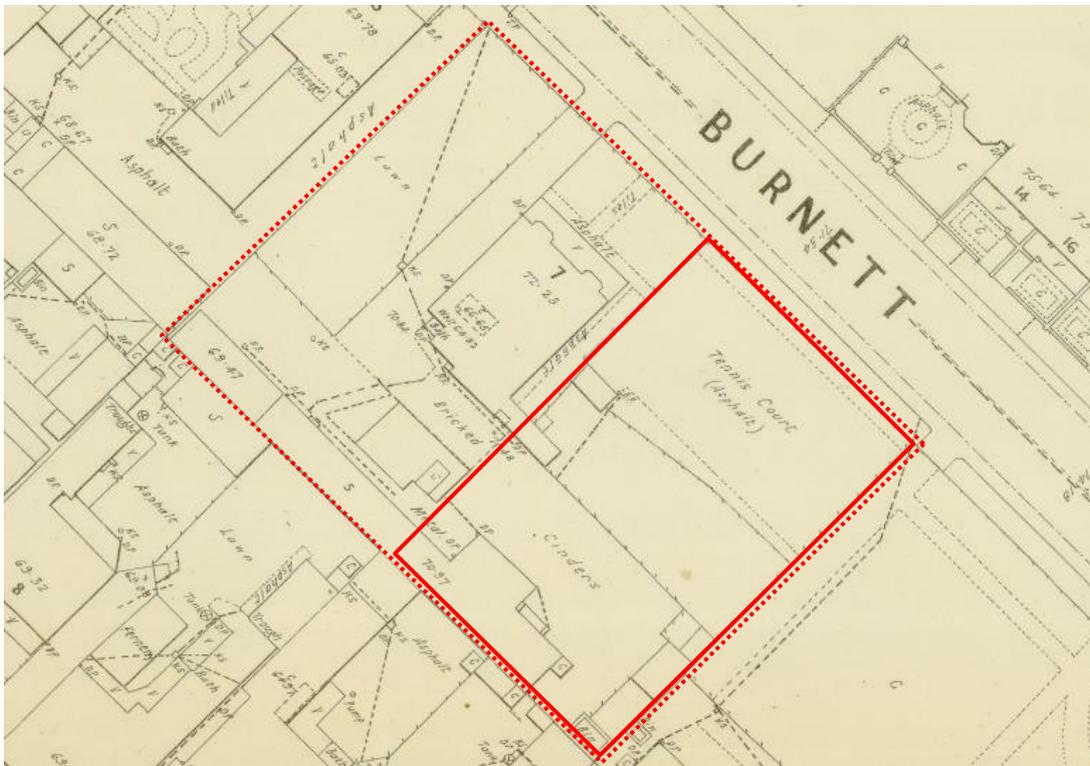


Figure 4 - MMBW Detail Plan no. 1365, dated 1897. Earlier extent of 7 Burnett Street (dotted line), subject site (solid line). (Source: State Library of Victoria)

In 1951, the half-acre property was subdivided into two almost equal parts: the western part containing the house and the eastern part being the subject site which was purchased by Esther Avramoff, widow, of 10 Ellesmere Road Windsor (CT v.8004 f.123). The following year, in 1952, Esther was joined in ownership by three others: Sonia Davis, married woman, of 17 Wimbledon Avenue Elwood, John Arthur Trencher, builder, of 2 George Street Caulfield, and Mordecai Benshemesh, architect, of 490 St Kilda Road Melbourne (CT v.8004 f.124).

In 1951, Mordecai Benshemesh prepared plans for a three-storey building containing 20 one-bedroom flats, a café on the second floor, and laundry facilities on the roof. The title block on the plans indicate they were prepared for 'Messrs T D T B & Co.' (the members of this group are not known, but it appears that it included Dr Eugene Treyvish who was a relative of joint owners Esther Avramoff and Sonia Davis). Council issued a permit in August 1951 (BP U.1174). The estimated cost was £35,000. The builder was 'G Trencher' of 2A George Street Caulfield, who was presumably a relative of the aforementioned joint owner, John Arthur Trencher, also a builder.

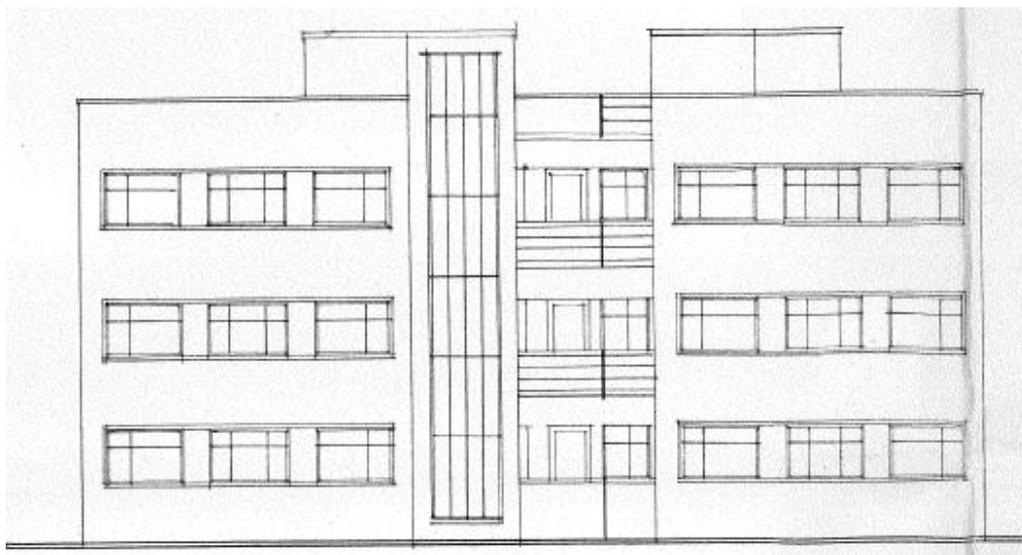


Figure 5 - Front elevation, from plans related to Building Permit U1174 (M Benshemesh, 1951) (Source: Council Building File)

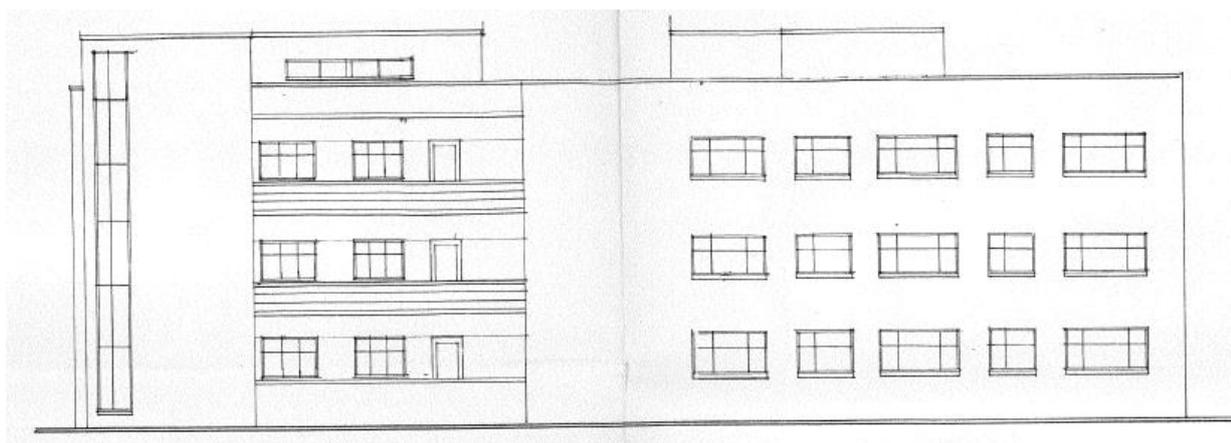


Figure 6 - West elevation, from plans related to Building Permit U1174 (M Benshemesh, 1951) (Source: Council Building File)

By early 1953, the building had been completed and ownership was transferred to Burnett Lodge P/L c/o Feiglin & Francome P/L of 83 William Street Melbourne. Flats were advertised for sale on an 'own-your-own' basis for £3000 with a deposit of £1000 and the balance at £4 weekly (Age 28 Feb 1953 p24). Advertisements highlighted that the flats were 'close to trains, trams, beach etc.' (Age 25 Mar 1953 p17).

## 289 Barkly Street, St Kilda – Barkly Lodge

The site formed part of Crown portion 81 at St Kilda Parish of South Melbourne, County of Bourke. The approximately 3¼-acre allotment was purchased by G Baker in October 1869 (PP).

In June 1902, land amounting to half an acre, comprising the subject site and the adjacent site to the north (287 Barkly Street), was acquired by Vincenzo Cicalese, confectioner, of Rainsford Street St Kilda (CT v.2879 f.783). Cicalese had a weatherboard villa erected at 287 Barkly Street known as *Ravello* (BP no. 89; SM 1905), while the land at no. 289 remained undeveloped.

Both the 1905 MMBW (detail plan no. 1379) plan and a 1945 aerial photograph shows *Ravello* at no. 287 and the vacant subject site.

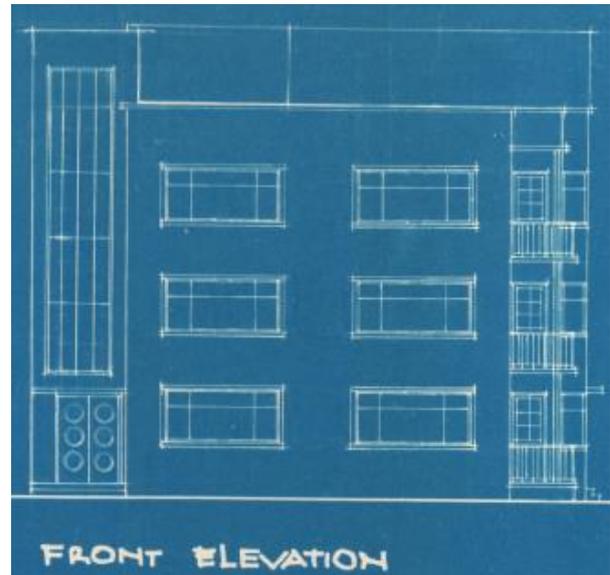
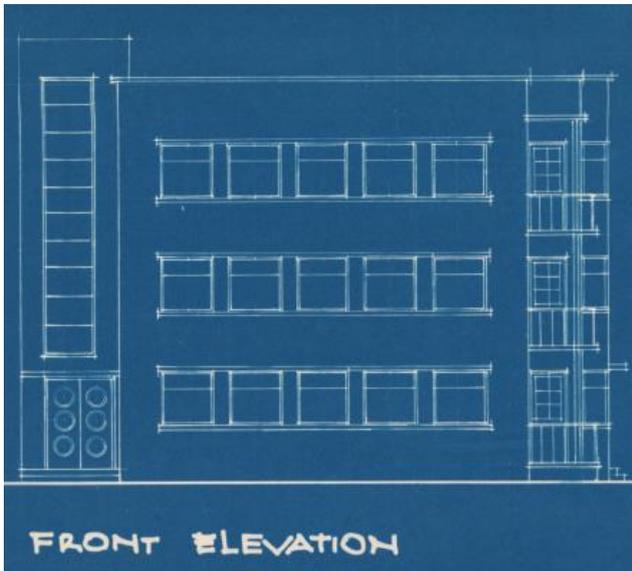


Figure 7 - Aerial photograph dated 1945. No. 289 (subject site) is outlined, and no. 287 is indicated with an arrow. (Source: Landata, Proj No 5, Run 16, Frame 57850)

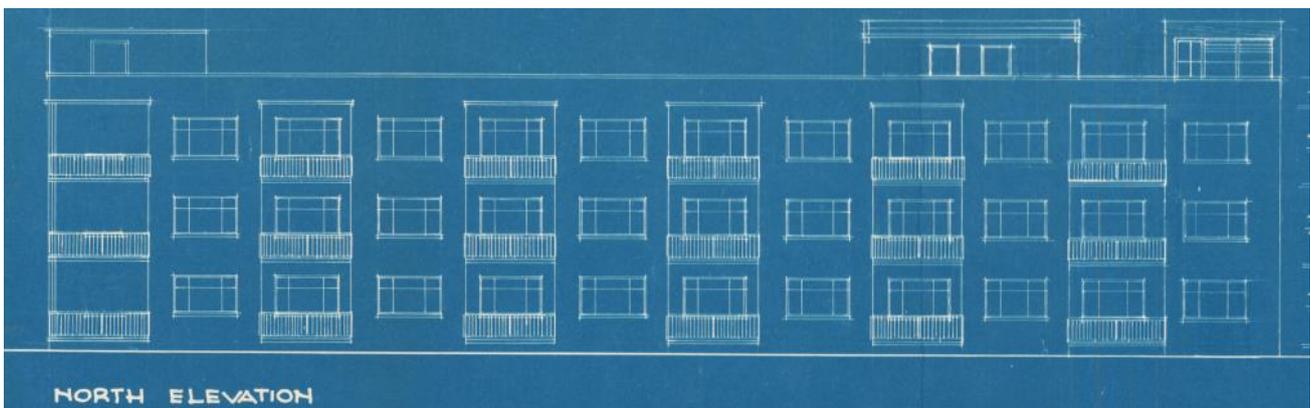
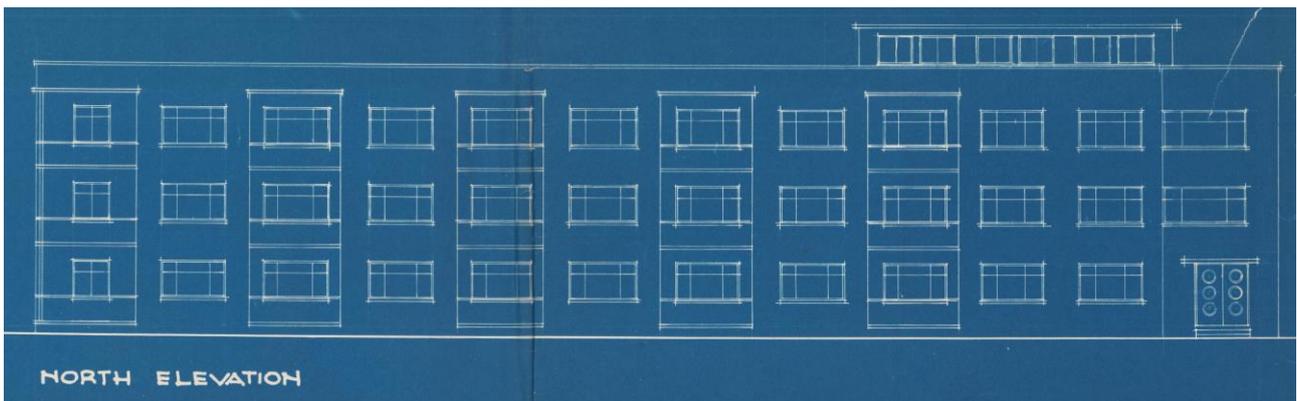
Following Vincenzo Cicalese's death in 1952, nos 287 and 289 were sold separately. No. 289 was purchased by Leon Yehuda Sher, manufacturer, of 9 Bramley Court Kew, and architect Mordecai Benshemesh of 34 Fitzroy Street St Kilda, with the transfer registered in December 1953 (CT v.8059 f.888).

Two versions of undated plans were prepared by Mordecai Benshemesh for a three-storey building containing 18 two-bedroomed flats and laundry facilities on the roof. The version of the plans that were not built had alternative fenestration detailing and pattern to the façade (horizontally orientated windows to the stair enclosure and rows of five smaller windows) and solid balustrade detailing to the north elevation (Figures 8 and 10). The version of the plans that were built (this was apparently a post-permit amendment) (Figures 9 and 11) included an additional bedsit flat on the roof. A permit for the building was

issued by Council in July 1953 (BP U.1677). The building was estimated to cost £60,000 and the builder was J Trencher of George Street, Caulfield (presumably John A Trencher). An August newspaper article indicated that tenders for the job would be called shortly (*Argus* 20 Aug 1953 p11). A minor amendment for the internal reconfiguration of one of the flats was dated January 1954.



Figures 8 and 9 - Front elevation, unbuilt version (left) amended built version (right). Plans related to Building Permit U1677 (M Benshemesh, undated) (Source: Council Building File)



Figures 10 and 11 - North elevation, unbuilt version (top) amended built version (below). Plans related to Building Permit U1677 (M Benshemesh, undated) (Source: Council Building File)

By early 1955, the building had been completed and ownership was transferred to Barkly Lodge P/L c/o Feiglin & Francome P/L of 83 William Street Melbourne. Flats were advertised for sale on an 'own-your-own' basis (Age 2 Feb 1955 p18).

## Mordecai Benshemesh

Born in Palestine in 1912, Mordecai Benshemesh spent three years (1930-1933) at the Montefiori Polytechnical School in Tel Aviv, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. He subsequently travelled to London where he initially studied a year of engineering before completing a degree in architecture in 1937 (HE).

In 1939 Benshemesh migrated to Australia where he worked in the offices of notable Melbourne architects including Arthur W Plaisted (1940-1941) and Harry R Johnson (1946-49), where he was the lead designer. The office specialised in blocks of flats often designed in the Streamlined Moderne style. Several of these were built in the St Kilda area where he was living at the time (HE).

In 1943 he enrolled in an engineering course at the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University). Benshemesh established his own practice in 1948 where his projects continued to focus on apartment style living. He soon gained a reputation as 'Mr Highrise,' and was known as the city's leading designer of high-density residential developments (BH). In 1961 Benshemesh and Sydney architects Harry Seidler and Neville Gruzman, were invited as specialists in high-rise development to contribute to a forum on multi-storey apartment buildings (HE).

Benshemesh passed away on 22 December 1993.

## References

Built Heritage website (BH), Dictionary of Unsung Architects – entry for Mordecai Benshemesh, accessed 23.06.2021

Certificates of Title (CT), various

Edquist, Harriet (2012), 'Benshemesh, Mordecai', in Phillip Goad and Julie Willis [eds] *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p79 (HE)

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 Plans, P81(13), M333(25) (PP)

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

Sands & McDougall Directories (SM)

St Kilda Council building permits (BP)

St Kilda Rate books (RB)

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 four individual blocks of flats have various similarities in that they are all three storey and indicative of the Functionalist style. Their massing is consistent with cuboid forms and usually a defined entry block, walls of predominantly/all cream brick in stretcher bond, and flat roofs concealed by parapets. The roofs are partly or fully traversable as indicated by railings, laundry facilities and/or freestanding elements (plants, etc.) They all have steel-framed windows.

There is a slight shift in the external palette to the four blocks over the time period, with the earlier buildings (1948 and 1951) being partly red brick, whereas the two later buildings (1953 and 1954) are completely cream brick. This could in part be due to the higher cost of cream bricks, especially in the immediate postwar years when materials were rationed. For instance, in 1948 cream bricks were about 15% more expensive than red bricks, which would add considerably to the costs of large blocks of flats (Age 13 Oct 1948 p4). Cream bricks were favoured by architects at this time for 'they were more uniform and attractive' (*Dandenong Journal* 14 Dec 1949 p7) than red bricks, which were also strongly associated with styles from the preceding decades such as the Queen Anne and Bungalow.

The four buildings are all in good condition and have a high level of external intactness.

### 62 Hotham Street, St Kilda East – Francelaw Flats

Francelaw Flats are located on the east side of Hotham Street. The rectangular site has an area of about 1,247m<sup>2</sup>. The building is comprised of two offset blocks. At the front, the building is orientated for the best solar access about a north facing garden, which is mainly lawn with some shrubs and hedging and an established Canary Island Date Palm on the north boundary.

The front boundary has an original low masonry fence, which is rendered (possibly an alteration) and has piers with stepped caps. To the rear is a car parking area, including original brick garages with timber doors, which is accessed via a shared concrete laneway stretching between Hotham and Alexandra streets.



Figure 12 - Aerial photograph showing extent of 62 Hotham Street. (Source: Landata, October 2021)

The front part of the building is cream brick on a red brick plinth however red brick has been employed to the rear walls (south and east). Rendered bands at sill level emphasise the horizontality. Corner balconies have a cantilevered concrete deck and brick balustrade with a rendered coping which is continuous with rendered sills. Steel poles provide additional support to the corners though there is some deflection of the front balconies. The uppermost level has a separate concrete canopy. The taller entry bay has an elongated, vertically orientated window above the entry door (not readily visible) and its flanking, multi-paned screen.



Figures 13 and 14 - Front elevation (left), north elevation (right)

The front wall has a central line of porthole windows with the name of building - Francelaw Flats - in small metal lettering at the middle of the ground level. The windows are steel-framed in distinct bands, including corner windows, and mostly in tripartite units comprised of a large fixed central light and flanking casements, all with horizontal glazing bars. The balcony doors are however timber-framed though they also have horizontal glazing bars.

There is a skillion roofed room to the south-east corner of the roof, which probably was a communal laundry (as evidenced on plans for the later buildings).

### 38 Westbury Street, St Kilda East

The block of flats is located on the east side of Westbury Street. Both the site, which has an area of about 2,440m<sup>2</sup>, and the building’s footprint, are T-shaped. The front boundary is defined by a non-original metal palisade fence. There is also a likely original brick bay with letterboxes. Within the north setback is a pedestrian access and an area of garden. There are also plantings in the front setback.

A vehicular access extends along the south side, with covered parking provided to a narrow carport on the southern boundary and in two blocks of garages. It is unclear whether the garages are original; the southern block is in the location of a proposed workshop and engine room shown on the original plans, which may have been later enlarged.



Figure 15 - Aerial photograph showing extent of 38 Westbury Street. (Source: Landata, October 2021)

Whilst the original brickwork has been overpainted, it is evident at the front at least that the walls are mainly cream brick on a red brick base. A metal railing indicates a traversable roof deck, which may also include laundry facilities as suggested by small skillion-roofed rooms.



Figure 16 - Front elevation showing likely original brick letterbox wall

By comparison with the Francelaw Flats built two years earlier, there is less articulation at 38 Westbury Street as there is no rendered band at the sill level, rather flat tiles (similar to those employed to the latter blocks) only at the windows, and the steel-framed windows only have one horizontal glazing bar (to the upper part), though they are similarly organised in tripartite units. There are also no corner or porthole windows. The balconies are however similar with a concrete deck and brick balustrade though with the addition of a metal rail (but without a corner steel pole). The balcony doors are also similarly timber-framed and have horizontal glazing bars.

The entry bays are recessed, the only example in the group, and do not project above the main parapet however have similar steel-framed glazing to the Francelaw Flats and Barkly Lodge.

## 11 Burnett Street, St Kilda – Burnett Lodge

*Burnett Lodge* is located on the south side of Burnett Street and the rectangular site has an area of approximately 967m<sup>2</sup>. There is an original low cream brick fence to the front boundary with a secondary, non-original steel-framed fence behind and enclosed bin area in the north-west corner. No car accommodation is provided on site.

The building has a broadly 'U' shaped footprint, with the western arm being truncated to the north end allowing some solar access to the inner parts of the building and an expanded garden at the front western corner, which is mostly lawn and with some shrubs and palm trees. There is also a narrower garden in front of the longer, eastern arm of the building.



Figure 17 - Aerial photograph showing extent of 11 Burnett Street. (Source: Landata, October 2021)

The latter two blocks – Burnett and Barkly lodges – are differentiated from the earlier two by having more diverse massing and partly external circulation by way of gallery/walkways and having completely cream brick walls. The coping to the parapet is rendered in both instances.

The massing of Burnett Lodge is however the most diverse of the group in that the stairwell is considerably taller (tower-like) than the main part of the building and is more prominent. The treatment of the openings to this tower-like element - with additional discrete window openings with a distinct horizontal emphasis – contrasts with the elongated (vertically orientated) window wall, continuous across the levels, employed in the other three blocks. The original drawing however shows windows to the circulation tower consistent with those to the others. It is the only example among the four where glass bricks have been employed (at the base of the tower).



Figures 18 and 19 – North and west elevations

There are no private balconies to this block, only the long walkways which have a brick balustrade and concrete deck similar to the balconies of the two earlier blocks.

The windows are steel framed however whilst there are some tripartite windows, which are not as wide as those on the other blocks (the three sections are of equal width), they are flanked by dipartite windows (consisting of a wide fixed pane and casement to one side). On the front elevations, they form overall mirrored groups in relation to the glazing bar configuration.

The name of the building is identified in steel-letting at the front of the shorter, western arm but is partly concealed by planting.

Like the other blocks, the roof deck is likely traversable with laundry facilities, however metal railing is only apparent to the shorter western arm.

## 289 Barkly Street, St Kilda – Barkly Lodge

*Barkly Lodge* is located on the west side of Barkly Street. The rectangular building occupies much of the largely rectangular site which has an area of approximately 897m<sup>2</sup>. On the front boundary there is an original low cream brick fence, which incorporates slots for mailboxes (now disused) at the south end. The narrow side setbacks have a pedestrian path and plantings and there is also a small garden area within the front setback.



Figure 20 - Aerial photograph showing extent of 289 Barkly Street. (Source: Landata, October 2021)

The massing is similar to that of *Burnett Lodge* with a tall and prominent entry block at the edge of the east/front wall, behind which extends long open galleries (walkways) to the stair block at the far/west end. Above the glazed door and sidelight (which on the original drawings are shown with the circular lights Benshemesh employed on other blocks) is a concrete canopy. The elongated window to the stairwell has vertically orientated panes similar to that at *Francelaw Flats* and 38 Westbury Street.



Figure 21

This final block is distinguished from the others in the group by a lighter treatment of the balconies and galleries, which have a concrete deck but a metal balustrade with vertical balusters. The balconies are larger and project forward of the main wall plane and there are steel poles to the galleries.

The same windows and sills as at 38 Westbury Street have been employed in combination with the same balcony doors (timber-framed with horizontal glazing bars). The name and number - Barkly Lodge and 289 – in raised metal are located near the front entry.

Like the other blocks, Barkly Lodge has a metal rail and a wash house to the west end of the traversable roof.

## 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 architect-designed examples which are more finely detailed or distinguished by their site responsiveness. Mordecai Benshemesh was one of several émigré architects that were active in the area and at the forefront of the evolution of this building type along with Michael R E Feldhagen (Polish), Dr Ernest Fooks (Slovakian) and Kurt Popper (Viennese), 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 group are indicative of the approach during the earlier phase of the Postwar period – circa late 1940s to mid-1950s when the Functionalist style held sway. This form of Modernism is readily identified by clear volumetric expression (usually rectilinear or cuboid and often with taller, separate circulation zones), parapets (concealing a flat roof), and steel-framed windows. This machine-like aesthetic had clear connotations with progress. Cream brick was typically employed to the walls.

Cream brick continued to be favoured during the latter phase of the Post-war period, that is the mid to late 1950s into the early 1960s, however whilst roofs were often flat, they were usually expressed with soffits, often deep, and openings were typically timber-framed. Some decorative elements crept into the palette such as coloured spandrel panels, ceramic tiles, and balustrading with geometric patterns, partly as a reaction to the often codified and simplified approach to Modernism that was evolving, especially in the realm of the speculative developer (where it offered the opportunity for a cheaper build). 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.

The subject four flats designed by Mordecai Benshemesh are fine examples of the Functionalist style and form a distinct group that is distinguished from the work of other architects in the municipality, particularly in terms of the boldness of their massing.

Although outside the municipality, the flats designed by Mordecai Benshemesh at 124 Balaclava Road, North Caulfield and built in 1950-51 are highly comparable, particularly in relation to 62 Hotham Street as they share similar materiality (cream brick on red brick base), balcony and window detailing and porthole windows.

Several other blocks of flats designed by Mordecai Benshemesh are included in the heritage overlay, although none are directly comparable to the subject group as they relate to the latter part of the post-war period and are in a different design mode.

- *Edgewater Towers*, 12 Marine Parade, St Kilda (Citation 2049, HO510). Built 1959. Multi-storey, International style building in white painted concrete with continuous bands of glazing to each elevation.
- Benshemesh Flats Group Listing 2 (1960) (Citation 2429), all built in 1960 comprising:
  - Wolverton, 8 Westbury Street, St Kilda East. Three storey with stepped plan, cream brick with eaves overhang, timber-framed windows, faceted balconies and spandrel panels to the front.
  - 16 Lansdowne Road, St Kilda East. Three storey, cream brick with projecting brick and tiled spandrels to the front, timber-framed windows, faceted balconies, and eaves overhang.
  - Leaworra Flats, 306 Dandenong Road, St Kilda East. Three storey with stepped plan, cream brick, timber-framed windows, canted balustrading, and wide eaves overhang.
- 22 Westbury Street (HO5 precinct, no citation). Built 1959. Three-storey, cream brick, balconies with metal balustrades and panels), fully glazed stairwells with louvres, eaves overhang.
- 318 Beaconsfield Parade (HO444 precinct, no citation). Built 1963. Three storey with a L-plan with canted side walls. Brick walls overpainted and most of the recessed balconies enclosed.

- *Questa Heights* 21 The Esplanade, St Kilda (HO5 precinct, no citation). Built 1965. Multi-storey, of a similar ilk to Edgewater Towers, the walls are white painted concrete with continuous bands of glazing. Projecting balconies with a combination of metal balusters and panels.

One other place designed by Benshemesh is not included in a heritage overlay:

- 11 Marine Parade. Built c.1955. Four-storey. Original 'window wall' at front has been replaced.

The builder architect Bernard Evans was responsible for a few Functionalist style blocks of flats at this time, which have some general similarities but are more varied as a group:

- 28 Milton Street (Contributory within St Kilda Botanic Gardens and Environs precinct). Built 1947. Three storey, cream brick. It has some corner balconies with a low brick balustrade and metal railing above. It is differentiated from the Benshemesh examples by a tiled hip roof, panels of dogtooth brickwork above the entry, and varying format to the steel-framed windows.
- *Chapel Lodge* 16A Chapel Street, St Kilda (Citation 2425). Built c.1950. A large, multi-storey block with paired balconies having similar brick balustrading to most of the subject group. It has a few porthole windows to the uppermost level, however smaller and less prominent than those at 62 Hotham Street. The windows are mostly tripartite and steel framed.
- Flats, 169 Ormond Road, Elwood (Contributory within HO8 precinct). Built 1951. Three storey, cream brick, parapet to front and hip roof to the rear, built around an enclosed courtyard. Bank of windows to upper two levels set in a concrete frame, however windows are timber-framed though with horizontal glazing bars. A similar building also designed by Evans in 1952 is at 91 Ormond Esplanade, Elwood.

The early examples of the typology by the Viennese Kurt Popper were designed in a Functionalist style, however there are several subtle differences when compared to the subject group, especially Popper's preference for a more recessive approach to the entry/stair wells:

- 21 Mitford Street, St Kilda 1949-50. (Contributory within St Kilda Botanic Gardens and Environs precinct). Builder Harry Kinsman. Three storey, cream brick on a red brick plinth has some similarities to the 62 Hotham Street and 38 Westbury Street blocks in regard to its balcony (with steel pole) and some window detailing however the entry is more recessed than a typical block by Benshemesh.
- 124-126 Alma Road, 1954 and 47 Westbury Street, St Kilda, 1956 (Contributory within HO6). Similar, adjacent blocks. The Alma Road block at least was built by Harry Kinsman. Cream brick (one on red brick plinth), with parapeted roof, steel-framed windows but differentiated by some windows having concrete framing (both small and large). The balconies are similar to the last block in the group at 293 Barkly Street with the use of metal railing for the balustrades. The Alma Road block has vertical banks of small square windows denoting the entry zones.

Other contemporary flats in the Functionalist style also with distinct differences to the subject group are:

- Flats, 40 Southey Street, Elwood (1941 & 1946) and 44 Southey Street (c.1946) Harry R. Johnson (Contributory within St Kilda Botanic Gardens and Environs precinct). This pair of three-storey flats which frame the entry to Southey Court are similar to each other. Both are cream brick with steel-framed openings and represent a Moderne/Functionalist hybrid with their prominent curved corner balconies, either partly or fully rendered, and rendered bands. The latter block has a similar entry bay approach favoured by Benshemesh at this time with the elongated window wall and also has a red brick plinth - as Benshemesh worked for Johnson during this period he may have had involvement in the design.
- Flats, 45 Spray Street, Elwood, 1950-51. Built by Norman Adderley Three storey, with a different wall palette of clinker brick with extensive areas of render to the front, large steel-framed openings, broadly Functionalist style but with a projecting flat roof.

- Duplex, 23 Eildon Road, St Kilda, 1953-54. (Contributory within HO5). Constructed by Norman Adderley. Two storey, variegated salmon brick, timber-framed openings, broadly Functionalist style but with a projecting flat roof.

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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 a group listing with a single HO number.

Apply fence controls to 62 Hotham Street, 289 Barkly Street and 11 Burnett Street in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (original fences).

Remove 289 Barkly Street and 11 Burnett Street from HO35 (individual) and HO5 (precinct), respectively, and include within new group HO listing. The citations relating to these places in the Port Phillip Heritage Review (nos 24 and 445) can be removed as they are now redundant given the information and analysis in this new citation.

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## Primary source

RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *HO7 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

N/A