City of
STONNINGTON

# Portland Place Precinct

**Prepared by:** GJM Heritage (March 2025)

**Address:** Grosvenor Street and Portland Place, South Yarra

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Name:** | Portland Place Precinct | **Review Date:** | June 2024 |
| **Place Type:** | Residential Precinct | **Architect/Designer:** | Not known |
| **Grading:** | See grading table | **Builder:** | Not known |
| **Extent of the Overlay:** | See Figure 5 | **Construction Date(s):** | 1880s, 1900s (13 & 14 Portland Place), 1910s (15 Portland Place) |



*Figure 1. 2 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 2. 5 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 3. 8 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 4. 10 Portland Place, South Yarra*




*Figure 5. Portland Place Precinct, South Yarra (GJM Heritage, July 2024)*

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## Statement of Significance

*What is significant?*

The Portland Place Precinct, a predominantly 1880s residential subdivision containing a collection of Victorian houses, along with a small number of Federation-era houses.

The precinct includes:
- Grosvenor Street (nos. 1, 3, 5, 9, 11)
- Portland Place (nos. 1-28)

Elements which contribute to the significance of the precinct include:
- Single-storey detached houses and terrace rows predominantly from the Victorian period, with a small number of Federation-era houses
- Polychromatic brick or timber construction with some block-fronted timber to principal (street) elevations
- Predominantly slate-clad hipped roofs with some corrugated sheet metal-clad roofs to the south of the precinct, with bracketed eaves
- Symmetrical principal elevations or asymmetrical principal elevations with projecting hipped or gabled bays
- Front verandahs of concave or convex profile across principal elevations
- Decorative cast iron valences and brackets
- Timber-framed sash windows
- Prominent brick or rendered brick chimneys with corniced capping
- Road and laneway alignments and allotment patterns resulting from nineteenth century subdivisions
- Generally uniform pattern of small front and side setbacks with no vehicle accommodation in front setbacks.

Later front fences and rear additions do not contribute to the significance of the precinct. The property at 11 Portland Place, South Yarra is a non-contributory place within the precinct.

*How is it significant?*

The Portland Place Precinct, South Yarra, is of local historical, representative and aesthetic significance.

*Why is it significant?*

The Portland Place Precinct, South Yarra has strong associations with the development of South Yarra in the boom-years of the 1880s and early 1890s, when surplus land from the construction of the railway line to Oakleigh was subdivided and sold for middle-class residential development. As a highly intact precinct of modestly-scaled houses constructed predominantly in the late-nineteenth century, the Portland Place Precinct clearly illustrates this important phase of development in the City of Stonnington (Criterion A).

The Portland Place Precinct is a cohesive collection of fine and highly intact representative examples of predominantly Victorian houses. The majority of houses in the precinct display typical features of the Victorian period, including polychromatic brick or timber construction, hipped roofs clad in slate or corrugated iron, both symmetrical and asymmetrical forms, front verandahs with decorative cast-iron and prominent corbelled brick or rendered brick chimneys (Criterion D).

The Portland Place Precinct forms a highly unified group of residences dating predominantly to the Victorian period and constructed in a Victorian-style. The high degree of consistency in plan forms, setbacks, materials and detailing of the buildings creates a picturesque and cohesive streetscape with a distinctive architectural character (Criterion E).

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## Historical Context

This precinct is associated with the following historic theme(s) taken from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (2009):

3 Settling the land

- 3.3.3 Speculators and land boomers

- 3.3.4 Uncontrolled and unplanned development

4 Transport and communications

- Developing State railway systems in the late nineteenth century

8 Building suburbs

- 8.2 Middle class suburbs and the suburban ideal

## Place History

*The following history is drawn from the City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay Gap Study, prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd in 2009, with additional information as cited.*

The land included in the Portland Place Precinct was first offered for sale as part of the early Crown land sales in 1849 and 1850. The large tract of land, bounded by Punt Road to the west, Gardiners (now Toorak) Road to the north, Chapel Street to the east and Commercial Road to the south, was divided into three long rectangular blocks, each of about 52 acres, and purchased by Peter Davis, a real estate agent (Figure 6). While the land benefited from having frontages to four major roads, its development potential was limited by a large swamp, known as Clifford's Paddock, occupying the central section and extending south to Commercial Road. Davis quickly sold off the suitably drained land – in particular the higher ground to the north – typically offering smaller farm allotments for sale. Some of these allotments were subsequently subdivided for residential development with narrow streets and small building lots.

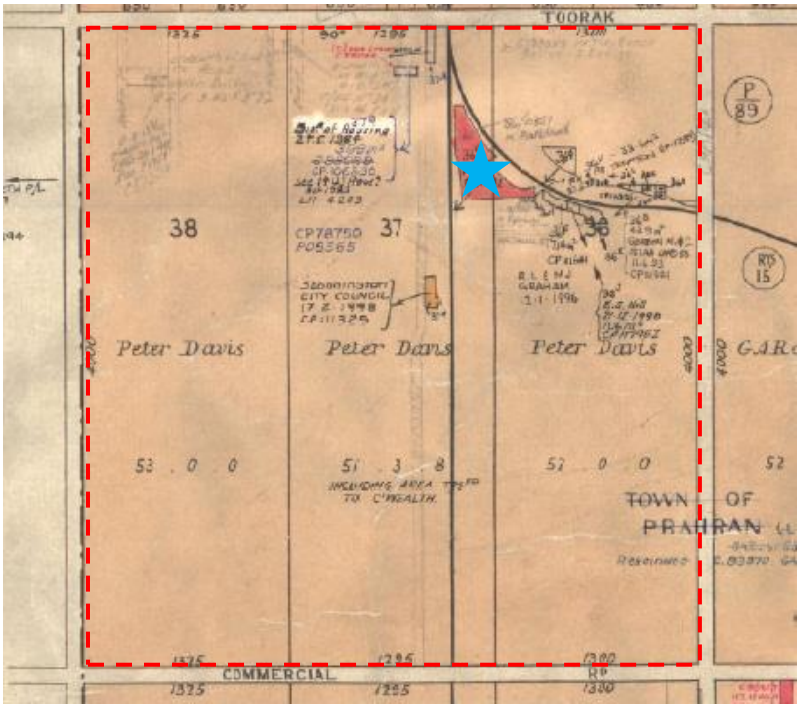



*Figure 6. Detail of parish plan, showing lots purchased by Peter Davis overlaid with later notations; plan dates to c1880. Approximate area of precinct indicated by blue star (Source: Public Record Office Victoria)*

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Kearney's map of Melbourne and suburbs, dating to 1855, indicates that the streets comprising the precinct had not been laid out by this time (Figure 7). Arthur Street, Fitzgerald Street, Cliff Street and Grosvenor Street were established on allotments in the eastern sections of Davis' purchase the following year. These streets commenced at Chapel Street and extended westwards, terminating at the swamp. To the east of these, somewhat tentative, developments, the area was mainly occupied by brickmakers. An attempt was made to drain the swamp in 1858 when Davis had channels dug to drain rainwater into a gully running along Osborne Street and across Gardiners Creek (now Toorak) Road to swampy land near the Yarra River. The attempt was largely unsuccessful.

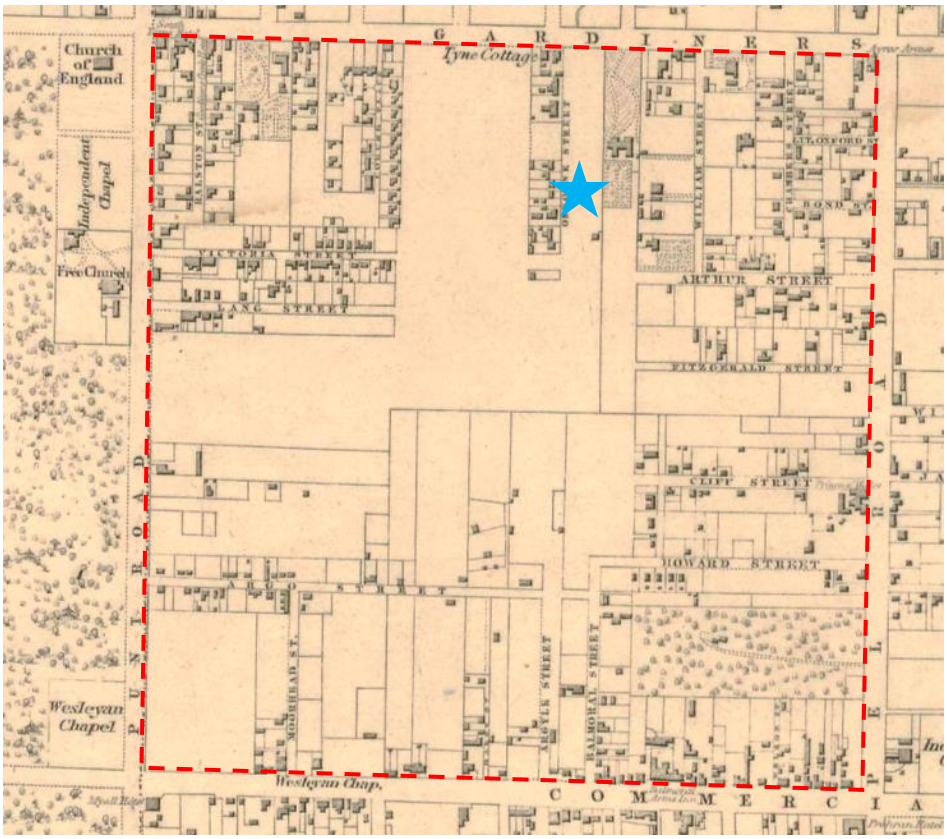



*Figure 7. Detail of plan of Melbourne and its suburbs, compiled by James Kearney, 1855; approximate area of precinct indicated by blue star (Source: State Library of Victoria)*

In the mid-1850s, the Hobson's Bay Railway Company commenced planning for a direct railway line from the city to Windsor. Landowners, including Davis, sold a strip of land from Toorak Road through the swamp to Commercial Road to allow its construction. This had the effect of dividing the block between Punt Road and Chapel Street into two halves with no potential for passage between the two.

A second railway line connecting the South Yarra Station to Oakleigh was constructed in 1879. In the following year, surplus railway land around the junction of the two lines was released for sale with 10 lots made available (Figure 8). The subdivision also included the creation of a new public road running parallel to the railway line, Portland Place. Lots 6,7 and 8 between Arthur Street and Fitzgerald Street, with frontages to the newly created Portland Place, were developed as residential allotments with freestanding cottages and villas, while Lot 8 was developed as a long single storey terrace row. By the mid-1880s, the allotments along Portland Place between Arthur Street and Fitzgerald Street, had been fully developed.

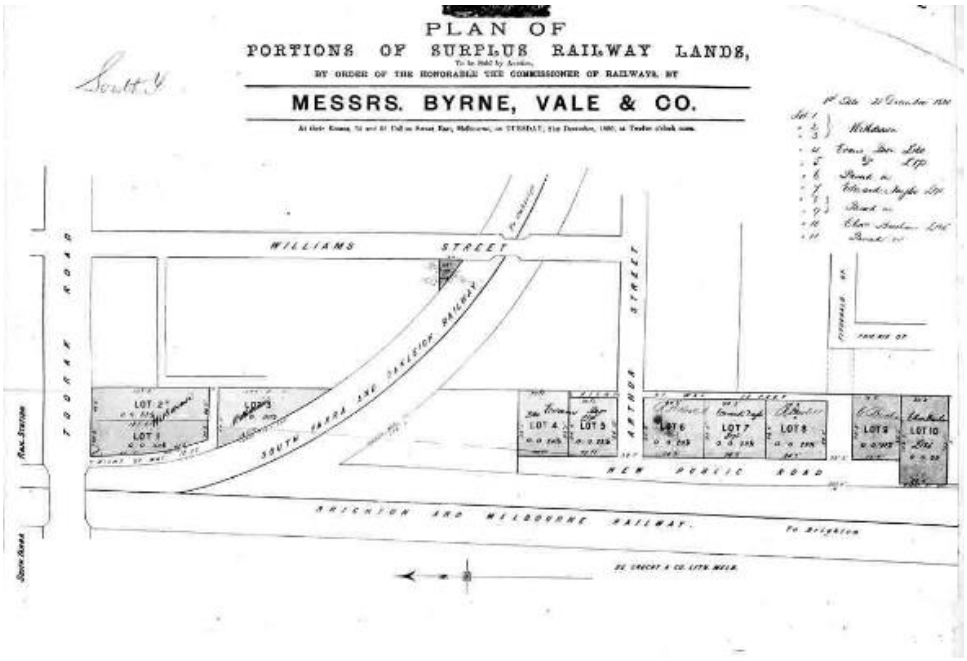
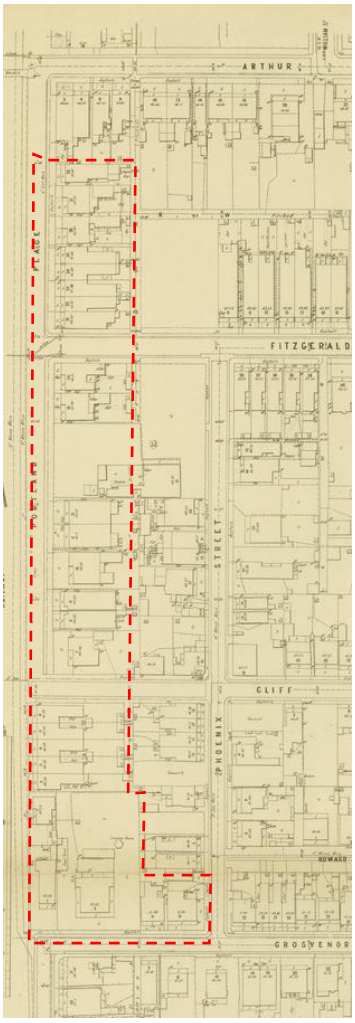



*Figure 8. Plan of portions of surplus railway lands advertised for sale, 1880; this sale resulted in the creation of Portland Place (Source: Stonnington History Centre)*

It was originally intended that Portland Place, south of Fitzgerald Street, would terminate at the northern boundary of lot 10. However, Cliff Street was extended to the railway in c1886, which subsequently created more allotments in Portland Place. Additional allotments to the south of Cliff Street were also created. These blocks provided no street frontage, instead addressing a narrow walkway connecting the northern sections of Portland Place to Grosvenor Street to the south. This arrangement, in which dwellings line one side of a street which narrows briefly to become a pedestrian walkway, is unusual; however, *ad hoc* planning arrangements were not uncommon in this part of the municipality during the boom of the 1880s. No planning laws (beyond those associated with fire prevention) were in place and properties were developed in whatever manner their owners saw fit. Portland Place had adopted this unusual arrangement by about 1888 and most of the precinct was developed by this time (see Figure 9 and 10).

The timber cottage at 13 and 14 Portland Place was constructed in the early 1900s; the residence at 15 Portland Place was constructed by 1915 (City of Prahran Rate Books, various).



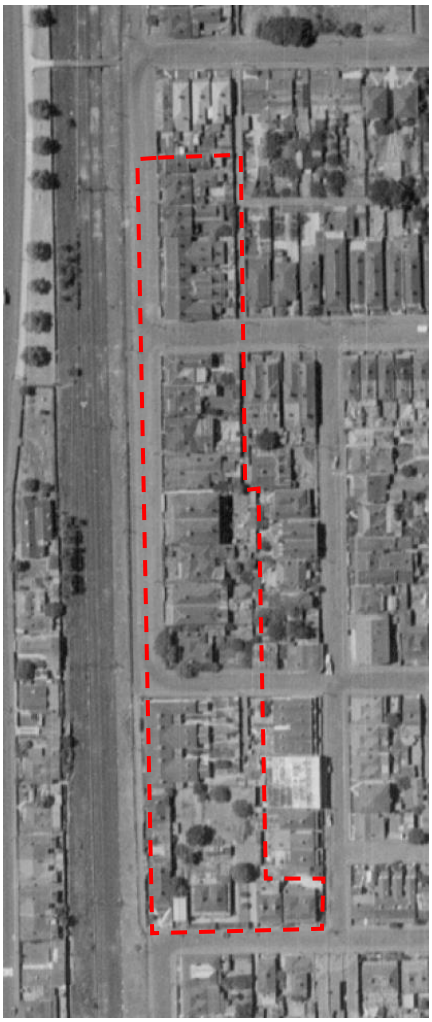



*Figure 9. Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Plan 954, City of Prahran, 1895 with approximate boundary of precinct indicated in red (Source: State Library of Victoria)*

*Figure 10. Aerial photograph showing Portland Place in 1951 with approximate boundary of precinct indicated in red (Source: Landata Victoria)*

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## Description

The Portland Place Precinct is located to the south of Toorak Road, between Punt Road and Chapel Street, South Yarra. The Sandringham Railway Line runs through a deep cutting along the western edge of the precinct. The precinct comprises predominantly Victorian-era residential properties – 25 on the east side of Portland Place and four on the north side of Grosvenor Street. Houses at the south end of Portland Place, between Cliff Street and Grosvenor Street, have no vehicular access, with a footpath between the properties and the railway cutting providing pedestrian access. Number 11 Portland Place is a newer built form and is non-contributory to the precinct. All houses are located on rectangular sites of various width, and are setback from the street boundaries behind small front gardens.

The precinct consists predominantly of single-storey detached houses and terrace rows, constructed in the Victorian period. The majority of houses are constructed of polychromatic brickwork, including a two-storey house at 12 Portland Place, with a collection of timber houses to the south of the precinct at 1-5 Portland Place (with block-fronted principal elevations) and houses at 1 and 9 Grosvenor Street. Three timber houses at 13-15 Portland Place were constructed in the Federation period. Houses are rectangular in form with hipped roofs and either symmetrical elevations or asymmetrical principal elevations with projecting hipped or gabled bays. Rows of terraces are similarly of rectangular form with either a transverse gabled roof (21-25 Portland Place) or hipped roof form (2-6 Portland Place). Roofs are generally clad with slate, with some corrugated sheet metal-clad roofs to the south of the precinct. Eaves are bracketed and prominent chimneys are either brick or rendered brick with corniced capping. Corrugated sheet metal-roofed verandahs of concave or convex profile extend across principal

elevations, either fully or in part, and are generally decorated with cast iron valences and bracketing. Rectangular sash windows to the principal elevations are timber-framed.

Within the precinct some changes have been made to fenestration, however the building forms are largely unaltered. Single or double-storey additions are located to the rear of the majority of properties. Front boundaries are lined with later fences of various materials and designs, including a number of timber picket fences. An interwar brick substation is located at the front of the large property at 5 Grosvenor Street.

Key Features:

- Single-storey detached houses and terrace rows predominantly from the Victorian period, with a small number of Federation-era houses
- Polychromatic brick or timber construction with some block-fronted timber to principal (street) elevations
- Predominantly slate-clad hipped roofs with some corrugated sheet metal-clad roofs to the south of the precinct, with bracketed eaves
- Symmetrical principal elevations or asymmetrical principal elevations with projecting hipped or gabled bays
- Front verandahs of concave or convex profile across principal elevations
- Decorative cast-iron valences and brackets
- Timber-framed sash windows
- Prominent brick or rendered brick chimneys with corniced capping
- Road and laneway alignments and allotment patterns resulting from nineteenth century subdivisions
- Generally uniform pattern of small front and side setbacks with no vehicle accommodation in front setbacks.



*Figure 11. 1 Grosvenor Street, South Yarra*



*Figure 12. 9 Grosvenor Street, South Yarra*



*Figure 13. 11 Grosvenor Street, South Yarra*



*Figure 14. 2 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 15. 5 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 16. 8 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 17. 10 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 18. 12 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 19.13 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 20. 14 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 21. 20 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 22. 24 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 23. 26 Portland Place, South Yarra*



*Figure 24. 27 Portland Place, South Yarra*

## Intactness and Integrity

The Portland Place Precinct remains highly intact to its period of construction and retains a high degree of integrity to the Victorian and early Federation period in fabric, form and detail. While individual residences have undergone some minor alterations – including to fenestration, front fences and rear additions – these changes do not diminish the ability to understand and appreciate the place as a highly intact and cohesive precinct of residences dating predominantly to the Victorian period.

## Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in *Planning Practice Note No. 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay* (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, August 2018), modified for the local context.

***CRITERION A:*** *Importance to the course or pattern of the City of Stonnington's cultural or natural history (historical significance).*

The Portland Place Precinct, South Yarra has strong associations with the development of South Yarra in the boom-years of the 1880s and early 1890s, when surplus land from the construction of the railway line to Oakleigh was subdivided and sold for middle-class residential development. As a highly intact precinct of modestly-scaled houses constructed predominantly in the late-nineteenth century, the Portland Place Precinct clearly illustrates this important phase of development in the City of Stonnington (Criterion A).

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***CRITERION B:*** *Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City of Stonnington's cultural or natural history (rarity).*

N/A

***CRITERION C:*** *Possession to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the City of Stonnington's cultural or natural history (research potential).*

N/A

***CRITERION D:*** *Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).*

The Portland Place Precinct is a cohesive collection of fine and highly intact representative examples of predominantly Victorian houses. The majority of houses in the precinct display typical features of the Victorian period, including polychromatic brick or timber construction, hipped roofs clad in slate or corrugated iron, both symmetrical and asymmetrical forms, front verandahs with decorative cast-iron and prominent corbelled brick or rendered brick chimneys (Criterion D).

***CRITERION E:*** *Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).*

The Portland Place Precinct forms a highly unified group of residences dating predominantly to the Victorian period and constructed in a Victorian-style. The high degree of consistency in plan forms, setbacks, materials and detailing of the buildings creates a picturesque and cohesive streetscape with a distinctive architectural character (Criterion E).

***CRITERION F:*** *Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.*

N/A

***CRITERION G:*** *Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing cultural traditions (social significance).*

N/A

***CRITERION H:*** *Special association with the life or works of a period, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Stonnington's history (associative significance).*

N/A

## Gradings and Recommendations

It is recommended that the properties remain in the Heritage Overlay as a Heritage Precinct known as *Portland Place Precinct* (HO145).

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) to the Stonnington Planning Scheme:

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|---|---|
| **External paint controls**<br>*Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?* | No |

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|---|---|
| **Internal alteration controls**<br>*Is a permit required for internal alterations?* | No |
| **Tree controls**<br>*Is a permit required to remove a tree?* | No |
| **Solar energy system controls**<br>*Solar energy system controls apply?* | Yes |
| **Outbuildings and fences exemptions**<br>*Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?* | No |
| **Victorian Heritage Register**<br>*Is this place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?* | No |
| **Prohibited uses may be permitted**<br>*Can a permit be granted to use for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?* | No |
| **Aboriginal heritage place**<br>*Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the* Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006? | No |
| **Incorporated Plan**<br>*Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?* | No |

Gradings of individual properties within the precinct are recommended as follows and as shown in Figure 25:

| No. | Address | Name/alternate address | Grading |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Grosvenor Street | | Contributory |
| 3 | Grosvenor Street | Substation | Contributory |
| 5 | Grosvenor Street | | Significant |
| 9 | Grosvenor Street | | Contributory |
| 11 | Grosvenor Street | | Contributory |
| 1 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 2 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 3 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 4 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 5 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 6 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 7 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 8 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 9 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 10 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 11 | Portland Place | | Non-contributory |
| 12 | Portland Place | | Contributory |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 14 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 15 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 19 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 20 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 21 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 22 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 23 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 24 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 25 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 26 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 27 | Portland Place | | Contributory |
| 28 | Portland Place | *Alexandria Villa* | Contributory |




*Figure 25. Grading map.*

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## Previous Assessments

*City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay Gap Study,* Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd, 2009.

## References

City of Prahran Rate Books, various dates.

Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006.

Landata Victoria, Central Plan Office, Historical Aerial Photography, 1951.

Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan No 954, City of Prahran,1895.

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), Parish and Township Plans collection.

State Library of Victoria, map collection.

Stonnington History Centre, subdivision plans.