Former Primary School No. 2855, 67 High Street, Prahran

Heritage Place: Former Primary School No. 2855
Address: 67 High Street, Prahran
HO Reference: HO52
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: Public Works Department – Henry Robert Bastow
Builder: Mr. Bale
Year of Construction: 1888



Photograph of Primary School No. 2855 (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022)



Location map and extent of HO52.

Heritage Group: Education
Heritage Type: School – state (public)

Key Theme: Education
Key Sub-theme: Developing a system of state education

Significance Level: Local

Controls:	☐	External paint controls	☐	Internal alteration controls	☐	Tree controls
	☐	Include on Victorian Heritage Register	☐	Incorporated Plans	☐	Outbuildings and fences not exempt
	■	Prohibited uses may be permitted	☐	Aboriginal Heritage Place	■	Solar energy system controls

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 67 High Street, Prahran (otherwise known as Former Primary School No. 2855), is significant. Specifically, the form, scale, materiality, fenestration, and detailing of the double-storey 1888 former school building is of local heritage significance. Later alterations and additions to the property, including the landscaping and front boundary fence are not significant.

How is it significant?

Former Primary School No. 2855 is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Former Primary School No. 2855 is of historical significance as a school building that was constructed in the late nineteenth century as part of the development of large State Schools in the City of Stonnington. It represents the booming population of Prahran in the late nineteenth century and the need to accommodate the educational requirements of the new population's children. (Criterion A)

The former Primary School is of aesthetic significance as a highly intact example of a Public Works Department Public School designed in 1888 during Melbourne's boom era. The building is a highly intact, example of a Late Gothic design, incorporating the unorthodox combination of Queen Anne and Flemish design traits. Physical features that contribute to the site's aesthetic significance include its form and scale, its brick masonry materiality and use of polychrome detailing, its buttresses and pilasters, decorative render work and floral plasterwork, Queen Anne chimneys, slate roofing with dormer vents, emphasis on symmetry, multi-pane sash windows, and spired tower. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	Former Primary School No. 2855 is of historical significance as a school building that was constructed in the late nineteenth century as part of the development of large State Schools in the City of Stonnington. It represents the booming population of Prahran in the late nineteenth century and the need to accommodate the educational requirements of the new population's children.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our* cultural *or natural history*	This place does not meet this criterion.

D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	This place does not meet this criterion.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	The former Primary School is of aesthetic significance as a highly intact example of a Public Works Department Public School designed in 1888 during Melbourne's boom era. The building is a highly intact, example of a Late Gothic design, incorporating the unorthodox combination of Queen Anne and Flemish design traits. Physical features that contribute to the site's aesthetic significance include its form and scale, its brick masonry materiality and use of polychrome detailing, its buttresses and pilasters, decorative render work and floral plasterwork, Queen Anne chimneys, slate roofing with dormer vents, emphasis on symmetry, multi-pane sash windows, and spired tower.
F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	This place does not meet this 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 the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	This place does not meet this criterion.
H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

- ### Physical Analysis

Primary School No. 2855, also known as the Former Prahran Primary School, is located at 67 High Street Prahran. It consists of a large two-storey structure with an imposing roof and central turret. The face red brick structure is laid with a Flemish bond, contrasted by heavy stucco detailing in an off-white colour. The structure features a complex hipped roof clad with slate ties and lead ridge capping. Six tall face brick chimneys with corbelling, strapwork and paired terracotta chimney pots extend from the main roof. An octagonal turret extends from the centre of the main roof with turned posts supporting a lead paneled spire. Additional roof detailing includes projecting louvred dormer vents with a lead hipped roof.

The street front south façade presents a symmetrical layout split into three bays. The centre widest bay houses the two main arched main entrances. The entrances feature a stuccoed arched architrave with expressed pediment. The windows consist of single and grouped six-pane sash windows and six-pane fanlight with a stuccoed sill and lintel. A level course sits above the door pediments and windows demarcating the second level. The centre of the bay includes a slightly projecting open gable. It features a centred incised stuccoed name plate reading 'STATE SCHOOL no. 2855' above the ground level windows. The gable parapet features highly ornate detailing including a centred brick arch with rendered keystone and pre-cast botanical mouldings. A centred expressed pediment with festoon supported by scrolls sits above a sill course leading up the apex of the gable decorated with precast finial, brick nogging and a line of blue glazed tiling.

The identical flanking gables include two paired four-pane sash windows with fanlight on each level. The windows are dressed with a decorative stuccoed architrave with imitation quoining. The windows are further framed by brickwork buttressing. Stuccoed moulded sill and level courses and sill courses consisting of contrasting face yellow brick extend from the windows and buttressing. The parapets of the flanking gables are also highly detailed with festoon and a centred circular pattern moulding, fluted stucco paneling, brick nogging and blue tiling.

The side elevations present simpler detailing limited to the face yellow brick and blue tiling sill courses. The windows consist of single sash windows with a rendered sill and arched brickwork lintel. The north of the building includes a parking area accessed from a private road extending east from Perth Street. The parking area is sheltered by a gable roof structure clad with corrugated sheet metal. The study area includes two-storey terraced residences known as Stonnington Gardens to the west and north of the former school buildings. The residences are clustered around a central courtyard and pool.

The structure is set back from the street by a heavily planted front lawn area. This includes tall hedges and a pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) that partially obscures views of the front façade from street level. The street front boundary is demarcated by a low rendered brick wall with tall face brick posts and a rendered hipped cap. Wrought iron fencing is supported by the brick posts.

Primary School No. 2855 is bounded by High Street to the south. It is located close to the railway line and commercial precinct located to the east. Primary School No. 2855 is currently used as a residential apartment building and would have been highly altered internally for the purpose. The structure appears highly intact and subsequent additions are sympathetic to the original design. The structure retains its original detailing, particularly on the front façade and would be considered in an overall good condition and high integrity.

- Alterations and Additions

- Substantial development and subdivision of surrounding property and holdings for contemporary high density residential development.
- A new brick and metal fence has been installed on the southern site boundary.
- Internal conversion into flat accommodation.
- Skylights added to the main roof.
- Gable roof structure added to the north elevation of the former school building.
- Front lawn area replanted and relandscaped.
- Wrought iron fencing added to the front fence.

The integrity of the Primary School No. 2855 building is high.

History

- ### Historical Context

The area presently known as Stonnington is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the East Kulin Nation. Formerly characterised by pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyongkoot) and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), this once thriving habitat provided Traditional Owners access to a range of water, plant and animal resources integral to their way of life. The onset of colonialism not only saw the transformation of these landscapes, but also Woi wurrung and Bunurong displacement through violence and land dispossession, as is evident in the establishment of George Langhorne's Aboriginal Mission Station Reserve along the southern banks of the Yarra River in present day Prahran and Toorak. Operating under the guise of 'protection', this reserve ultimately became a focal point for segregation, dislocation, and colonial control of Aboriginal people's lives (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 31).

Despite decades of ongoing dispossession, the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington has an enduring presence to this day. Through continued resistance and the passing down of Indigenous knowledge, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people maintain an ongoing connection to, and care for Country.

European settlement in what would become the suburb of Prahran grew gradually following the 1849-1850 Crown Land Sales, which saw the subdivision of land bounded by present day Toorak Road, Orrong Road, Dandenong Road and Punt Road into fifty-one allotments (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 39). George Langhorne, the Commissioner of an 1837 Aboriginal mission in the area south of the Yarra River around Punt Hill, called this area 'Pura-ra-ran', a compound of two Bunurong words believed to mean land partially surrounded by water (O'Callaghan 1922, 54). In 1840 the name was changed to Prahran for official use.

While higher ground overlooking the Yarra to the north of Prahran was quickly acquired and settled by the colonial elite following the 1840 Crown Land Sales, the majority of present-day Prahran, being of poorly drained low-lying land characterised by wetlands, was primarily purchased by land speculators. These areas were subsequently and re-sold for farming, industry and housing the working classes. The high level of natural deposits of alluvial clay in the area meant that pockets of low-lying land were used as brickyards (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 17). By 1856, the land encompassing Prahran was primarily characterised by a scattered series of timber and brick workers cottages set on narrow allotments to the west of Williams Road, while land to the east and south remained undeveloped or in use as paddocks (Surveyor-General's Department 1856). The area was also distinguished by its strong market garden character during this period, with much of the land awaiting development being used for cultivation during the 1850s and 1860s (Malone 1983, 12).

The area underwent a period of rapid change following the 1880s land boom, which spurred the replacement of many small, mid-nineteenth century cottages with more ornate, single-fronted Victorian and Edwardian style terraces that could house the influx of factory workers as part of the area's growing brick manufacturing, food processing and textiles industries around Chapel Street and Commercial Road. Additionally, upper-middle class enclaves and mansion estates in the formerly undeveloped area of eastern Prahran were also developed to house the wealthy

settling adjacent to the suburb of Armadale (Malone 2000, 20). Comprising higher ground with no major drainage problems, this area attracted comparably wealthier residents (Malone 2003, 1). These transformations were also compounded by the construction of impressively detailed shops along Chapel Street, solidifying the strip as a popular retail and commercial centre by the late nineteenth century (Allom Lovell 2000, 45).

Pockets of the suburb continued to be used as a centre for small-scale manufacturing into the early- and mid-twentieth centuries. Although business restructuring and trade liberalisation in the late twentieth century ultimately resulted in the closure and demolition of many of these factories, built remnants of this era can be seen at the c.1910 Former Kia-ora Cordial factory chimney at 181-187 High Street, Prahran and at the former milliner factory at Grattan Street, Prahran (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 95). Today, Prahran's working-class history is best represented through the relatively modest late nineteenth and early twentieth century single fronted cottages and dwellings that dominate the suburb's building stock. Meanwhile, traces of late nineteenth century upper middle-class residential development are best seen in the grand Victorian dwellings adjacent to Armadale along Grandview Grove.

- ## Place History

Primary School No. 2855, then variously known as the State School No. 2855 and Prahran West State School, was erected on High Street in 1888 as part of the late nineteenth century expansion of public education provision in Victoria. The state school system was established in 1872 and the growing population of Prahran following the 1880s land boom saw an increasing demand for new schools to ease overcrowding in existing schools.

Designed and carried out by the officers of the Public Works Department and built by contractor Mr. Bale, the school was formerly opened by the Minister of Education on the 13th of February in 1888 (The Telegraph, St Kilda Prahran and South Yarra Guardian 1888, 6). Designed in an elaborate Queen Anne style, the building was noted for its articulated architectural features and careful consideration of ventilation (The Telegraph, St Kilda Prahran and South Yarra Guardian 1888, 6; The Telegraph, St Kilda Prahran and South Yarra Guardian 1888, 5) (see Figure 1 and Figure 2*):*

> The building is two storys [sic] high and is in the Queen Ann[e] style of architecture, with bright red brick facings. It is designed to accommodate date 900 pupils, but at present only 600 are provided for. Special attention has been paid to the ventilation of the different apartments, and in other essentials the comfort of the scholars and teachers has been studied. The plan of the school is somewhat different from that usually adopted. The staircase is centrally placed and has been so built as to assist in ventilating the whole structure (The Telegraph 1888, 6).



Figure 1. c.1912 overview of Primary Schol No. 2855 from High Street. *Source*: Prahran Historical and Arts Society in conjunction with Prahran Mechanics Institute).



Figure 2. c. 1922 overview of Primary School No. 2855 from High Street. *Source*: Stonington History Centre.

Noticeably, these initial descriptions of the school reflected the late nineteenth century pedagogical understandings that placed an emphasis on children's health (Willis 2016, 2). School design during this period was focused on the health of children, and as demonstrated by the above description, ventilation was a key consideration in the interior layout of the school building. Differing from the Victorian Gothic Revival that dominated state erected schools in the

1870s, State School No. 2855 also reflected the Public Works Department shift towards the civic and secular Queen Anne style in school design that was being popularised in British state schools at the time (Gargano 2013).

Rapidly increasing enrolments prompted several extensions to the school building one year later in 1889, including the erection of a twenty-five by twenty feet head teacher's office (The Prahran Telegraph 1889, 3). During this period, the school building was also used in the evening as the temporary premises of the Prahran Working Men's College (Context Pty Ltd 1993, 43-44). The building saw several alterations and additions during the interwar period, including the provision of a new staircase in 1914, the remodeling of pavilion classrooms in 1922, as well as further renovations and extensions in 1928 (Malvern Standard 1914, 4; The Argus 1922, 12; The Argus 1928, 13). The latter comprised the addition of folding partitions in eight large classrooms, converting them into thirty-six rooms, the removal of offices at the rear of the school to provide additional playing space, the addition of two shelter pavilions, the provision of additional cloakroom accommodation and the levelling and re-surfacing of the play area (The Argus 1928, 13).

Enrolments at the school dwindled towards the late twentieth century, and the school subsequently closed in 1990. Tenancy was taken up by the Gould League of Victoria, an organization concerned with environmental education. The most noticeable changes took place in 2005, which saw the conversion of the school building into luxury apartments, and the erection of the Stonnington Garden Apartments on the site of the former playground.

Comparative Analysis

The subject site at 67 High Street, Prahran, the former Primary School No. 2855, is recorded as being of individual significance in the local Stonnington Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay. The subject site was constructed during a period of mass development and construction of State Schools.

Comparable examples within the municipality include:

- **Primary School No. 1467, 333-365 Malvern Road, and 21, 22, and 23 Cromwell Place South Yarra (HO67 and VHR No. H1032).** The Primary School No. 1467 in South Yarra was constructed in 1874 to a design by Crouch and Wilson architects. The school is protected at the local level by the City of Stonington Heritage Overlay (HO67) and is also included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H1032) as a place of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. The building is comparable to the Primary School No. 2855 as two examples of late nineteenth century, Late Victorian educational design. Both structures utilize; polychromatic brick masonry with an emphasis on a centralized bay with two projecting side bays; a similar scale and form; a centralized façade decoration in the form of a large belfry at School No. 1467, and a decorative gable parapet and spire at School No. 2855; the use of decorative render; large sash windows; hipped roof form with projecting vented dormers; brick pilasters and buttresses and slate roofing. Differences include the architectural influences, with No. 1461 informed by Gothic Revival architectural design and No. 2855 informed by Flemish decorative elements with Queen Ann chimneys underpinned by a pervasive Gothic Revival element which informs the use of ecclesiastical influences in the buttress and steeply pitched gable ends. Though of comparable scale, No. 1461 is larger than No. 2855, and retains more of its setting. However, both buildings are still directly comparable.

- **Primary School No. 2586, 17-23 Tooronga Road Malvern East (HO112 and VHR No. H1710).** The Primary School No. 2586 in Malvern at Tooronga Road was completed in 1885 and was extended in 1891-92 to include a belltower, classroom, headmaster's office, and later three additional classrooms. The additional infant building was constructed in 1907-08, with later substantial additions added in 1961. The school is protected at the local level by the City of Stonington Heritage Overlay (HO112) and included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H1710) as a place of architectural, social, and historical significance to the State of Victoria. The school is comparable to No. 2855 as reflecting the historical development of state schools in Victoria in the late nineteenth century. Further, both buildings, though stylistically different in many elements, share comparable design trends that speak to educational architecture in the nineteenth century. Both buildings are constructed around a centralized projecting bay with a transverse hall connecting two additional projecting bays to the north and south at Tooronga Road and East and West on High Street. Whilst the original portion of No. 2586 is a single storey school building, both building still share architectural similarities through the use of polychromatic brick masonry, slate roofing on a hipped roof form, large multi-pane timber sash windows, decorative rendered elements, and a centralized spired roof turret. Differences most notable at No. 2586 include its later construction, and substantial hipped gable roof elements. However, both buildings are still comparable as high integrity examples of late nineteenth century State Schools located in the municipality.

Comparable examples outside the municipality include:

- **Carlton Gardens Primary School, 201-231 Rathdowne Street, Carlton (City of Melbourne HO106 and VHR No. H1624).** The Carlton Gardens Primary School, located at Rathdowne Street, is protected at the local level by the City of Melbourne Heritage Overlay (HO106) and is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H1624). At the State level, the primary school is recognised for its architectural significance to the State of Victoria and for demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places – Criterion D. In terms of comparable elements with School No. 2855, both buildings were designed by the Public Works Department and completed within four years of each other, with the Carlton Gardens Primary School completed in 1884 and No. 2855 in 1888. With this, it is highly likely that as both buildings were constructed under the purview of the Public Works Department, they were both designed by in house architect Henry Robert Bastow. Both buildings – save for stylistic elements in plasterwork and roofing materials – are exactly the same. Both buildings share the same form and scale, with a centralized gabled bay with a transverse hall connecting two additional projecting bays. Both buildings utilize a strong Gothic Revival element, as indicated by the pitch of the parapets and hipped roof forms. Most notably however and a clear indication of similarity is the centralized spired roof turret. Differences between both buildings are minimal, however the Carlton Gardens Primary School does observe a less ornamented aesthetic, and the chimneys are significantly less decorative than those at No. 2855. With this, No. 2855 is of equal significance, though more decorative.

The above comparative analysis has addressed two schools located within the municipality, and an external primary school located in Carlton but designed by Henry Robert Barstow of the Public Works Department. The above analysis has established that the subject site, Primary School No. 2855, is of comparable significance both aesthetically and historically, to all

examples listed above. However, where all examples addressed are currently protected at the State level by the Victorian Heritage Register, No. 2855 is protected at the local level. As much of the school's context has been greatly altered through subdivision and development, and the school is no longer in use as a publicly accessible building, some elements of the site's historical significance have been impacted. What is more, the building's historical significance does not have a state-wide bearing but is more representative of the boom-era history of Prahran and the City of Stonnington. Accordingly, whilst the other examples are currently included on the VHR, and they are comparable in design, No. 2855 should be retained on the local City of Stonnington Heritage Overlay as an individually significant place at the local level.

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Limitations

1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain as well as desktop resources.
3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

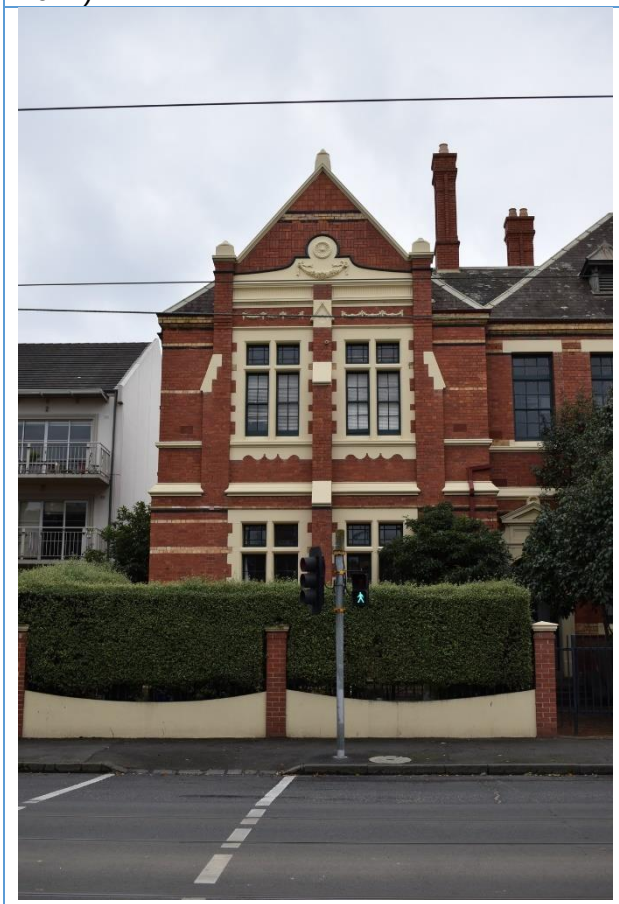
Images



Southern elevation of the former Primary School (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Oblique view of the building's western elevation, looking northeast (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



View of the western bay looking north (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



View of the central hall and spire looking north (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Oblique view of the southeastern elevation looking northwest (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



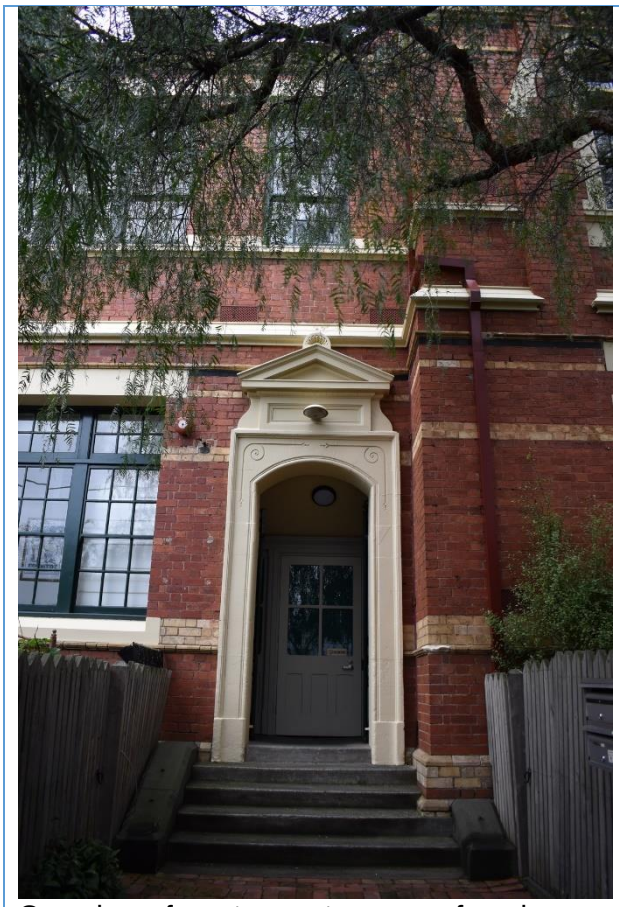
Oblique view of the spire and roof vents (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



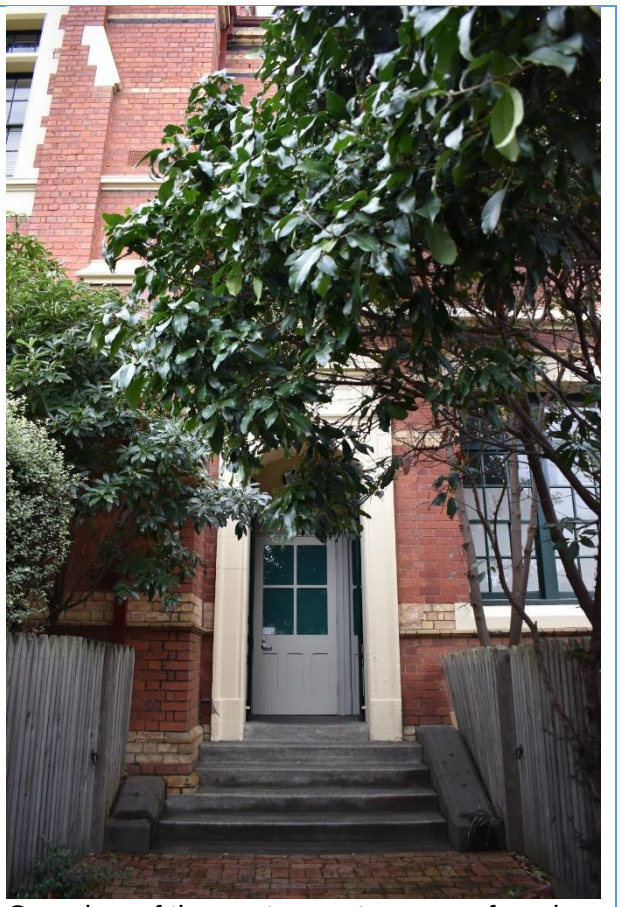
Oblique detail view of the western façade bay (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detail view of gable decoration (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of western entrance on façade looking north (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of the eastern entrance on façade looking north (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



View of rear extension, looking northeast (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).

Authors

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