Kelvin Mansions, 325 Dandenong Road, Prahran

Heritage Place: Kelvin Mansions
Address: 325 Dandenong Road, Prahran

HO Reference: HO31
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: Edwin J. & C. L. Ruck
Builder: Unknown

Year of Construction: 1922



Photograph of Kelvin Mansions (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022)



Location map and extent of HO31.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings
Heritage Type: Flats

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Developing higher density living – developing apartment living

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 325 Dandenong Road, Prahran (otherwise known as Kelvin Mansions), is significant. Specifically, the form, detailing, fenestration, materials, and scale of the interwar flat, along with the front boundary fence and sympathetic 1932 third storey addition, is of local heritage significance. Later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

Kelvin Mansions is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Kelvin Mansions is of historical significance as an early twentieth century flat building constructed during the interwar period following the promulgation of purpose-built flat development in the former municipality of Prahran. As an outcome of the interwar subdivisions of Victorian boom era mansions, flat development in Prahran not only reflected the growing popularity of low maintenance flat living, but also changing social attitudes towards apartment living. Kelvin Mansions thus forms a tangible link to this period of residential and urban development. (Criterion A)

Kelvin Mansions is of aesthetic significance as a highly expressive and pronounced example of an interwar flat building that incorporates both Federation and Victorian style influences. It is distinguished by its impressive scale, five distinct bays, an open gable roof form clad with terracotta tiles, bracketed eaves, and an open staircase. It also comprises the contrasting use of light pink stucco and face red brick paneling, curved bay timber sash windows and timber framed casement windows with stained leadlight and curved open balconies with circular columns embellished with precast mouldings. These features, along with its deep setback and original street front boundary fence comprising a rendered curved brick fence with face brick capping and curved wrought iron fencing, combine to create an unusual yet highly decorative three storey flat building. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	Kelvin Mansions is of historical significance as an early twentieth century flat building constructed during the interwar period following the promulgation of purpose-built flat development in the former municipality of Prahran. As an outcome of the interwar subdivisions of Victorian boom era mansions, flat development in Prahran not only reflected the growing popularity of low maintenance flat living, but also changing social attitudes towards apartment living. Kelvin Mansions thus forms a tangible link to this period of residential and urban development.

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*	Kelvin Mansions is of aesthetic significance as a highly expressive and pronounced example of an interwar flat building that incorporates both Federation and Victorian style influences. It is distinguished by its impressive scale, five distinct bays, an open gable roof form clad with terracotta tiles, bracketed eaves, and an open staircase. It also comprises the contrasting use of light pink stucco and face red brick panelling, curved bay timber sash windows and timber framed casement windows with stained leadlight and curved open balconies with circular columns embellished with precast mouldings. These features, along with its deep setback and original street front boundary fence comprising a rendered curved brick fence with face brick capping and curved wrought iron fencing, combine to create an unusual yet highly decorative three storey flat building.
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

Kelvin Mansions is a three-storey masonry apartment building. The structure is mostly finished with a light pink stucco contrasted by face red brick sections. The structure presents a complex hipped and gabled roof form clad with terracotta tiles, horn finials, and crest ridge tiles. Five rendered corbelled chimneys of varying widths extend from the main roof. The roof overhangs the structure with exposed eaves and some sections of the overhanging roof are supported by equally spaced brackets.

The front façade presents a symmetrical layout with an open gable roof form and curved bay windows. The façade is visually separated into five bays defined by the vertical face red brick paneling forming buttresses at the ground level. The centre bay consists of curved open balconies with four circular columns decorated with precast mouldings. A balustrade form is expressed within the balcony masonry.

The two bays on either side of the centre balcony present mostly identical features. This includes a curved bay window flanking the centre balcony that contains four white time sash windows with rectangular fanlight. The end bays consist of balconies enclosed with white timber casement windows. The expressed balustrade form is repeated on the masonry of the end bays. The end bays on the ground level feature porthole windows in place of the balconies above. The windows on the front façade feature stained leadlight glass. Lettering on the centre bay of the first level reads, 'J&H FROHLICH WEST HOUSE'. Additional expressed stylised lettering on the two flanking bays read, 'KELVIN MANSIONS'.

The main entrance to the building is located on the west elevation in the form of a side staircase. The open staircase leads to enclosed landings overhanging the side driveway. The side staircase mirrors detailing on the front façade including the balustrade motif, circular columns, and bracketed eaves. There is also an external staircase along the north elevation made of galvanised steel which replaced an original timber staircase.

The remainder of the structure lacks the decorative detailing seen on the front facade, presenting as face brick elevations with single sash windows. The north (rear) elevation includes a secondary set of open stairs leading to the central concrete laid parking area. North of the parking area is a two-storey apartment building consisting of face red brick with a hipped roof clad with terracotta tiles. The secondary structure extends north and fronts Karbarook Avenue at its northern extent.

The apartment building is set back from the street with a landscaped front lawn. A concrete laid driveway extends along the west boundary. The front lawn is planted with a variety of low ornamental shrubs and trees. The street front boundary consists of a rendered curved brick fence with wide posts. The fence base and post caps are finished with face brick. Curved wrought iron fencing further emphasis the form of the masonry fence.

Kelvin Mansions is bounded by Dandenong Road to the north. It is remains in use as a residential apartment block. The structure retains its original detailing, is in good condition and is of high integrity.

- Alterations and Additions

- Sympathetic third storey added (1932).
- Addition of six double carports to rear of property (1977).
- External side staircase filled in casement windows (after 1982).
- Expressed metal lettering added to the centre bay reading, 'K & H FROLICH-WEST HOUSE' (after 1982).
- Replacement of original external rear timber staircase with galvanised steel staircase and aluminum framed windows (2000).
- Driveway and parking area laid with concrete.
- Some windows replaced with steel framed sliding windows on the north elevation.

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 (Kooyong Koot) 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 middle-class residential development are best seen in the grand Victorian dwellings adjacent to Armadale along Grandview Grove.

- ## Place History

The land on which Kelvin Mansions currently sits was part of Lot 64 during the 1849-50 Crown Land Sales. Purchased by merchant James Rae, this thirty-and-a-half-acre allotment comprised land towards the south-eastern boundary of the present-day suburb of Prahran (Surveyor-General's Department 1849). As opposed to low lying land to the west that was set aside for housing the working class, this area comprised fairly level and well drained land and was gradually subdivided and taken up by the wealthy upper-middle classes by the late nineteenth century (Malone 2003, 38) (see Figure 1*).*

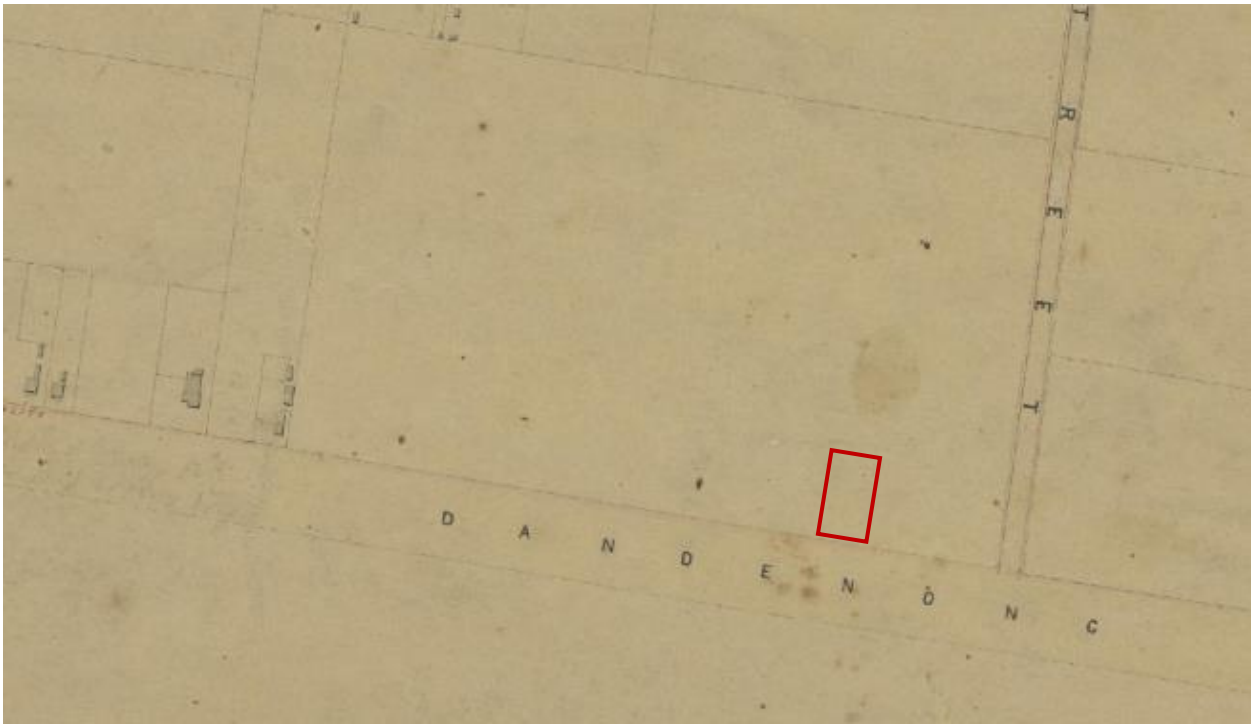


Figure 1. 1855 map showing the approximate location of present day Kelvin Mansion (then vacant) in red. *Source*: Public Record Office Victoria.

In 1881-2, the six-acre Karbarook Estate was subsequently erected for noted judge Sir Thomas a'Beckett on land bounded by present day Stawell Street, Dandenong Road, Orrong Road and the southern boundary of the extant Larnook Mansion at 519 Orrong Road, Armadale (MMBW 1900; Malone 2003, 38) (see Figure 2). However, as with most Victorian mansion estates in this area, Karbarook was ultimately subdivided during the interwar period. Although the subdivision of large estates was taking place as well before this period, rising labour costs following World War I made the cost of servants and other workers to maintain the estates prohibitive (Context Pty Ltd 2009). This resulted in a period of subdivision and development that precipitated key urban character changes. In the case of Karbarook, its subdivision, combined with the City of Prahran's support of flat development during the late 1910s, would pave the way for the construction of the Kelvin Mansions by 1922 (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 144; The Prahran Telegraph 1919, 4). Notably, while many municipalities enacted restrictive building codes to halt interwar flat development due to safety reasons and their perceived lack of conduciveness to nuclear living, the City of Prahran, along with the City of St Kilda, encouraged flat development to a certain extent (Context Pty Ltd 2009, 144).

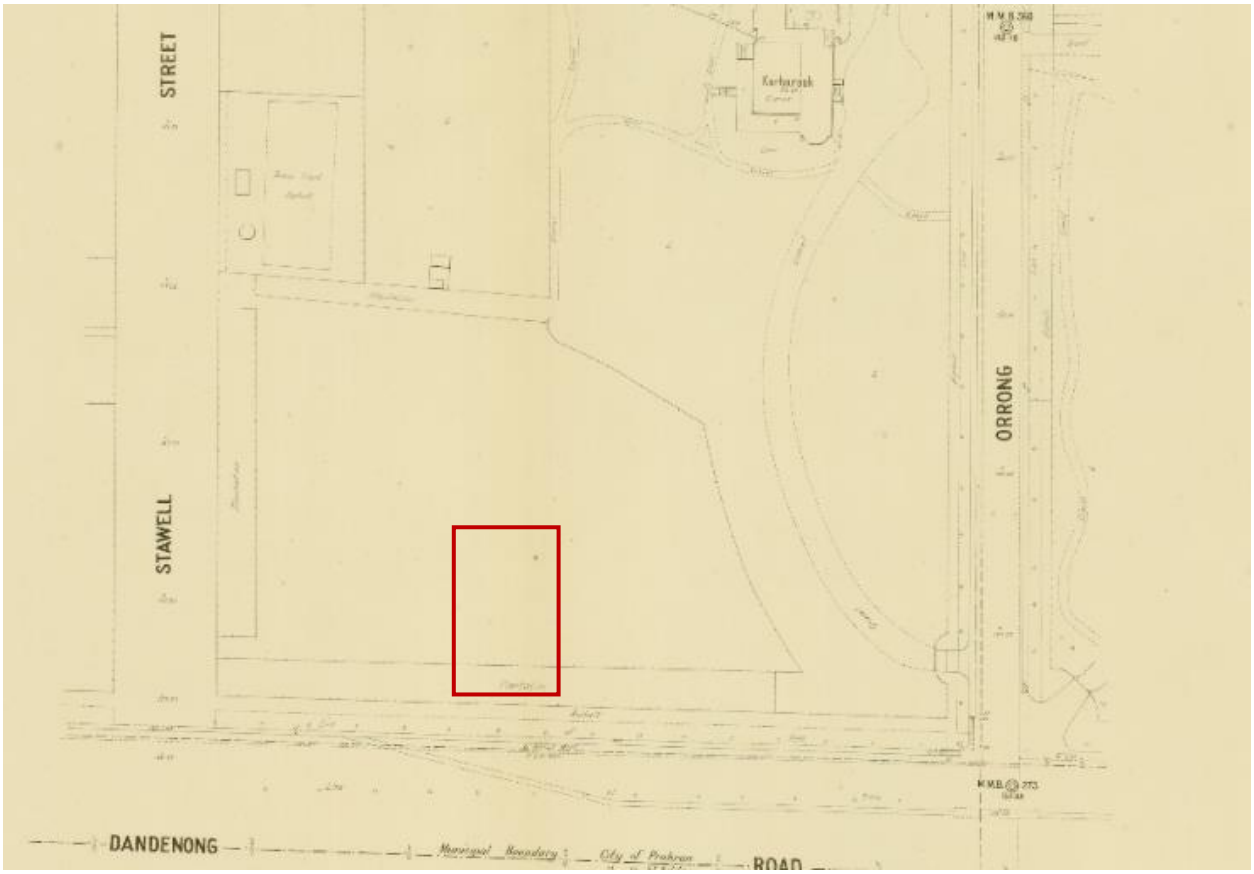


Figure 2. 1900 MMBW detail plan 999 showing Kelvin Mansion (then part of the grounds of Karbarook Estate) in red. *Source:* State Library of Victoria.

Completed in 1922 to designs by brothers and architectural partners, Edwin J. Ruck and C. L. Ruck, the Kelvin Mansions consisted of a two-storey block of four five-roomed brick flats which was initially owned by commission agent and bookmaker Vernon Hurt (Prahran Rate Books, Windsor Ward). Well-known architects who worked in Victoria and Western Australia throughout the interwar period, other apartment designs by Edwin J. Ruck and C. L. Ruck include the Spanish Mission style flats Aston Court (City of Port Phillip HO5) at 43 Acland Street, St Kilda, as well as the now demolished Mayfair flats at Marne Street, South Yarra (Sawyer 1982, 36).

Owner Vernon Hurt resided in one of the flats, while the others were rented out to various individuals. Known tenants in 1928 include Jane Bartlett, Alexander Mullin, and John Gibson (Prahan Rate Books, Windsor Ward). As with the numerous contemporaneous flats erected across the wider municipality during the interwar period, Kelvin Mansions was known for housing single people, a distinct contrast to the traditional nuclear families that occupied the larger houses in the surrounding area. An additional storey was added to the flats in 1932 which consisted of two more five-room flats. These two additional flats were distinguished by their private balconies and porches that offered extensive views over St Kilda to the bay. By this period, known tenants included John Bartlett, manager John Mercer, motor salesman John L. Mended, civil servant William Taylor and Donald McMillan (Prahran Rate Books, Windsor Ward). Meanwhile, Hurt continued to occupy one of the original four flats (Prahran Rate Books, Windsor Ward).

Hurt eventually sold Kelvin Mansions in 1950 for a total of £35,000 (The Argus 1950, 14). By this period, the property was described as having eleven flats of five or six rooms, indicating that further additions had taken place during the 1940s (The Argus 1950, 14). By the 1960s, Max and Minna Rozental are listed as the owners of the apartment building (Prahran Rate Books, Windsor Ward). The property was subsequently acquired by Aylmer Investments Pty Ltd by the 1970s. This transfer of ownership resulted in several alterations and additions to the building, including the addition of six double carports in 1977 (Prahran Rate Books, Windsor Ward; Prahran Building Inspection Cards 1977). More recent alterations comprise the replacement of the original external timber rear (north elevation) staircase with a galvanised steel staircase and aluminum framed windows in 2000 (Jacobi 1999). Today, the Kelvin Mansions continue to be used as private residential flats.



Figure 3. 1982 north-east facing view of façade. *Source*: Graeme Butler.



Figure 4. 1982 south facing view of the rear and original external timber staircase (now replaced). *Source:* Graeme Butler.

Comparative Analysis

Designed in a Federation derived style, Kelvin Mansions is a distinctive interwar era flat defined by its central curved stuccoed balconies, elaborate detailing, leadlight windows, and multiple hipped and gabled roof forms. Primarily incorporating Federation Queen Anne architectural elements, the building is unique from most other interwar flats that were typically constructed in the popular Interwar Old English, Moderne and Arts and Crafts styles. There are, however, a small number of interwar style flats with Federation influences within the municipality that Kelvin Mansions shares features with. These include:

- **Netherhall, 32-34 Clendon Road, Toorak (HO432).** Designed by architect John A.B. Koch in 1918, Netherhall is a rare example of the Federation Queen Anne style applied to a residential interwar flat. It encompasses the key features associated with the style, including front facing gables, ridge tiling and finials, chimneys with curved brackets beneath a flat cap, and is further articulated by decorative bargeboards, exposed eaves and roof lanterns. It is synonymous with Kelvin Mansions in terms of its materials, roof detailing, symmetrical appearance and front facing gables. Another noteworthy similarity is its classical style entrance portico, which compares well to the central façade of Kelvin Mansions in terms of its paired piers. Of the two, Kelvin Mansions is more visually impressive in terms of its elaborate detailing and combined use of rectilinear and curved forms.
- **Studley, 392-400 Toorak Road, Toorak and 41 Tintern Avenue, Toorak (HO108).** Constructed in 1910 and 1918 by noted architect Walter Richmond Butler, Studley comprises an Interwar Arts and Crafts style flat distinguished by rectilinear forms with entrance treatments, low-pitched gable roofs with terracotta Marseille tiles, deep eaves, rendered brick and leaded windows. While a different style to the Kelvin Mansions, it shares a number of Federation derived architectural features, including the use of terracotta and rendered brick materials, a combination of hipped and gabled roof forms, and face brick detailing. Being of the Arts and Crafts style, it is substantially less ornamented than Kelvin Mansions.

The only other known example of Federation style flats that Kelvin Mansions can be compared with lies outside of the municipality at:

- **Moama, 1 Emilton Avenue, St Kilda (City of Port Phillip, significant in HO5 St Kilda Hill Precinct).** Comprising a two-storey Federation style residence to flat conversion, Moama compares well to Kelvin Mansions in terms of its distinct curved bay windows, terracotta ridge tiling and finials, timber framed leaded windows, exposed eaves and combination of rectilinear and curved forms. However, as with the above, it is less ornamented, and lacks the imposing scale and unusual cosmetic character that distinguishes Kelvin Mansions from other interwar era flats.

From an architectural perspective, Kelvin Mansions is a highly distinct and unusual example of an interwar era flat development, and few compare to it in terms of scale and ornamentation Unlike the above examples, Kelvin Mansions is ultimately distinguished by its highly decorative and detailed character, an appearance that stems from its incorporation of canopies over curved bay windows and balconies, Victorian era precast ornamental moulds and paired circular columns.

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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.

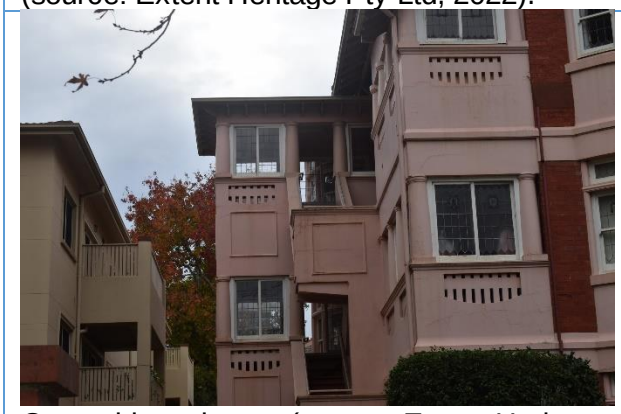
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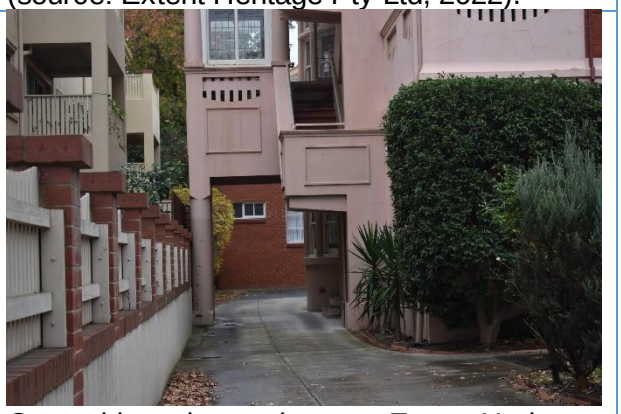
Overview of façade from Dandenong Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detail view of upper floors, western bays (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



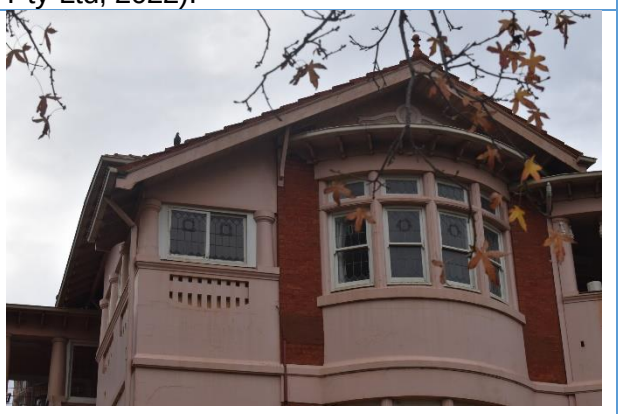
Open side staircase (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Open side staircase (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detal view of ground and middle floor (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detail view of upper floor curved bay windows, roof form, bracketed eaves and red

	brick panelling on the western bay (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).
 Detail view of the first floor curved bay windows, brick panelling and expressed metal façade lettering on the western bay (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).	 Detail view of the first floor curved open balcony with circular columns embellished with precast mouldings and expressed metal façade lettering, on the central and eastern bays (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).
 Detail view of upper floor curved bay windows, roof form, bracketed eaves and red brick panelling on the eastern bay (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).	 North-east facing view of the original front boundary fence (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).
 Detail view of face brick capping and wrought iron detailing to the front boundary fence (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).	 Detail view of face brick capping to the front boundary fence (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).

Authors

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