HO377 Union Street Precinct

What is Significant?

The Union Street Precinct is a residential area which initially developed as a brickmaking centre from the late 1850s. The construction of the railway through Armadale in 1879 was another important factor in the development of the precinct. The railway cut diagonally across the western edge of Union Street, creating an irregular group of blocks which - along with ad-hoc subdivision around the brick clay pits in the 1880s - would produce the unorthodox arrangement of streets that survive in the area today.

Residential development in the precinct was initially constrained by the large extent of the Union Street clay pits. Nonetheless, house building in the area intensified as the land boom reached its peak in the late 1880s. The precinct evolved during this period with higher density cottage groups on narrow streets and freestanding middle class villas on more generous allotments - the later type of development typically occurring closer to the shopping strips along Glenferrie Road and High Street although the often erratic and unplanned nature of 1880s subdivisions meant that both working class or artisan cottages were intermingled with the more substantial villas.

Development halted abruptly with the recession of the early 1890s and the closure of the brickworks, leaving large areas of the precinct vacant. The next major phase of development in the precinct took place during the early 1900s and was spurred on the extension of the electric tram network along Glenferrie Road. Much of this new development took the form of middle class housing but also included modest cottages and a small number of factory buildings, reinforcing the mixed industrial/working class character of certain streets within the precinct. Development was largely complete to the present arrangement of streets, dwellings and allotments by the late 1910s. The area is highly intact to this c.1920 state with few relatively modern interventions and the greater part of its building stock demonstrating a high level of integrity to its original form.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the precinct include (but are not limited to):

- the Victorian-era houses and streetscapes including the detached brick and timber villas coexisting with more modest cottages housing and terrace rows of the period;
- the Edwardian houses and streetscapes developed through the early twentieth century and including fine examples of the 'Queen Anne' revival style;
- the utilitarian architectural character and red-brick materiality of Edwardian era industrial buildings;
- a selection of dwellings from the 1920s and 1930s which are generally sympathetic in terms of their architectural form, scale, and siting, and as such make useful contributions to the early character of the area;
- the predominantly single-storey nature of the precinct (the two-storey scale of the former Merriman's Dairy and the Edwardian factory buildings on Stuart Street provide an atypical, but historically important, variation from the scale of the precinct more generally);
- the open landscaped character of certain streetscapes in the precinct brought about through, low front fences, undeveloped front setbacks and mature street trees;
- the modest scale of built form and uniform pattern of small front and side setbacks within certain

streetscapes including Barkly Avenue, Willis Street, Stuart Street and Stanhope Street;
- repetitive character of the building stock and the regularity of rhythm of the built form, particularly on Alleyne Avenue, Barkly Avenue and Willis Street;
- the extent to which original detailing survives. Nineteenth century buildings typically retain verandahs, polychrome brickwork and ornamental detailing. Edwardian buildings are generally of note for their ornate timber detailing;
- timber, face brick or render materiality and hipped or gabled roofscapes with chimneys and terracotta or slate tiles or plain corrugated galvanised steel cladding;
- low incidence of modern interventions such as parking provisions in front setbacks (particularly in areas such as Stuart, Stanhope and Willis Streets and Barkly Avenue, where few crossovers exist at all);
- the retention of sympathetic low front fences in most sections of the precinct;
- low incidence of visible first floor additions in most streetscapes;
- road layout and allotment patterns reflecting the ad-hoc process of subdivision in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century;
- bluestone kerbs, channels and laneways (to the extent that they survive); and
- the collection of mature Peppercorn trees (Schinus molle) at 9 Meryl Street, Armadale.

How is it significant?

The Union Street Precinct is of historical and aesthetic significance at a local level.

Why is it significant?

The Union Street precinct is of historical significance for its capacity to demonstrate the dramatic cycle of boom and bust created by the frenzy of land speculation in the 1880s (*Historic Theme: 3.3.5 Recovery and Infill*). This is illustrated by the way in which residential subdivisions laid out in the late nineteenth century were not fully developed until there was a renewed surge of building activity in the early 1900s.

The irregular layout of narrow and broad streets and relationship with the railway line illustrate the *ad hoc* nature of nineteenth century planning (*Historic Theme: 3.3.4 Uncontrolled and Unplanned Development*). The area also provides a vivid contrast between the modest standards of accommodation and amenity enjoyed by the Victorian working class and the more substantial, but polite, built form which underscores the middle class aspirations of Edwardian Malvern (*Historic Theme: 8.5.1 'Struggletown' - working class housing in the nineteenth and early twentieth century)*. The larger dwellings in the precinct, typically in landscaped settings on generous allotments illustrate the desire for rus in urbe - city in the country - and life away from the crowded conditions of the inner city *(Historic Theme: 8.2.2 'Country in the city' - suburban development in Malvern before 1920).* The collection of Peppercorn trees (Schinus molle) at 9 Meryl Street, Armadale from the early 20th century add to this story.

In addition, the Union Street Precinct is of historical significance for its associations with the brickmaking industry dating back to the late 1850s (*Historic Theme: 6.2.1 Brick and tile manufacturing)*. Although the brickworks closed down in the 1890s they continued to play an important role in the evolution of the

surrounding urban landscape. In particular, the clay pits occupied a large area which limited the potential for residential subdivisions in the early 1880s and contributed to the ad-hoc street layout. The prescence of the brickworks also provided further stimulus in the early twentieth century for factory development of a type rarely found in the suburban middle-class enclaves of Armadale and Malvern (*Historic Theme: 6.2.4 Other manufactured goods)*.

The Union Street Precinct is aesthetically significant for its substantially intact collection of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century housing stock. This includes fine streetscapes of handsome Victorian and Edwardian villas and more modest cottages, often occurring side by side in a manner typical of 1880s subdivisions. The precinct also contains a number of streetscapes with a notably higher degree of consistency in terms of scale, form and period of construction. This includes the timber cottage streetscape on Barkly Avenue and adjacent Edwardian brick villa rows on Alleyne Avenue. The dramatic change in architectural character between these two streetscapes provides a particularly clear demonstration of the way in which the precinct was developed in two main stages in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The villas in Alleyne Avenue are especially significant as they demonstrate a degree of architectural unity rarely found elsewhere in the municipality.

The precinct also contains a small number of dwellings which were built in the 1920s and 1930s. These are sympathetic to the key Victorian and Edwardian building stock in terms of their architectural form, scale, and siting, and as such make a valuable contribution to the early character of the precinct.

The collection of Peppercorn trees (Schinus molle) at 9 Meryl Street, Armadale also contribute towards the aesthetic significance if the precinct, as a copse of mature peppercorns with an interesting twisted form, synonymous with mature examples of this type of planting.

The overall intactness and diversity of the Victorian and Edwardian building stock, contrasting densities of development and ad-hoc planning make the precinct a rare and significant urban landscape within the City of Stonnington.

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