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# Osborne Street Interwar Group

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

**Address:** 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Name:** | Osborne Street Interwar Group | **Survey Date:** | July 2024 |
| **Place Type:** | Residential group | **Architect/Designer:** | R M and M H King (135 Osborne St) |
| **Grading:** | HO806 - see grading table | **Builder:** | Not known |
| **Extent of the Overlay:** | See Figure 24 | **Construction Date(s):** | 1935-38 |







*Figures 1-3. Green Gables Flats at 121 Osborne Street (top left), Harrow Flats at 125 Osborne Street (top right), and Allambi Flats (bottom) at 135 Osborne Street, South Yarra (GJM Heritage, June 2024)*

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## Statement of Significance

*What is significant?*

The Osborne Street Interwar Group, a group of three interwar flat buildings at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra, constructed 1935-37.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include:

- Two-storey brick flats, in the Interwar English Domestic Revival (nos. 121 and 125) and Moderne styles (no. 135)
- Hipped roofs with tile cladding
- Asymmetrical principal elevations with projecting front gables (nos.121 and 125)
- Symmetrical principal elevation with prominent flat-roofed central bay (no. 135)
- Detailing including decorative brickwork to gable ends and entrances, wrought iron balustrading, curved walls and balcony balustrading, single and grouped multi-paned timber-framed sash windows
- Variety of brick and rendered brick chimneys
- Consistent setbacks behind landscaped frontages
- Rear vehicle access and accommodation
- Low brick fences at the street boundaries.

*How is it significant?*

The Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra is of local historical, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

*Why is it significant?*

The Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra has strong associations with the development of the municipality in the interwar period. This period of development transformed the built environment and social character of the area by replacing larger properties and substantial mansion estates with higher density flat developments. This was largely a result of rising labour and materials costs following World War I, which made the cost of maintaining large properties difficult and led to a significant increase in the subdivision of large estates across the municipality to create higher density living. As a highly intact group of flats dating to the interwar period, the Osborne Street Interwar Group clearly illustrates this important phase of development in the City of Stonnington (Criterion A).

The Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra contains a cohesive collection of fine and highly intact representative examples of flat buildings dating to the interwar period. Constructed in the English Domestic Revival or Moderne style, the buildings display typical features of this period, including the use of face brickwork with tile-clad hipped roofs, asymmetrical front elevations with projecting front gables (nos. 121 and 125), symmetrical front elevation (no. 135), decorative brick detailing, wrought iron balustrading, curved walls and balustrading, multi-paned timber-framed windows, brick and rendered brick chimneys and low brick boundary fences (Criterion D).

The Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra forms a highly unified group of interwar architect-designed flats constructed in the English Domestic Revival or Moderne style. The consistent siting, scale, building forms and materiality – in conjunction with the garden settings and low brick front fences – presents a highly architecturally consistent and aesthetically cohesive streetscape (Criterion E).

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## Historical Context

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

8 Building suburbs
- 8.1.3 The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twenthieth century
- 8.2 Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal
- 8.6 Developing higher density living

## Contextual History

*[The following contextual history is derived from Context Pty Ltd's 'Residential Flats in Stonnington Heritage Citations Project', Final (Amendment C163), 12 August 2013, pp 21-24.]*

The building of residential flats began in Melbourne in the first decades of the twentieth century and gathered momentum after World War I. The war affected patterns of living and social life within Australia and the population boom that followed led to a shortage of housing at a time when there was also a shortage of skilled labour and high material costs. The building of flats was seen as one solution to the problem.

A further impact of World War I particular to the South Yarra area was the rapidly changing socio-economic and employment environment which made it increasingly difficult for mansion owners to afford to maintain these large properties and to retain domestic staff. As Wilde (1999:62) cites from an article in the 18 October 1919 edition of the *Prahran Telegraph*:

> *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.*

As a result, in the early twentieth century many sites were ripe for flat development – for both purpose-built flats and the conversion of single substantial residences into flats – particularly along the network of recently electrified tram routes.

The boom in flat development eventually led to resident protests about flats destroying the character of South Yarra and Toorak and, as a result, Prahran Council passed a by-law in 1933 that placed controls over site coverage and building height as well as construction standards in certain areas. An impact of these controls was that until the postwar era, flat developments in these areas were limited to two-storeys in height and needed to be set within garden settings.

## Place History

The land that is now Osborne Street was first offered for sale as part of the early Crown land sales in 1849 and 1850. A large tract of land, comprising Crown Allotments 36-38, bound by Punt Road to the west, Gardiners Creek (now Toorak) Road to the north, Chapel Street to the east and Commercial Road to the south, were purchased by Peter Davis, a real estate agent. Davis quickly sold off 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 house lots.

Osborne Street, running between Toorak Road and Commercial Road alongside the Sandringham railway line, was created in the mid-nineteenth century and was almost fully developed by the early 1900s when it was lined with large villas and single fronted terrace houses (MMBW). An 1895 Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) plan indicates that at this date, the subject land was occupied by a large Victorian

villa and garden addressed as 125 Osborne Street (Figure 4). This property remained until the 1930s (Figure 5).

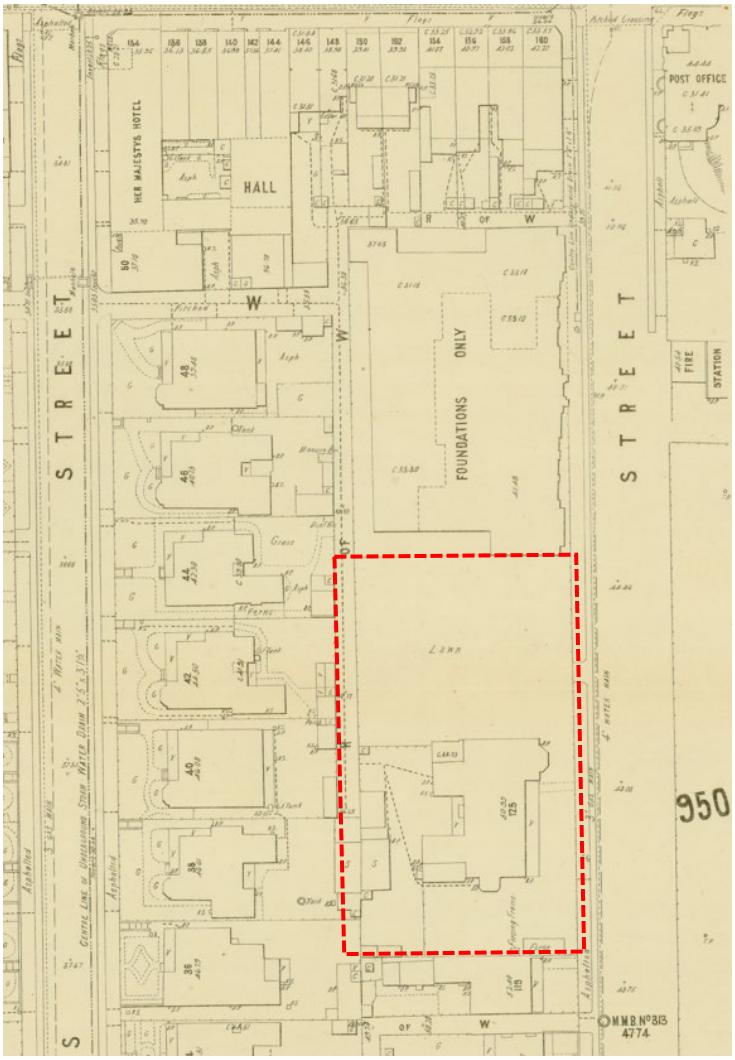



*Figure 4. An 1895 MMBW plan showing the north end of Osborne Street. The approximate precinct boundary is indicated in red, occupied by the earlier residence and gardens at no. 125 (Source: MMBW Detail Plan No. 949, dated 1895)*




*Figure 5. A 1931 aerial photograph overlaid with the approximate precinct boundary. Evident is the earlier house and garden addressed to no. 125 (Source: Landata Victoria)*

After World War I some of the larger allotments towards Toorak Road closest to South Yarra railway station and the cable tram along Toorak Road that was converted to electric traction by 1927 (Context 2012:125) began to be redeveloped as flats. In November 1935, Henry H Harris of 856 Burke Road, Glen Iris was rated as the owner of vacant land comprising the current 121, 125 and 135 Osborne Street (RB, 1935-36).

***Allambi Flats, 135 Osborne Street***

The Allambi Flats at 135 Osborne Street were constructed in 1935-36 for owner Henry H Harris, designed by architects R M and M H King.

R M and M H King, architects and engineers called for tenders for 'four flats at Osborne-Street, South Yarra' in June 1935 (Age, 8 Jun 1935:3). A Drainage Plan dated August 1935 shows the original footprint of the flats and outbuildings, including three garages (Figure 6). In November 1936 Henry H Harris was rated as the owner of four four-roomed brick flats at 135 Osborne Street, each with a tenant (RB, 1936-37).

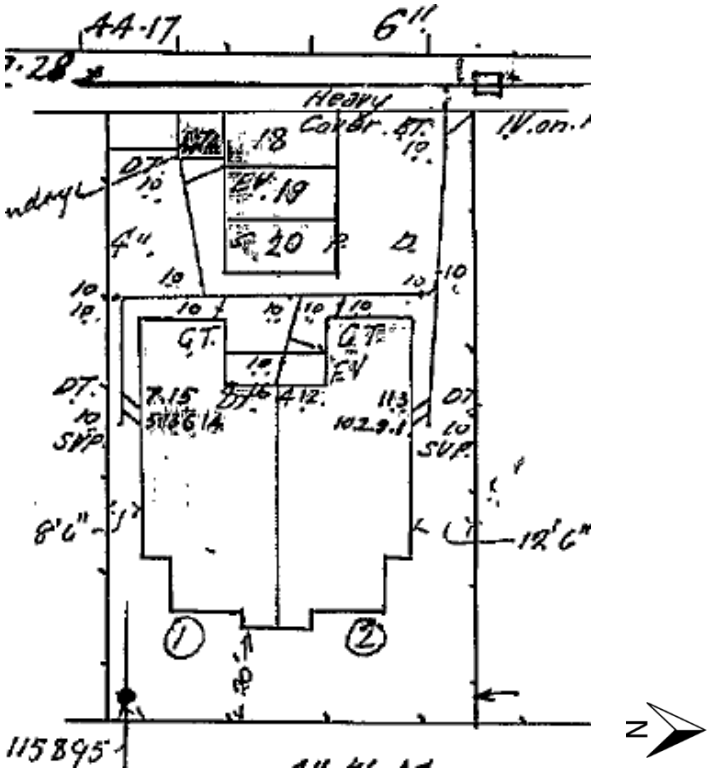



*Figure 6. Footprint of Allambi Flats, including the building and outbuildings (inlcuding three garages) at 135 Osborne Street, plan dated August 1935 (Drainage Plan No. 196112).*

***Green Gables Flats, 121 Osborne Street***

The Green Gables Flats at 121 Osborne Street were constructed in 1936-37.

In November 1936 Henry H Harris was rated as the owner of vacant land located between nos. 119 and 135 Osborne Street; however, a Drainage Plan also dated November 1936 shows the original footprint of the flats and outbuildings, including two garages, constructed at 121 Osborne Street (Figure 7). Research has not been able to determine an architect for the development.

In November 1937, Henry D Phipps was rated as the owner of four four-roomed brick flats at 121 Osborne Street, each with a tenant (RB, 1937-38) indicating that Phipps acquired the newly completed block of flats.

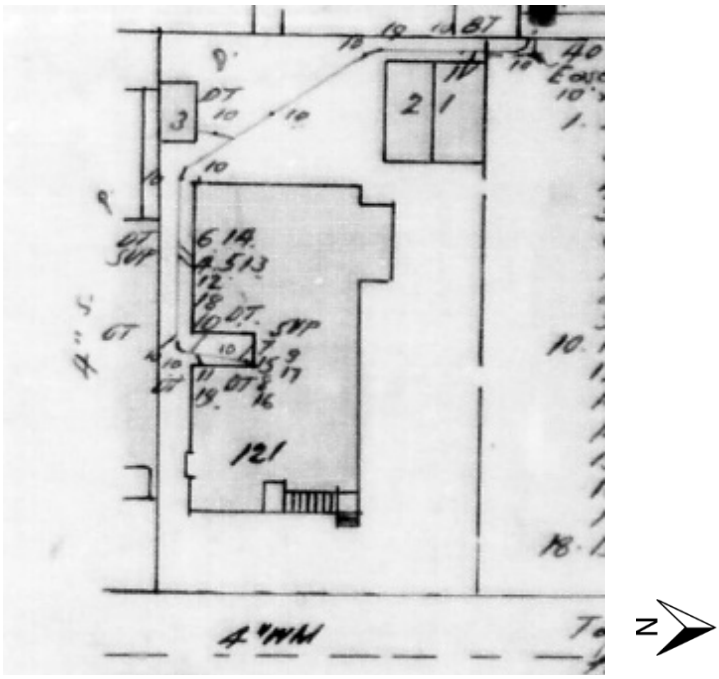



*Figure 7. Footprint of Green Gables Flats, including the building and outbuildings (including two garages) at 121 Osborne Street, plan dated November 1936 (Drainage Plan No. 3908).*

***Harrow Flats, 125 Osborne Street***

Harrow Flats at 125 Osborne Street were constructed in 1937-38 for owner Henry H Harris and were initially addressed as number 133 Osborne Street.

In November 1937 Henry H Harris was rated as the owner of vacant land located between 121 and 135 Osborne Street. By December 1938, Harris was rated as the owner of six four-roomed brick flats at 133 (current 125) Osborne Street, five of which were recorded with a tenant (RB, 1938-39). A Drainage Plan dated October 1937 shows the original footprint of the flats and outbuildings, including four garages (Figure 8). Research has not been able to determine an architect.

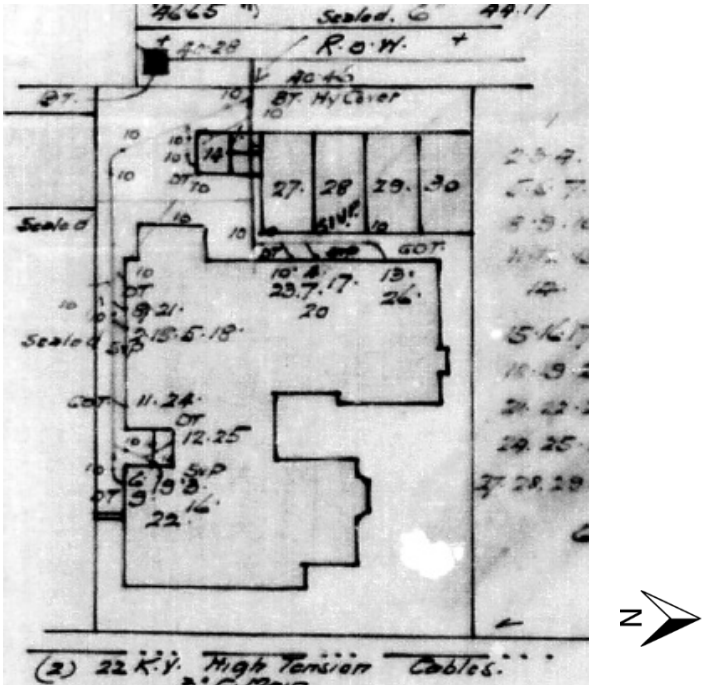



*Figure 8 Footprint of Harrow Flats, including the building at 125 Osborne Street, plan dated October 1937. To the rear are four garages and an outbuilding (Drainage Plan No. 204316).*

A 1945 aerial photograph shows the recently completed flats (Figure 9).



*Figure 9. A 1945 aerial photograph showing the three blocks of flats and outbuildings at 121 (south), 125 and 135 (north) Osborne Street (Source: Landata Victoria)*

***R M and M H King, architects***

*[The following architect biography is taken from Context Pty Ltd's 'Residential Flats in Stonnington Heritage Citations Project', Final (Amendment C163), 12 August 2013, p 35.]*

Ray Maurice King began practicing as an architect in Adelaide in 1891. The following year he moved to Melbourne and over the next 60 years he and his son, Maurice Harrington King, who he went into partnership with in 1926, designed many industrial and residential buildings in Greater Melbourne and wider Victoria. Maurice, who was trained as an engineer, is regarded as having transformed the fledgling practice established by his father into one of Melbourne's most prolific architectural firms of the mid-twentieth century.

Although the firm designed a range of building types including commercial (e.g. Kurrajong House on Collins Street, Melbourne of 1926-7, and the showroom for the Colonial Gas Company at Box Hill), factories (e.g. the Hopkins Odlum Apex Belting factory at Footscray) and churches (e.g. Knox Presbyterian Church, Noel Street, Ivanhoe of 1927), they are perhaps best known for their residential projects, comprising houses and flats, including the conversion of earlier dwellings into flats. R M & M H King designed many houses in the Tudor Revival, Mediterranean and Bungalow styles that were popular in the 1920s and 1930s, however their Moderne houses of the 1930s are regarded as some of the best examples of this style in Melbourne. Examples of their residential flats within Stonnington include those at 1483 High Street, Glen Iris (1932, HO351) and 'Coronal' at 9-11 Lewes Drive, Malvern East (conversion to flats, 1939, HO322). Other residential projects within Stonnington include the duplex at 392-394 Glenferrie Road, Malvern (1935-36, HO455) and residences at 9 Redcourt Avenue, Armadale (1937, HO384) and 500 Orrong Road, Armadale (1937, HO384).

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## Description

The Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121, 125 and 135 Osborne Street, South Yarra is located on the west side of Osborne Street, south-east of the main intersection of Punt Road and Toorak Road and directly west of the Melbourne to Sandringham railway line. It comprises a group of three interwar residential flats which are situated on rectangular sites and setback from the street boundary behind front gardens. Brick garages are located at the rear of the three properties and nos. 121 and 135 are accessed by driveways at the northern end of their street boundaries. A bluestone-paved lane provides access to parking at the rear of no. 125.

The three buildings are large two-storey buildings constructed in the 1930s. Constructed of brick (rendered at nos. 121 and 135 and face brickwork at no. 125) with tile-clad hipped roofs, the buildings are highly consistent in scale and materiality and display a variety of detailing which draws on the Interwar English Domestic Revival (nos. 121 and 125) and the Interwar Moderne (no. 135) styles. Principal elevations at nos. 121 and 125 are asymmetrical with projecting front gables, and symmetrical at no. 135 with a dominant flat-roofed central bay and curved bays to each side. Detailing includes decorative brickwork to gable ends and entrances (nos. 121 and 125), wrought iron balustrading (nos. 121 and 125), curved walls and balcony balustrading (no. 135), single and grouped multi-paned timber-framed sash windows and a variety of brick and rendered brick chimneys.

Original low brick front fences line the street boundaries of the properties, with wrought iron top rail and pedestrian and vehicular gates at no. 121.

Key Features:

- Two-storey brick flats, in the Interwar English Domestic Revival (nos. 121 and 125) and Moderne styles (no. 135)
- Hipped roofs with tile cladding
- Asymmetrical principal elevations with projecting front gables (nos.121 and 125)
- Symmetrical principal elevation with prominent flat-roofed central bay (no. 135)
- Detailing including decorative brickwork to gable ends and entrances, wrought iron balustrading, curved walls and balcony balustrading, single and grouped multi-paned timber-framed sash windows
- Variety of brick and rendered brick chimneys
- Consistent setbacks behind landscaped frontages
- Rear vehicle access and accommodation
- Low brick fences at the street boundaries.




*Figure 10. Aerial photograph of Allambi, Green Gables and Harrow flats at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra (Source: Nearmap, dated 9 October 2024)*



*Figure 11. Front (eastern) elevation of Green Gables Flats, 121 Osborne Street (Source: GJM Heritage, June 2024)*



*Figure 12. Front (east) elevation of Harrow Flats, 125 Osborne Street (Source: GJM Heritage, June 2024)*



*Figure 13. Front (east) elevation of Allambi Flats, 135 Osborne Street (Source: GJM Heritage, June 2024)*

## Intactness and Integrity

The residential flats within the Osborne Street Interwar Group remain highly intact to their period of construction and retain a high degree of integrity to the interwar period in fabric, form and detail. They form a cohesive group of English Domestic Revival and Moderne style flats dating from the interwar period.

## Comparative Analysis

The Osborne Street Interwar Group is a representative and highly intact group of interwar flat developments built in the City of Stonnington. The three buildings were constructed by the one developer between 1935 and 1938, with those at no. 135 designed by architects R M and M H King. They present as a visually cohesive row that are highly consistent in scale and materiality, displaying a variety of detailing drawing on the English Domestic Revival (nos. 121 and 125) and Moderne (no. 135) architectural styles.

The development of residential flats in Melbourne gained in popularity following World War I. This was the result of a number of factors, including a shortage of skilled labour, the high cost of building materials,

and the difficulties associated with maintaining large estates. Within the City of Stonnington, the affluent suburbs of Toorak and South Yarra were particularly sought after for their proximity to the city and a number of flat developments were constructed in these suburbs in the interwar period. Across the municipality, flat developments varied in their scale, layout, planning and architectural design.

A number of interwar residential precincts are included in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme. The precincts that are most comparable to the Osborne Street Interwar Group include St Georges Court Precinct, Toorak (HO348), Huntingfield Road Precinct, Toorak (HO347) and Coolullah and Quamby Avenues Precinct, South Yarra (HO382). These precincts contain comparable streets of highly intact flats and maisonettes dating to the interwar period. Examples of flats and maisonettes within these precincts include:

St Georges Court Precinct, Toorak (HO348)

The St Georges Court Precinct comprises a consistent streetscape of two-storey freestanding and semi-detached dwellings constructed in the interwar period. The precinct is significant as an intact, visually cohesive and prestigious interwar subdivision that pursues a consistent stylistic theme despite the involvement of a range of architects. The two-storey residences and maisonettes display Georgian Revival and Mediterranean influences, designed in cases to present multi-residential properties as large and stately residences.



*Figure 14. 9 St Georges Road, Toorak (Source: Victorian Heritage Database)*




*Figure 15. Maisonettes, 11 St Georges Court, Toorak (Source: Victorian Heritage Database)*



*Figure 16. 15 St Georges Court, Toorak (Source: Victorian Heritage Database)*

Huntingfield Road Precinct, Toorak (HO347)

Huntingfield Road Precinct comprises a streetscape of large two-storey interwar dwellings. It is significant as an intact, visually cohesive and prestigious interwar subdivision. Designed by a range of architects, there's a degree of architectural unity with the dominance of the Georgian Revival architectural style.



*Figure 17. 2 Huntingfield Road, Toorak (Source: Victorian Heritage Database)*



*Figure 18. 7 Huntingfield Road (left) & 9 Huntingfield Road, Toorak (right) (Source: Victorian Heritage Database)*



*Figure 19. 8 Huntingfield Road, Toorak (Source: Victorian Heritage Database)*

Coolullah and Quamby Avenues Precinct, South Yarra (HO382)

The precinct comprises a fine and highly intact collection of flats, maisonettes and houses dating to the 1930s. They present as a highly unified group of interwar residences constructed in a range of styles prevalent at the time, particularly the English Domestic Revival and Moderne styles. Despite the variation in architectural detailing, the consistent siting, scale, building forms and materiality – in conjunction with the garden settings and low brick front fences – presents a highly



*Figure 20. 255 Williams Road, South Yarra (Source: GJM Heritage, 2024)*

architecturally consistent and aesthetically cohesive streetscape.



*Figure 21. 2 Quamby Avenue, South Yarra (Source: GJM Heritage, 2024)*



*Figure 22. 4-6 Quamby Avenue, South Yarra (Source: GJM Heritage, 2024)*

Like the Osborne Street Interwar Group, the above examples all contain streetscapes of generally highly intact dwellings dating to the interwar period, which illustrate the significant suburban development in the City of Stonnington during this period. Flat developments within these precincts display characteristics typical of the interwar period, including features of the English Domestic Revival, Georgian Revival, Mediterranean and Moderne styles. The resulting interwar streetscapes in these precincts display a high degree of integrity and are generally consistent in scale, materiality and detailing and have a distinctive architectural character.

## 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 Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra has strong associations with the development of the municipality in the interwar period. This period of development transformed the built environment and social character of the area by replacing larger properties and substantial mansion estates with higher density flat developments. This was largely a result of rising labour and materials costs following World War I, which made the cost of maintaining large properties difficult and led to a significant increase in the subdivision of large estates across the municipality to create higher density living. As a highly intact group of flats dating to the interwar period, the Osborne Street Interwar Group clearly illustrates this important phase of development in the City of Stonnington.

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

N/A

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***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 Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra contains a cohesive collection of fine and highly intact representative examples of flat buildings dating to the interwar period. Constructed in the English Domestic Revival or Moderne style, the buildings display typical features of this period, including the use of face brickwork with tile-clad hipped roofs, asymmetrical front elevations with projecting front gables (nos. 121 and 125), symmetrical front elevation (no. 135), decorative brick detailing, wrought iron balustrading, curved walls and balustrading, multi-paned timber-framed windows, brick and rendered brick chimneys and low brick boundary fences.

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

The Osborne Street Interwar Group at 121-135 Osborne Street, South Yarra forms a highly unified group of interwar architect-designed flats constructed in the English Domestic Revival or Moderne style. The consistent siting, scale, building forms and materiality – in conjunction with the garden settings and low brick front fences – presents a highly architecturally consistent and aesthetically cohesive streetscape.

***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

## Grading and Recommendations

It is recommended that the properties be included in the Heritage Overlay of the Stonnington Planning Scheme as a Heritage Place known as the *Osborne Street Interwar Group* (HO806).

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

| | |
|---|---|
| **External paint controls**<br>*Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?* | No |
| **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?* | Yes – front fences |
| **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 23:

| No. | Address | Name | Grading |
|---|---|---|---|
| 121 | Osborne Street | Green Gables | Contributory |
| 125 | Osborne Street | Harrow | Contributory |
| 135 | Osborne Street | Allambi | Contributory |

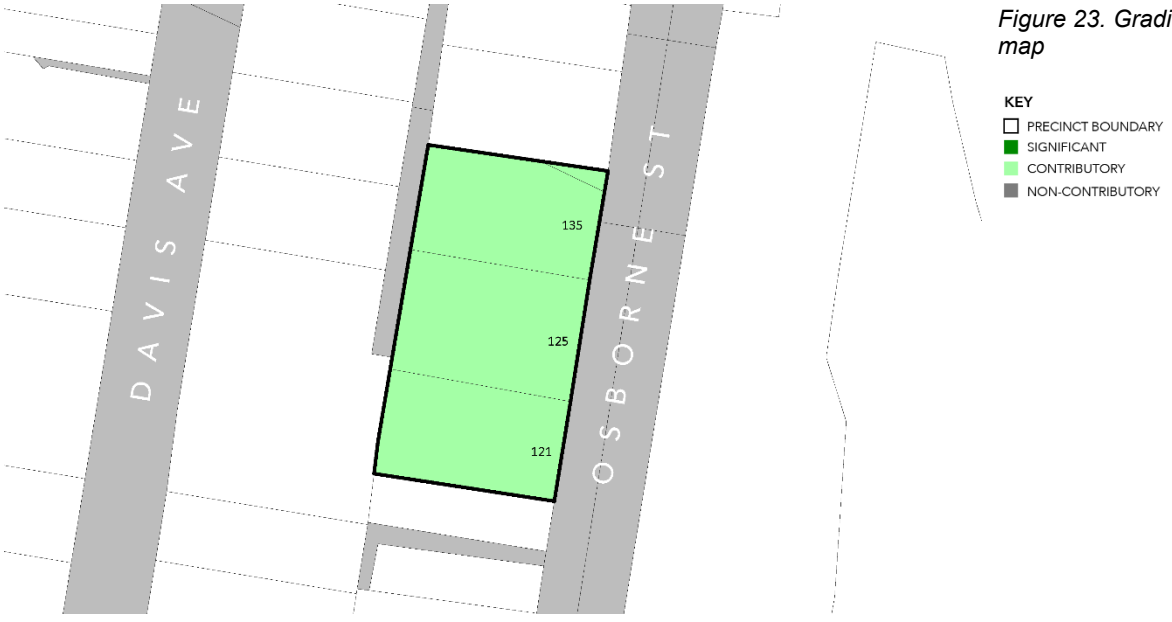



*Figure 23. Grading map*

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## Extent of Overlay

To the property boundaries, as shown in Figure 24.




## References

Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006 (Amendments 2009).

Context Pty Ltd, *Residential flats in the City of Stonnington, Stage 2 Assessment*, April 2012.

Context Pty Ltd, *Residential Flats in Stonnington, Heritage Citations Project*, Final (Amendment C163), 12 August 2013.

Drainage Plan (DP) Nos. 3908, 204316, 196112.

Google Street View.

Landata Victoria, Central Plan Office, historical aerial photography.

Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan No. 949, dated 1895.

Nearmap.

Prahran Rate Books (RB), South Yarra Ward, as cited.

Prahran Valuation Records.

*The Age.*

Victorian Heritage Database (VHD):

Place ID 165876 - Franklyn House Flats, 137 Osborne Street, South Yarra (Stonnington City)