High Street Federation Houses Precinct

Heritage Place: High Street Federation Houses Precinct
Address: 661-689, and 682-692 High Street, Prahran

HO Reference: HO782
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: Unknown
Builder: Victorian Permanent Building Society

Year of Construction: 1912-1913



Photograph of 677-682 High Street, Prahran (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024)



Location map and extent of the High Street Federation Houses Precinct, Prahran

Heritage Group: Residential Buildings
Heritage Type: Residential Precinct

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century

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 High Street Federation Houses Precinct, comprising a group of fifteen Federation dwellings on High Street, Prahran, is locally significant.

The precinct is wholly characterised by contributory graded buildings.

Character elements that contribute to the significance of the precinct include:

- The relatively high degree of integrity arising from the same construction period and absence of modern infill within the curtilage;
- The regularity and harmony of the semi-detached Federation era houses and one freestanding residence, primarily characterised by front-facing half-timbered gable ends paired with harling render, face red brickwork, casement windows with timber frame and some examples of decorative lead light glass, terracotta Marseille tiled roofs with elaborate ridge capping and finials, exposed timber eaves supported by decorative timber brackets, faced red brick corbelled chimneys with chimney pots and harling render, verandahs consisting of brick piers with decorative timber posts and valences and verandahs designed with skillion roof forms decorative timber fretwork;
- The uniformity of allotments, scale, siting, setbacks and built forms across the precinct; and
- The retention of some original bluestone kerbs;

Later alterations and additions to the properties are not significant, including unsympathetic and obscuring fences, unsympathetic paint schemes and new roofing materials (682 High Street).

How is it significant?

The High Street Federation Houses Precinct is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The High Street Federation Houses Precinct is historically significant as an intact and cohesive collection of Federation-era houses that were constructed by the Victorian Permanent Building Society in 1912-1913, following the earlier 1887 subdivision of the Wynnstay Estate. The precinct reflects the wholescale subdivision and development of large portions of Melbourne's metropolitan area during the economic boom of the 1880s which, in this instance, was subsequently delayed by the economic collapse of the 1890s. The residences design and constructed by Victorian Permanent Building Society, while initially established to provide affordable accommodation for working class communities in the suburb, were largely purchased by wealthier property investors who leased the residences to working class people. This ultimately resulted in limited improvements for local working-class home ownership but reflected the growing middle-class aesthetics of Prahran. (Criterion A)

The High Street Federation Houses Precinct is aesthetically significant as an intact residential streetscape characterised by semi-detached Federation-era style dwellings. The buildings retain a high degree of integrity and demonstrate cohesion through built form, scale, repeated roof patterns displaying visual homogeny, fenestration, materials, setbacks, and detailing. In form, the duplex residences are intentionally designed to mirror middle-class residential trends of the

early twentieth century and Federation period, appearing to be a modestly sized Federation villa but in fact being two distinct smaller high-density dwellings. These features, along with the retention of original corbelled chimneys and verandah fretwork, combine to create a visually consistent and harmonious residential streetscape on a major thoroughfare. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The High Street Federation Houses Precinct is historically significant as an intact and cohesive collection of Federation-era houses that were constructed by the Victorian Permanent Building Society in 1912-1913, following the earlier 1887 subdivision of the Wynnstay Estate. The precinct reflects the wholescale subdivision and development of large portions of Melbourne's metropolitan area during the economic boom of the 1880s which, in this instance, was subsequently delayed by the economic collapse of the 1890s. The residences design and constructed by Victorian Permanent Building Society, while initially established to provide affordable accommodation for working class communities in the suburb, were largely purchased by wealthier property investors who leased the residences to working class people. This ultimately resulted in limited improvements for local working-class home ownership but reflected the growing middle-class aesthetics of Prahran.
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 High Street Federation Houses Precinct is aesthetically significant as an intact residential streetscape characterised by semi-detached Federation-era style dwellings. The

		buildings retain a high degree of integrity and demonstrate cohesion through built form, scale, repeated roof patterns displaying visual homogeny, fenestration, materials, setbacks, and detailing. In form, the duplex residences are intentionally designed to mirror middle-class residential trends of the early twentieth century and Federation period, appearing to be a modestly sized Federation villa but in fact being two distinct smaller high-density dwellings. These features, along with the retention of original corbelled chimneys and verandah fretwork, combine to create a visually consistent and harmonious residential streetscape on a major thoroughfare.
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

The High Street Federation Houses Precinct consists of a group of fourteen semi-detached residences and one freestanding residence on High Street, Prahran. High Street is a major arterial road aligned running east-west through the City of Stonnington, joining St Kilda Road to the west with the Burwood Highway in Wantirna South to the east. The roadway is fully asphalted with some remnant bluestone kerbing and guttering. At the intersection of Orrong Road and High Street, where the High Street Federation Houses Precinct is located, the street is fully asphalted with street parking, ash street tree plantings, bluestone kerbs and a central tramline.

The residences within the High Street Federation Houses Precinct are single-storey Federation style face red brick structures constructed using a stretcher bond, typical of the 1890s-1910s. Within the group of fifteen structures, only no. 661 on the northern side of the precinct is a

freestanding residence. All other structures present in the precinct are semi-detached residences. All residences present the same shared setback and emphasis on red face brick masonry with decorative render banding, projecting gables with half-timbering and harling render, and timber fretwork verandahs. Though the northern side and southern sides of the precinct share the same design intent, they differ in execution. Where the northern side of the precinct uses projecting gables facing directly to the street, the southern side of the precinct utilises oblique facing gables and decorative terracotta ridgecapping.

All residences, regardless of minor differences in form, are designed with a double or single gable façade with strong party-wall separating each residence from their joined pair. The main entrance to each residence is typically located on the side elevations of each structure, with an awning verandah with timber fretwork. Timber sash windows are set into projecting rectilinear bays with skillion awnings clad in terracotta tiles. All chimneys are intact, with decorative rendered corbelled crowns.

All residences share a similar deep setback from the street allowing for a front garden with brick paving. However, there is no consistency in street front boundaries, which generally consist of timber picket fencing, brick walls, some metal examples and all with great variations in height and permeability.

The High Street Federation Houses Precinct presents a group of highly cohesive and intact Federation style residences with a consistent setback, scale, materiality, and roof profile displaying two distinct design forms. While some variations in detailed finishes and front fences can be observed within the precinct, these do not detract from the overall cohesive presentation of the Federation residences. The High Street Federation Houses Precinct is in good condition and is of overall high integrity.

• Alterations and Additions

- Original face brick overpainted at no. 677, 682, and 685 High Street, Prahran.
- Impermeable and high boundary fence at no. 661, 675, 677, 682, and 683 High Street, Prahran.
- Timber detailing, roughcast, fenestration and string course repainted black at no. 661, 689, 690, and 692 High Street, Prahran.
- Some front fences replaced with varied timber picket or metal fencing. Some fencing has been completely removed at no. 679 and 681 High Street, Prahran.

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 the current High Street Federation Houses Precinct, at 661-689, and 682-692 High Street Prahran, presently sits was formerly part of Lot 47 in the 1849-50 Crown Land Sales (Surveyor-General's Department 1849). Comprising approximately thirty-six acres of land bounded by present day Orrong Road, High Street, Malvern Road, and the line of Pohlman Lane, the portion was purchased as an investment by barrister, and namesake of the Lane, Rober Williams Pohlman (Malone 2003, 15). The intersection of Orrong Road and High Street is one of the tallest geographical points of Prahran, and owing to its excellent clay, the northern portion of the hill and Lot 47 was quickly leased to brickmakers. In the land boom of the 1880s, the southern end of Lot 47, including the High Street precinct, was extensively subdivided into substantial residential allotments as part the Wynnstay Estate sale in 1887 (Figure 1). The 1880s saw mass subdivision and development not only within the City of Stonnington but more broadly as Melbourne experienced a major economic boom which fuelled high-density development. The Wynnstay Estate sale of 1887 falls within this period, though the allotments themselves were not located on the site of the Wynnstay mansion, and prior to their release, the allotments appear to have been open paddocks.

Though subdivided in 1887, the precinct is still recorded as undeveloped in the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works plan for 1900 (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The 1910 City of Prahran Rate Books record the site as being unoccupied by structures, but owned and paid for by the Victorian Permanent Building Society (VPBS). The Society was founded by James Munro in 1865 to encourage working class people to purchase homes through a process of strategic loans and the borrowing of funds (Davidson 2008). However, while the Society and societies similar to the VPBS were successful in securing funds for working class homeowners, Jackson notes that historians recognise a significant amount of secured funding was often misallocated to middle-class land speculators and investors (Jackson 1984, 28-38).

In 1912, the northern side of the precinct comprising properties 661-689 High Street were recorded in the Prahran Rate Books. All recorded structures were five room brick buildings and were rented rather than occupied by the owners in line with the purpose of the VPBS. The majority of the owners are recorded as residing on more affluent streets, including Grandview Grove, Glenferrie Road in Malvern or New Street in Brighton. Three years later, the 1915 Sands and McDougall Street Directory records the northern side of the precinct as completely developed and occupied, except for 679 which is recorded as vacant. In this instance, the property was likely built, but registered in the directory without a leaseholder.

In 1912, the southern side of the precinct comprising 682-692 High Street is recorded without its numbers. However, owners and renters are recorded alike. The southern extent of the precinct is recorded completely in 1913 comprising six duplex buildings constructed in brick masonry with six rooms. Several years later in 1937, the precinct is photographed in an aerial view of High Street and Orrong Road. The photograph shows the original gardens and boundary fences of the precinct.

All structures within the precinct are still used as private residences.

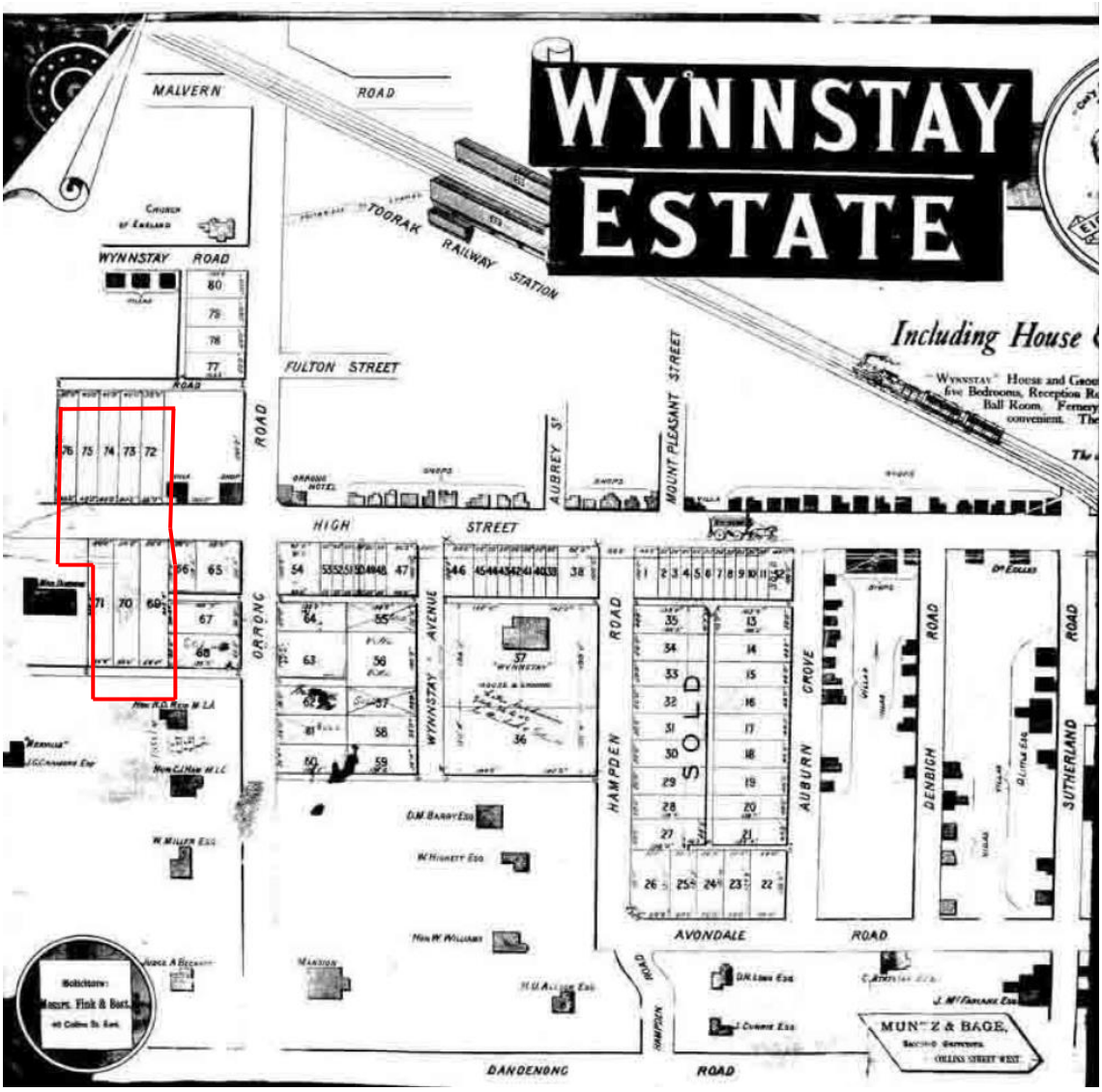


Figure 1. 1887 Wynnstay Estate Subdivision, with the allotments which would become the High Street Federation Houses Precinct marked in red. Source: Stonnington History Centre, PH11973.

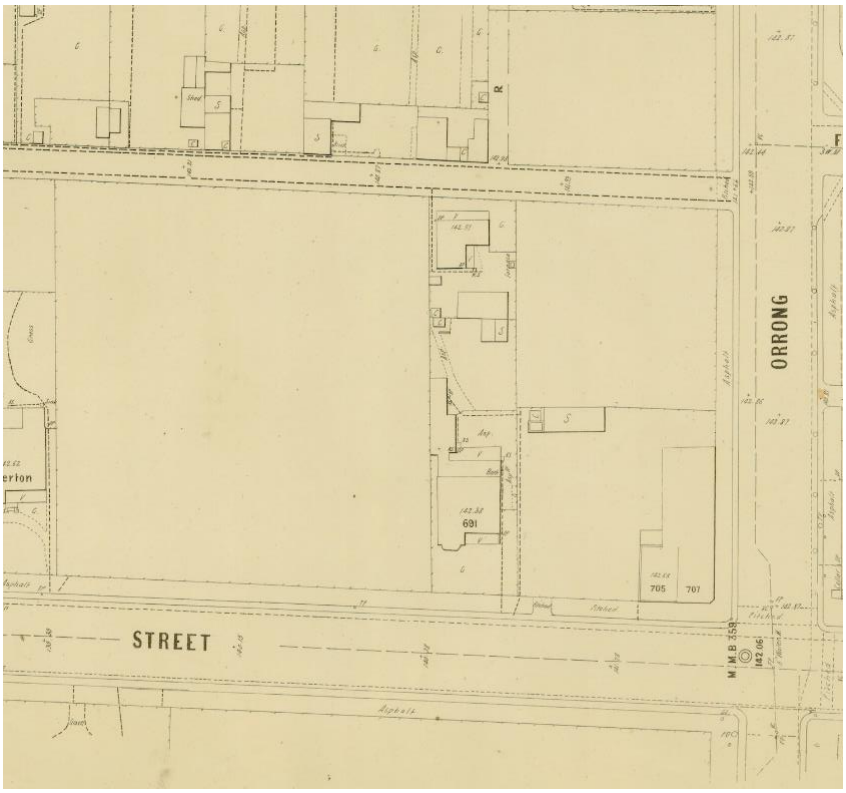


Figure 2. 1900 MMBW plan no. 989 showing the site as an open yard. Source: *Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works detail plan. 989, Prahran [cartographic material].* (1900). Melbourne: MMBW.

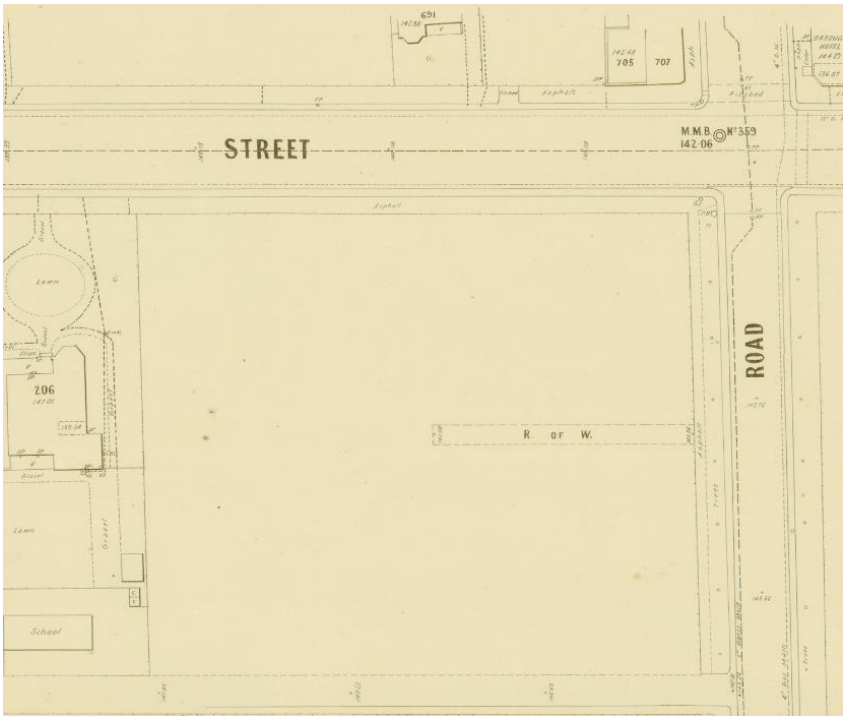


Figure 3. 1900 MMBW plan no. 1000 showing the site as an open yard. Source: *Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works detail plan. 1000, Prahran [cartographic material].* (1900). Melbourne: MMBW.

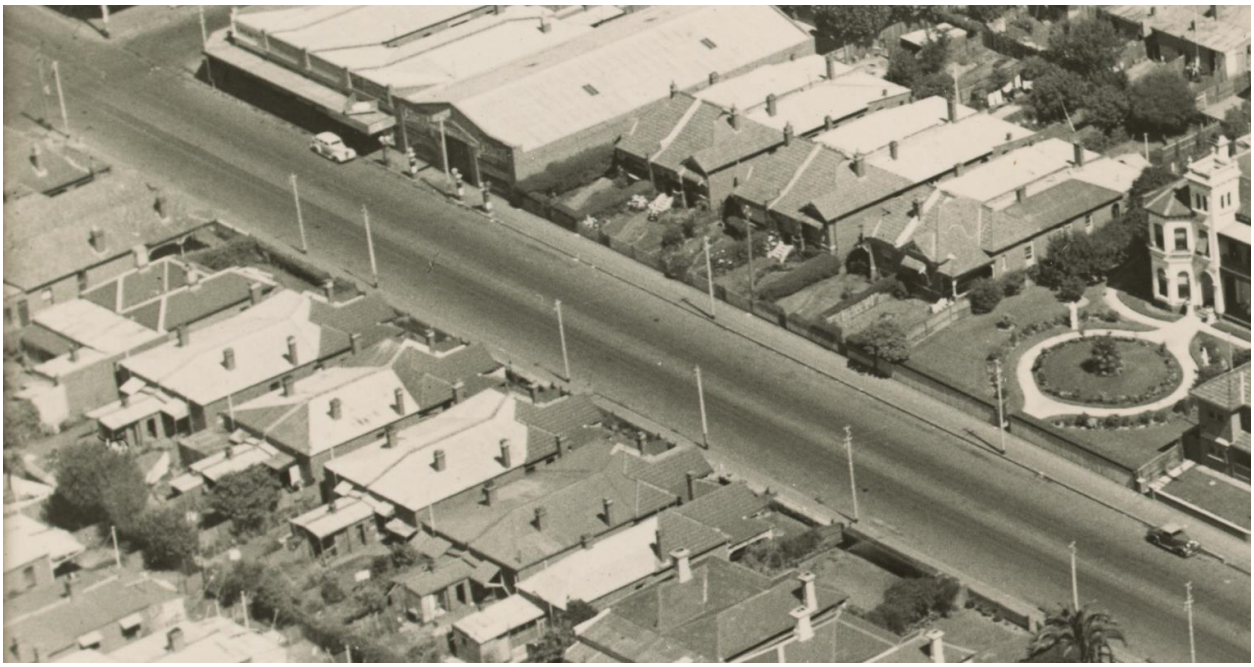


Figure 4. 1937 aerial view of the precinct looking southeast. Source: Airspy. (1937). *Over Armadale (at 2000 feet) featuring Glenloch Hospital [picture] / Charles Daniel Pratt.*

Comparative Analysis

The High Street Federation Houses Precinct represents a wave of early twentieth century high density development which followed the economic collapse of the 1890s and marked the rapid onset of higher-density residential development. The subdivisions and land sales were broad and led to mass development, purchased and developed by a mix of investors and a growing middle class of owner occupiers. The High Street precinct is not dissimilar to many other precincts which were constructed in the same period, all of which use similar Edwardian and Federation features representative of the changing architectural designs of the early twentieth century. Comparable precincts within the City of Stonnington include:

- **Kelvin Grove Precinct, Prahran (HO139).** The Kelvin Grove Precinct compares with the High Street Federation Houses Precinct as a residential streetscape occupied by single storey Federation duplex residences, constructed in red brick masonry with some decorative render work including harling render, Marseille terracotta tiling and ridge capping, brick and render chimneys and projecting gable bays with half-timbering decoration. Both precincts also share an emphasis on verandah treatments paired with decorative timber fretwork. As with the nominated area, the cohesiveness of Kelvin Grove is also somewhat diminished by the presence of tall, unsympathetic front fences. Both precincts are highly comparable as well due to their physical proximity, with Kelvin Grove approximately 145 metres southwest of the High Street precinct. This proximity informs the historical development of the High Street precinct, contextualising the broader developmental trends that were occurring in Prahran in the early twentieth century.

- **Vail Street Precinct, Prahran (HO152).** The Vail Street Precinct comprises a collection of substantially intact freestanding single and duplex Federation-era dwellings. Both precincts are comparable, as the residences exhibit comparable physical features, including half-timbered gables, face red brick masonry, Marseille terracotta tiling and ridge capping with finials, as well as a strong emphasis on verandah treatments, typically decorated with timber fretwork of a similar design. The Vail Street precinct however lacks the same visual homogeny that the High Street precinct has, due the presence of a greater number of variant designs and freestanding residences. However, the Vail Street precinct is of higher integrity overall, particularly in relation to the boundary fence treatments.
- **Fern Avenue Precinct, Windsor (HO132).** As with the High Street precinct, the Fern Avenue Precinct comprises a small group of near identical Federation-era duplex dwellings characterised by projecting gables with half-timbering, face red brick masonry, Marseille terracotta tiling and sympathetic low front fences. Overall, the buildings exhibit a high degree and standard of integrity. However, as with the High Street precinct, several buildings have lost their original face red brick detailing due to overpainting. Regardless, both precincts are comparable as two highly intact Federation duplex precincts in the City of Stonnington, representing early twentieth century development in the suburbs of Prahran and Windsor.

The above comparative analysis highlights the large proportion of Federation residential precincts within the City of Stonnington, constructed following the subdivisions of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The analysis also addresses that each precinct has its own degree of alterations and impacts to integrity, whether through overpainting or unsympathetic boundary fences. However, all precincts addressed above are significant to the City of Stonnington, and compare well with the High Street Federation Houses precinct which has a greater visual homogeny than the Vail Street precinct for example. Following this analysis, the High Street precinct is recognised as a highly intact and visually cohesive example of an early twentieth century Federation residential development.

Precinct Map



Grading Table

* S: Significant

C: Contributory

NC: Non-contributory

Refer to Heritage Victoria's Model brief for consultants (p.6) for explanation of designations.

Note: the Style/era column follows the architectural style categories set out in Heritage Victoria's HERMES Orion heritage database and does not necessarily reflect the date of construction. For details on construction era(s) where available, refer to the Place History section.

Street address	*Place type*	*Style/era*	*Grading*
661 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
675 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
677 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
679 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C

Street address	Place type	Style/era	Grading
681 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
682 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
683 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
684 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
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690 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C
692 High Street	House	Federation/Edwardian Period (1902 – c.1918)	C

References

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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

North side



661 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



675 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



677 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



679 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



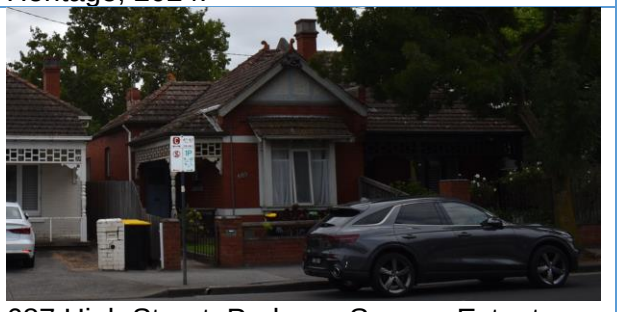
681 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



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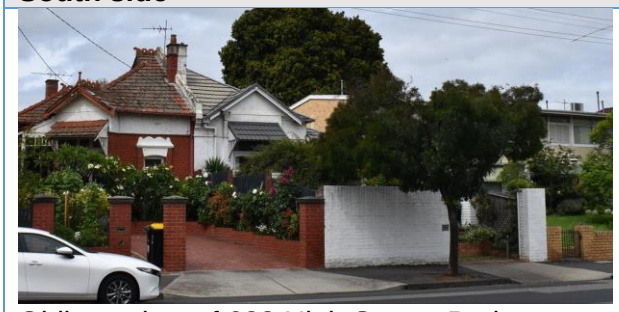


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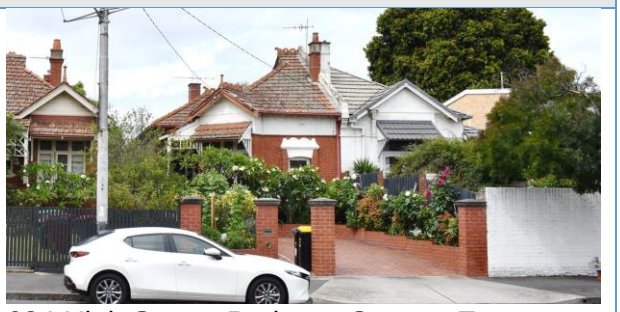


689 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.

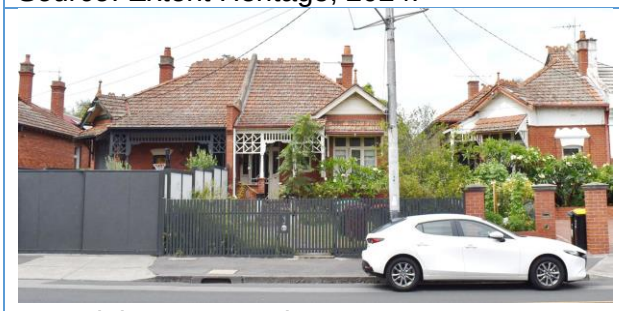
South side



Oblique view of 682 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



684 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



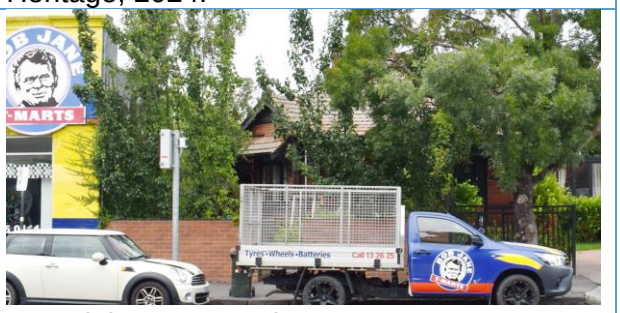
686 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



688 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



690 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.



692 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage, 2024.

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