City of
STONNINGTON

Bona Vista

Prepared by: GJM Heritage (March 2025)

Address: 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra

Name:	*Bona Vista*	**Survey Date:**	*May 2024*
Place Type:	*Residential*	**Architect/Designer:**	*Unknown*
Grading:	*Significant (HO64)*	**Builder:**	*Unknown*
Extent of the Overlay:	*See Figure 13*	**Construction Date(s):**	1884



Bona Vista (Source: https://www.realestate.com.au/sold/property-house-vic-south+yarra-106154533, image dated c2010)

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

Bona Vista at 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra, constructed 1884.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include:

- Two-storey brick house, with characteristics of High Victorian style
- Red brick construction with contrasting wide cream brick bands (overpainted) and cement render detailing
- Steeply-pitched slate-clad hipped roofs with shallow bracketed eaves
- Asymmetrical composition
- Cylindrical tower with steep conical slate-clad roof at the north-east corner
- Steep-pitched gable-ended entrance bay with moulded coping, rendered panels and a classically detailed porch with arched entrance, pilasters, large consoles and crowning pediment at the east elevation
- Tall, broad brick chimneys with strapwork

- Timber-framed double-hung sash windows with segmental arched window heads on the ground floor
- Stables, converted into a pool house
- Mature garden setting.

The 1920s addition to the north-west corner, the addition to the rear (south-west) of the residence, the brick garage and the perimeter fencing does not contribute to the significance of the place.

How is it significant?

Bona Vista, 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra, is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Bona Vista, 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra has strong associations with the development of South Yarra in the boom-years of the 1880s when large landholdings were subdivided and sold for residential development. Bona Vista was constructed in the early 1880s by Margaret Hobson on land purchased by her late husband – Dr Edmund Charles Hobson – in 1844. The house was constructed at the time the estate was subdivided for residential development. Bona Vista remains highly intact to clearly demonstrate this phase of development in the City of Stonnington (Criterion A).

Bona Vista, 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra is an assured and finely executed example of a substantial High Victorian-style mansion. The elaborate detailing, including complex asymmetrical form, steeply-pitched slate-clad roofs, decorative gable-ended entrance bay, cylindrical tower with steep conical slate-clad roof, and tall, broad brick chimneys with strapwork, presents a highly resolved expression of a large Victorian-era house. The stables (later converted into a pool house) and expansive garden setting contribute to the picturesque character of the place (Criterion E).

Historical Context

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

3 Settling the Land

- 3.3 Land speculation

8 Building Suburbs

- 8.1 Creating Australia's most prestigious suburbs

Place History

The following history is based on Department of Housing and Construction, Bona Vista: Report of Charge of Annuity Report, *1982, unless otherwise stated.*

Bona Vista at 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra was built in 1884 as a large two-storey brick house of 14 rooms.

The property formed part of Crown Portion 10 in the Parish of Prahran which was purchased by Charles Williams in the first land sales in Prahran in 1840. In 1844 Dr Edmund Charles Hobson, physician and naturalist and member of the prominent colonial Hobson family, purchased an approximately 8.7 hectare (approximately 21 acre) allotment with the Yarra River at the northern boundary. On this land he built a house which he named Bona Vista (later renamed Grantham) on the elevated portion of the site overlooking the Yarra River, located to the north-east of the existing house (Figure 1). After his premature death in 1848, the large property remained in the Hobson family.

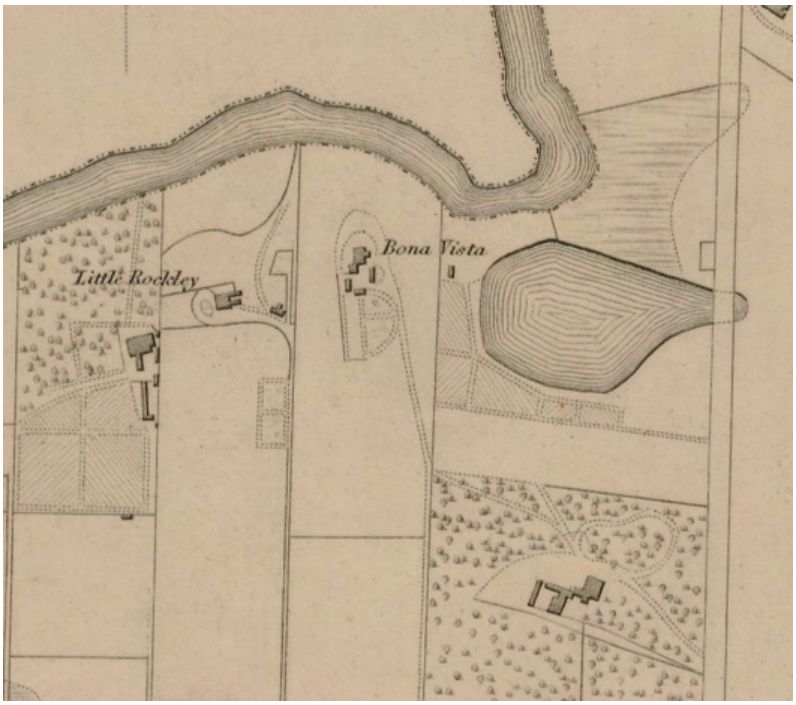
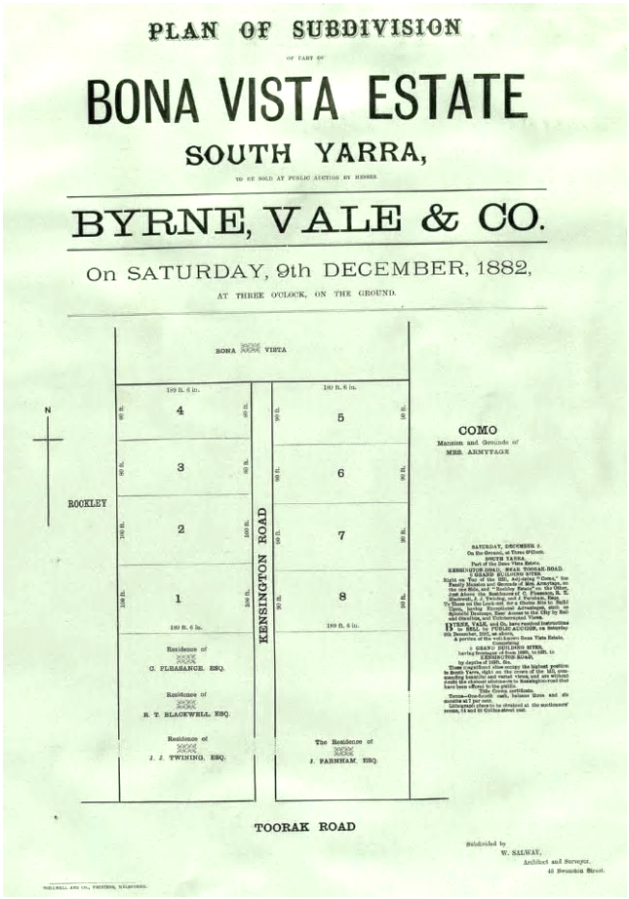


Figure 1. Melbourne and its suburbs, Map 4, James Kearney, 1855, showing the location of the first house named Bona Vista (renamed Grantham) (Source: State Library of Victoria)

Subdivision of Lot 10 took place between 1877 and 1882 (Figure 2) and Kensington Road was formed from Toorak Road to the original Bona Vista residence.


PLAN OF SUBDIVISION

OF PART OF

BONA VISTA ESTATE

SOUTH YARRA,

TO BE SOLD AT PUBLIC AUCTION BY MESSRS.

BYRNE, VALE & CO.

On SATURDAY, 9th DECEMBER, 1882,

AT THREE O'CLOCK, ON THE GROUND.

BONA VISTA

189 ft. 6 in.

189 ft. 6 in.

N

4

5

COMO

Mansion and Grounds of MRS. ARMYTAGE

3

6

ROCKLEY

2

7

KENSINGTON ROAD

1

8

189 ft. 6 in.

189 ft. 6 in.

Residence of C. PLEASANCE, ESQ.

Residence of R. T. BLACKWELL, ESQ.

Residence of J. J. TWINING, ESQ.

The Residence of J. FARNHAM, ESQ.

TOORAK ROAD

Subdivided by W. SALWAY, Architect and Surveyor, 45 Swanston Street.

Figure 2. Subdivision sale of the Bona Vista Estate, 1882 (Source: State Library of Victoria)

In 1884 the current house was built on a one-hectare (2.5 acre) site to the south of the original Bona Vista. Owned and initially occupied by Hobson's widow Margaret, the new house was known originally as Beuna Vista (distinguishing it from the earlier house) and addressed as 41 Kensington Road. The house was tenanted from 1888 until after Margaret's death in 1894, when ownership passed to her son Charles P Hobson. The two houses are shown on Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) City of Prahran Plan No. 37, dated 1895 (Figure 3) and MMBW Detail Plan No 941, dated 1896 (Figures 4 and 5).

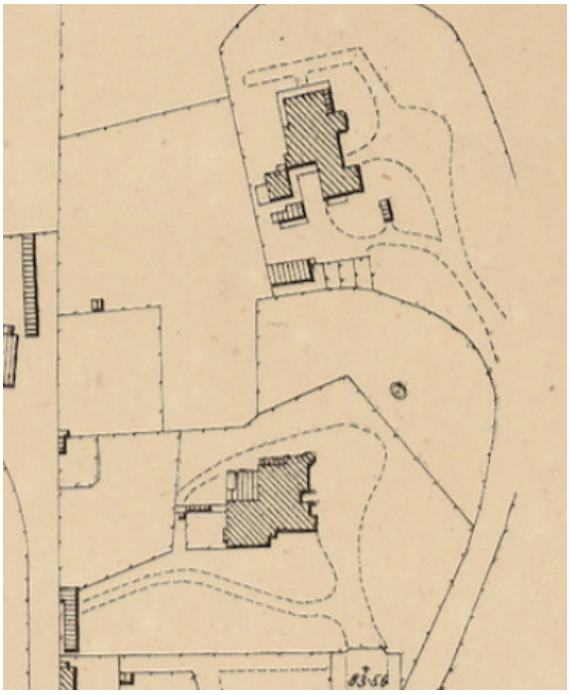


Figure 3. Detail of Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW), Plan No 37, City of Prahran, 1895, showing the original Bona Vista (later Grantham) to the north (top of image) and Buena Vista (later Bona Vista) to the south (Source: State Library of Victoria)

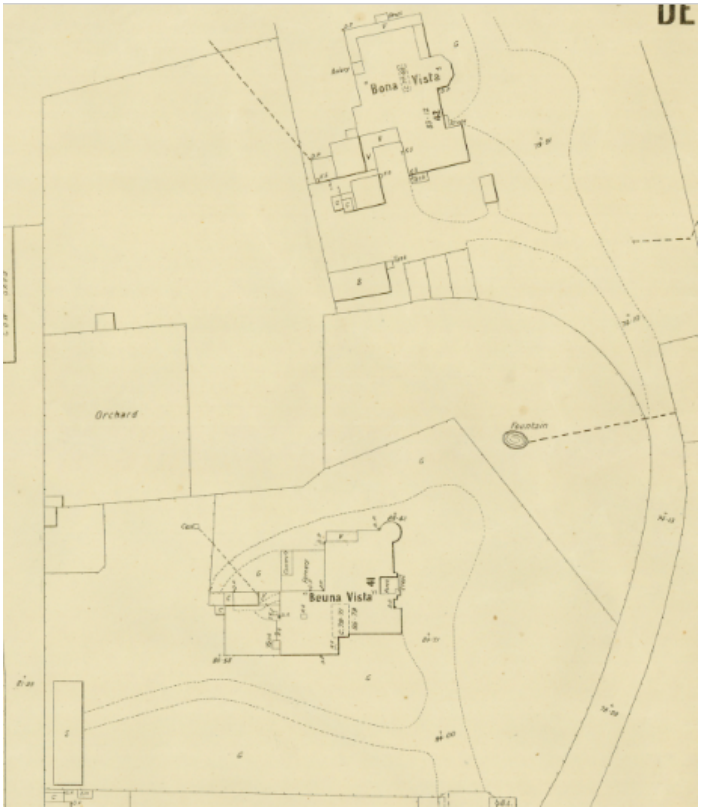


Figure 4. MMBW Detail Plan No 941 1896, showing Bona Vista (later Grantham) to north (top of image) and Beuna Vista (later Bona Vista) (Source: State Library of Victoria)

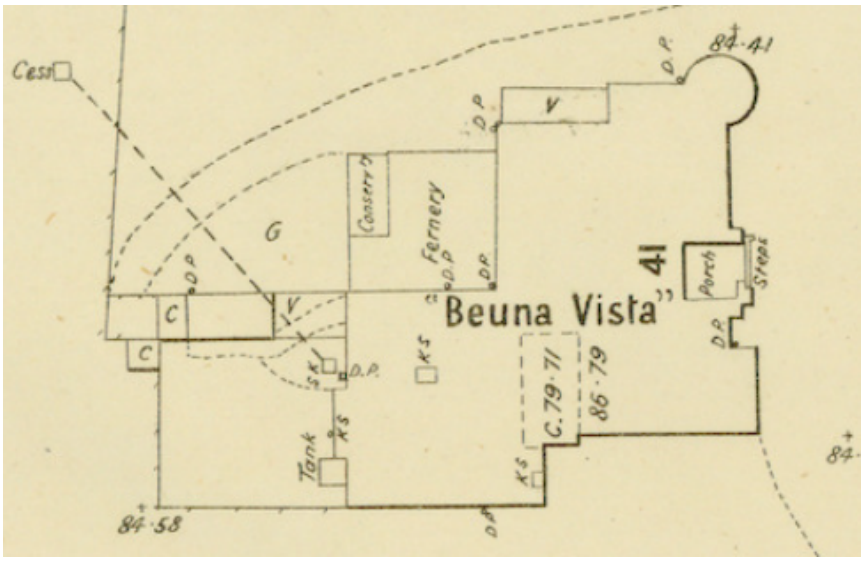


Figure 5. Detail of MMBW Detail Plan No 941 1896 showing the Beuna Vista (later Bona Vista) in 1896 (Source: State Library of Victoria)

Richard Linton, merchant, acquired the property in 1918, occupying Beuna Vista at 41 Kensington Road and disposing of the adjacent property by 1920 (RB 1918, 1920). A successful businessman, Linton entered Victorian politics in 1927 and became Agent-General for Victoria in London from 1933 to 1963. Knighted in 1936, he founded the Big Brother movement in 1924 and held various government positions. It appears that the houses were renamed at this time – the original Bona Vista was renamed Grantham and Linton changed the name of his house (Beuna Vista) to Bona Vista. Linton made some alterations to the property after acquisition, including a two-storey addition at the north-west corner containing a ballroom and lounge, which replaced a conservatory and fernery (Figure 6).

The original Bona Vista (later Grantham) was demolished after 1951.



Figure 6. Detail of aerial view of Yarra River and Herring Island, c1920s, showing Bona Vista and the large hipped roof addition made to the north-west corner after Linton's acquisition in 1918 (Source: State Library of Victoria)

In 1951 the Commonwealth of Australia purchased Bona Vista and occupied the building until it was offered for sale in 1983, when it was described as 'An outstanding property with so much exciting potential for imaginative development with frontage also to Alexandra Avenue and located at the heart of Melbourne's most popular and convenient high density residential precincts' (*The Age*, 7 December 1983:39) and as an '….extremely handsome residence with some quite splendid reception rooms, all beautifully proportioned and standing on approximately 9,700 sq m of land, ripe for subdivision or cluster development' (*The Age*, 17 Nov 1983:12). A series of photographs and illustrations show Bona Vista in the late twentieth century (Figures 7-10)



Figure 7. East elevation of Bona Vista, John T Collins, c1963-1972 (Source: State Library of Victoria)



Figure 8. Bona Vista, 1883 (Source: The Age, 17 November 1983:12)



Figure 9. View of Bona Vista from the south-east, 1983 (Source: National Trust file no. 2665)



Figure 10. View of the northern elevation of Bona Vista, 1983 (Source: National Trust file no. 2665)

Bona Vista passed into private ownership with some changes subsequently made to the property, including a small addition to the rear (west), conversion of the former stable building at the western boundary of the property into a pool house and addition of a brick garage at the south-east boundary. Two Canary Island date palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) remain to the east of the house and a peppercorn tree (*Schinus molle*) remains to the south within a mature garden setting*.

The extent of the property has been recently reduced with the northern portion fronting Alexandra Avenue subdivided and undergoing development in 2024. An additional portion of land to the north and fronting Kensington Road has also been subdivided.

Description

Bona Vista at 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra is located at the northern end of Kensington Road, on the western side. The large site is of irregular form with curved east boundary to Kensington Road and a stepped boundary to the north. The house is centrally placed on the site with tennis court and swimming pool to the west, a modern garage with slate roof to the southern boundary, and a remnant stable building (since modified) at the south end of the western boundary. The site is accessed by a driveway at the southern end of the street boundary and a central pedestrian path leads to the front entrance of the house. Well setback from the street boundary, the house is set behind dense mature planting and a large front lawn which extends to the north side of the building. Mature plantings include two Canary Island date palms (*Phoenix canariensis*) to the east of the house and a peppercorn tree (*Schinus molle*) to the south which appear to date to at least the 1920s.

Bona Vista is an asymmetrically composed two-storey house, constructed of red brick with cream brick and cement render highlighting and steeply-pitched slate-clad hipped roofs with shallow bracketed eaves. With characteristics of the High Victorian style, the house is elaborately detailed with deep cream brick bands (overpainted) at the plinth and first-floor as well as below the soffit, string courses, timber-framed double-hung sash windows with segmental arched window heads at ground level, and tall, broad brick chimneys with strapwork, rendered capping and terracotta chimney pots. Two vertical elements – a cylindrical tower with steep conical slate-clad roof at the north-east corner and a steep-pitched gable-ended entrance bay at the front (east) elevation – dominate the composition, the latter with moulded coping, rendered panels and a classically detailed porch with arched entrance, pilasters, large consoles and crowning pediment. At the south-east corner a rectangular bay projects beyond the wall plane with later windows to the first floor. These windows, and a projecting faceted bay window at the south elevation, appear to have been added in the 1920s.

The north and west elevations are dominated by a large 1920s addition with low broad-eaved hipped roof which extends to form a cantilevered verandah (later enclosed) with timber shingle-clad balustrade. Supported on large struts, the balcony extends to the north and west, beyond the brick wall below. A large projecting triple window bay, with rendered head detail, is located at the north elevation.

Key Features:

- Two-storey brick house, with characteristics of the High Victorian style
- Red brick construction with contrasting wide cream brick bands (overpainted) and cement render detailing
- Steeply-pitched slate-clad hipped roofs with shallow bracketed eaves
- Asymmetrical composition
- Cylindrical tower with steep conical slate-clad roof at the north-east corner
- Steep-pitched gable-ended entrance bay with moulded coping, rendered panels and a classically detailed porch with arched entrance, pilasters, large consoles and crowning pediment at the east elevation
- Tall, broad brick chimneys with strapwork
- Timber-framed double-hung sash windows with segmental arched window heads at ground level
- Stables, converted into pool house
- Mature garden setting.



Figure 11. Aerial view of Bona Vista, April 2024 (Source: Nearmap)



Figure 12. View of Bona Vista from the street (Source: GJM Heritage, April 2024)

Intactness and Integrity

Bona Vista, 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra remains substantially intact to its period of construction and retains a high degree of integrity as a substantial late Victorian residence. A large 1920s addition to the north-west corner of the house is not clearly visible from the streetscape and does not diminish the appreciation of the property as a Victorian residence. More recently, a small addition has been constructed to the rear (west) of the residence, a former stable building has been modified, and a brick garage has been constructed. These alterations also do not diminish the appreciation of the property as a substantial Victorian residence.

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).*

Bona Vista, 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra has strong associations with the development of South Yarra in the boom-years of the 1880s when large landholdings were subdivided and sold for residential development. Bona Vista was constructed in the early 1880s by Margaret Hobson on land purchased by her late husband – Dr Edmund Charles Hobson – in 1844. The house was constructed at the time the estate was subdivided for residential development. Bona Vista remains highly intact to clearly demonstrate this 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).*

N/A

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

Bona Vista, 51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra is an assured and finely executed example of a substantial High Victorian-style mansion. The elaborate detailing, including complex asymmetrical form, steeply-pitched slate-clad roofs, decorative gable-ended entrance bay, cylindrical tower with steep conical slate-clad roof, and tall, broad brick chimneys with strapwork, presents a highly resolved expression of a large Victorian-era house. The stables (later converted into a pool house) and expansive garden setting contribute to the picturesque character of the place.

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 land currently included in HO64 to the north of Bona Vista be removed from the Heritage Overlay (135-141 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra). While forming part of the original Bona Vista Estate, this land has recently been subdivided and redeveloped and no longer retains fabric which contributes to the significance of the heritage place. It is recommended that a small portion of land to the west of Bona Vista that forms part of the property but was previously within the extent of adjacent HO146 *Rockley Road Precinct* be removed from HO146 and included within HO64 (see Figure 13).

It is recommended that the 'Heritage place name' column within the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay be updated to:

Bona Vista
51-59 Kensington Road, South Yarra

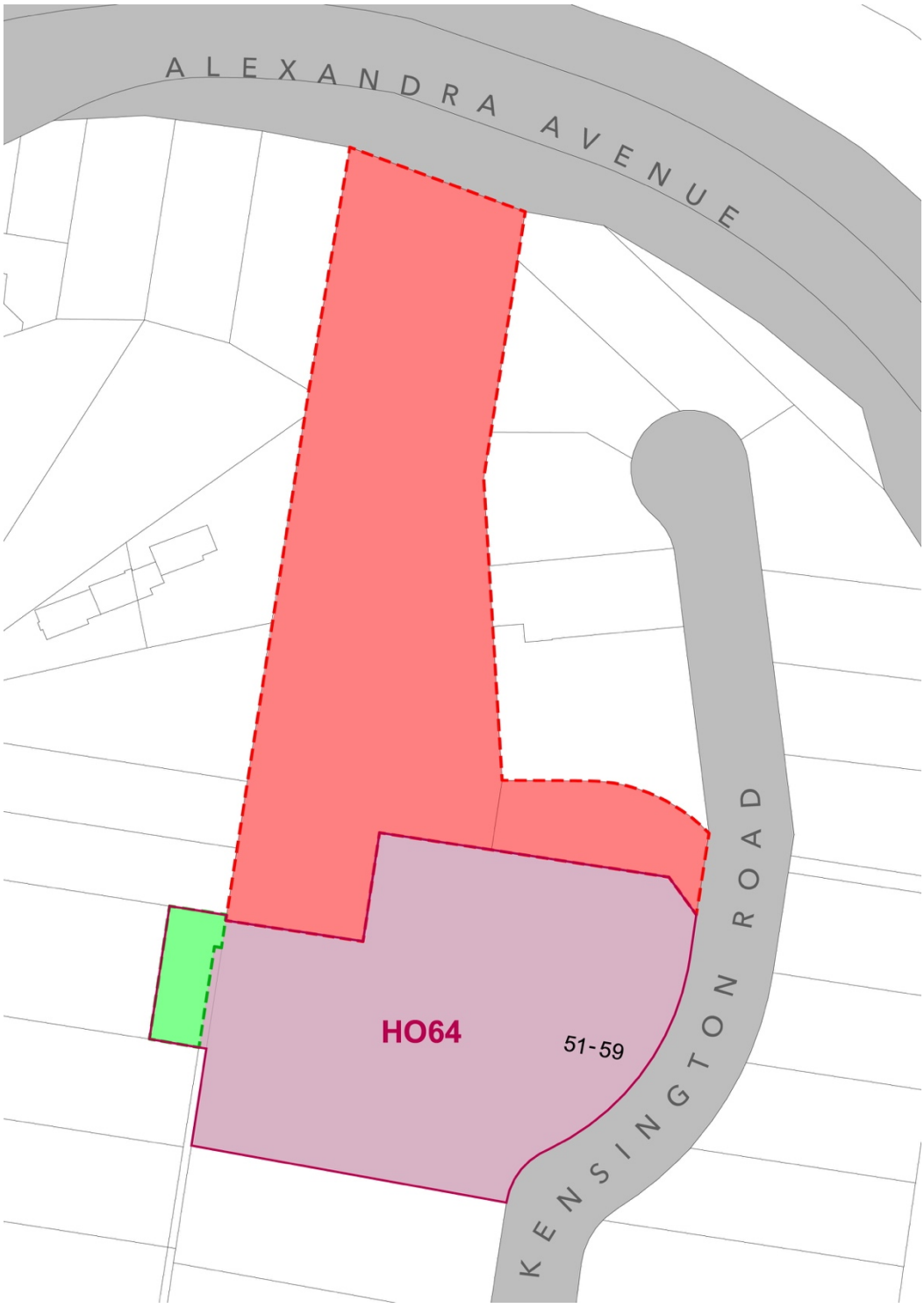


Figure 13. Map showing recommended changes to precinct heritage overlay extent.

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

External paint controls *Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?*	No

Internal alteration controls *Is a permit required for internal alterations?*	No
Tree controls *Is a permit required to remove a tree?*	No
Solar energy system controls *Solar energy system controls apply?*	Yes
Outbuildings and fences exemptions *Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?*	Yes - stables
Victorian Heritage Register *Is this place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?*	No
Prohibited uses may be permitted *Can a permit be granted to use for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?*	No
Aboriginal heritage place *Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the* Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?	No
Incorporated Plan *Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?*	No

Extent of Overlay

The recommended Heritage Overlay curtilage for HO64 is as follows:



Figure 14. Recommended HO64 Extent

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Previous Assessment

City of Prahran Conservation Review, Context Pty Ltd, 1993

References

Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993.

Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006.

Department of Housing and Construction, *Bona Vista, South Yarra, Report for Charge of Annuity*, 1982.

ERM for Department of Finance, *Bona Vista Heritage Assessment Final Report*, 2015.

Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW), City of Prahran Plan No 37, 1895.

Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detail Plan No 941,1896.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) file no. 2665.

Prahran Rate Books (RB), as cited.

State Library of Victoria, map collection.

State Library of Victoria, picture collection.

The Age.