Bowen Street Precinct, Prahran

Heritage Place: Bowen Street Precinct
Address: 1-39 and 2-28 Bowen Street, Prahran
HO Reference: HO124
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024
Designer: N/A
Builder: N/A
Year of Construction: c.1887-1888



Photograph of 11 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2022).



Location map and extent of HO124.

Heritage Group: Residential buildings
Heritage Type: Residential precinct
Key Theme: Housing the workers
Key Sub-theme: 'Struggletown' – working-class housing in the nineteenth and early 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 Bowen Street Precinct, comprising a group of Victorian-era dwellings on Bowen Street, is locally significant.

With the exception of two non-contributory properties at 6 and 9 Bowen Street, Prahran, the precinct is characterised by contributory properties. Refer to the grading maps below for designations.

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

- The distinctive pattern of the c.1850s Bowen Street subdivision, and subsequent c. 1887-1888 development created by the group of Victorian era cottages sited close together on narrow allotments;
- A high degree of intactness arising from the same construction period and relative absence of infill development;
- The regularity and harmony of the Victorian-era cottages characterised as freestanding structures with a single-storey presentation to the street, modest single fronted façades, hipped roofs clad with corrugated sheet metal, bullnosed or convex verandahs with corrugated sheet metal, turned and square timber posts and cast iron fretwork and brackets, timber weatherboard cut to appear like stone blockwork, paired pendant eave brackets, paired and single timber sash windows, timber panel doors with sidelights and fanlights, and profiled rendered brick chimneys;
- The uniformity of allotments, siting, setbacks and building heights across the precinct; and
- The retention of original or sympathetic, low to medium height timber picket fencing.

Later alterations and additions to the properties are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Bowen Street Precinct is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The Bowen Street Precinct is historically significant as an intact collection of Victorian-era weatherboard cottages that were erected during Melbourne's 1880s land boom, which ushered in a period of unprecedented prosperity, growth and development. Constructed to accommodate the rapid increase of workers settling in the suburb due to its growing manufacturing and service industries, the precinct is also notable as a working-class pocket situated within the more affluent area of eastern Prahran. Subsequently,the Bowen Street Precinct not only forms a tangible link to this period of suburban development, but also exemplifies the changing socio-economic demographic of eastern Prahran during the late nineteenth century. (Criterion A)

The Bowen Street Precinct is aesthetically significant as a visually unified residential area, characterised by near identical single-storey Victorian weatherboard cottages. The buildings retain a high degree of integrity as a group and demonstrate stylistic cohesion through consistency in built form, materials, fenestration, detailing, height, scale, allotment sizes and setbacks. These features, along with the retention of original and sympathetic low to medium

height timber picket fencing, combine to create a visually consistent and harmonious residential streetscape. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Bowen Street Precinct is historically significant as an intact collection of Victorian weatherboard cottages that were erected during Melbourne's 1880s land boom, which ushered in a period of unprecedented prosperity, growth and development. Constructed to accommodate the rapid increase of workers settling in the suburb due to its growing manufacturing and service industries, the precinct is also notable as a working-class pocket situated within the more affluent area of eastern Prahran. Subsequently, the Bowen Street Precinct not only forms a tangible link to this period of suburban development, but also exemplifies the changing socio-economic demographic of eastern Prahran during the late nineteenth century.
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 Bowen Street Precinct is aesthetically significant as a visually unified residential area characterised by near identical single-storey Victorian weatherboard cottages. The buildings retain a high degree of integrity as a group and demonstrate stylistic cohesion through consistency in built form, materials, fenestration, detailing, height, scale, allotment sizes and setbacks. These features, along with the retention of original and sympathetic low to medium height timber picket fencing, combine to create a visually consistent and harmonious residential streetscape.

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 Bowen Street Precinct consists of a group of thirty-four closely spaced freestanding residences along the north and south side of Bowen Street. Bowen Street is a narrow bi-directional street with street parking on both sides, oriented on an east-west axis. Bowen Street terminates at Williams Road to the west, and Packington Street to the east. The southern side of the precinct is bounded by the junction of Craven Street with Bowen Street to the west. Bowen Street is laid with bitumen with concrete kerbs, guttering and footpaths on both sides. The footpath includes interspaced planted trees consisting of a variety of species including Brush Box (*Lophostemon confertus*) and Melaleuca (*Melaleuca*). A narrow lane extends from the northern side of the street between 19 and 21 Bowen Street, extending into a lane forming the north boundaries of the north side residences (1-39). The no-through laneway is laid with concrete and has a second access point from Packington Street. A second no-through laneway provides partial rear access to the southern boundaries of the south side residences (2-14), which has access to Packington Street.

The residences within the Bowen Street Precinct consist of single-storey timber cottages. The residences present with a single fronted façade clad with timber weatherboard cut to appear like stone blockwork. The side elevations are clad with timber weatherboards. The main entrances consist of a timber panel door with sidelights and fanlight. The front windows at 1-7, 11-29 and 28 Bowen Street consist of paired timber sash windows, while the front windows at 2-4, 31-33 and 8-26 Bowen Street consist of single timber sash windows and sidelights.

The residences have a front verandah with a bullnosed or convex style awning. The verandahs generally present with turned and square timber posts with ornate cast-iron lacework. Paired pendant eaves brackets with raised mouldings are set under the eaves of each front façade. The hipped roofs are clad with corrugated sheet metal. A single rendered heavily moulded chimney extends from the centre ridge of some of the roofs, while others feature two chimneys.

The residences have a consistent setback from the street, allowing for a narrow front garden. The street front boundaries consist of timber picket fencing with some variation in gate location, height and post detailing. The residences occupy narrow and long lots with a consistent size on

the northern side and some variation on the southern side. The residences generally include single-storey rear extensions and garage additions, thereby maintaining the overall scale of the streetscape. Some residences include second-storey rear extensions however these are mostly well concealed from the street.

Overall, the Bowen Street Precinct presents as a group of highly cohesive Victorian-era timber weatherboard cottages with a consistent form, scale, setbacks, roof profiles and materiality. While some variations in detailed finished such as the front windows and verandah awning profile are visible, they are generally sympathetic to the overall aesthetic of the residences. Most front façades appear largely intact from the public domain, however some alterations including second-storey rear additions and removal of original chimneys are visible. Despite some visible alterations, the precinct presents an overall strong and consistent aesthetic. The Bowen Street Precinct is considered to be in good condition overall and has high integrity.

- Alterations and Additions

- Altered street front boundary with un-sympathetic brick, chain link, or high timber fences at 3, 4, 12, 17, 19, and 26 Bowen Street.
- Removal of original chimneys at 7, 8, 14, 16,19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 33 and 37 Bowen Street.
- Roofing presenting a contrasting colour or cladding at1, 4, 6, 18, 19, and 23 Bowen Street.
- Altered front verandah such as removal of lacework at 10, 12, and 16 Bowen Street.
- Residences generally include single-storey rear extensions.
- Second-storey rear addition visible from the public domain at 17, 19, 21, and 24 Bowen Street.
- Infill development at 6 and 9 Bowen Street.

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 Bowen Street Precinct comprised Crown Portion 54 during the 1849-1850 Crown Land Sales (Surveyor-General's Department 1849). Consisting of approximately thirty acres of land bounded by present day High Street, Williams Road, the line of Gertrude Street and the line of Michie Mews, Portion 54 was purchased as an investment by lawyer and judge Robert Williams Pohlman (Malone 2003, 22). Characterised by fairly level land that drained naturally to the bay rather than to the Yarra, the allotment was considered prime residential and commercial land that was distinct from the poorly drained land that dominated a significant portion of what is now

present-day Prahan. Despite the quality of the land, its distance from the city centre meant that the area was slow to develop. Consequently, with the exception of the Mount Erica Hotel building and a scattering of small properties that had been erected by 1856, Portion 54 remained largely undeveloped and in use as small farms and market gardens (Surveyor-General's Department 1856) (see Figure 1)



Figure 1. 1856 map showing the approximate location of present day Bowen Street Precinct (then predominantly vacant) in red. *Source:* Public Record Office Victoria.

Named after William Bowen, a Prahran councillor, Bowen Street was subdivided sometime in the 1850s (Malone 2003, 28). While the street appears to have been established by 1856, it was only intensely developed during the 1880s land boom, which saw the rapid construction of freestanding weatherboard cottages set on narrow allotments. Interestingly, the street formed a stark contrast to the larger mansion estates and middle-class villas set on extensive allotments along the neighbouring streets, and was therefore notable as a working-class pocket within what was then a more affluent area of the suburb (MMBW 1899; Context Pty Ltd 1993, 116). Reflecting a period of unprecedented prosperity, growth and development, the speed in which these working-class residences were erected not only spoke to rapid population growth in the area, but also the considerable influx of workers who were settling in the suburb as a result of its growing service and manufacturing industries. Indeed, by 1887-1888, all of the Victorian era properties comprising the present day Bowen Street Precinct had been erected (Prahran Rate Books 1887-1888). A MMBW map from 1899 also depicts the dwellings with generally identical forms and setbacks (MMBW 1899) (see Figure 2)



Figure 2. 1899 MMBW detail plan 1004 showing Bowen Street Precinct properties in red. *Source:* State Library of Victoria.

According to the City of Prahran Rate Books, the majority of the dwellings were owned by Alfred Ottaway, who was also likely the sole developer of the dwellings. As with other residential enclaves of this nature, the dwellings were primarily rented out to various working-class individuals from the late nineteenth century into the interwar period, including plumbers, factory workers and laborers (The Herald 1932, 15; The Age 1925, 5). With the exception of 6 and 9 Bowen Street, Prahran, which have since been replaced with contemporary buildings, all dwellings within this precinct have impressively survived intact against the 1960s and 1970s slum clearance initiatives, which saw the demolition of high-density residential areas characterised by workers cottages. Today, the dwellings continue to be used as private residential properties.

Comparative Analysis

The Bowen Street Precinct comprises a highly intact and cohesive series of modest freestanding Victorian era workers cottages that were developed during Melbourne's 1880s land boom period, which ushered in a period of unprecedented growth and development in the municipality. The precinct is notable for its impressive visual congruity and harmonious streetscape stemming from consistencies in setback, siting, scale, materials and detailing. There are several surviving late nineteenth century working-class residential pockets in the City of Stonnington that also followed this developmental trajectory. Comparative examples include:

- **Aberdeen Street Precinct, Prahran (HO121).** The Aberdeen Street Precinct comprises a small group of modest workers houses on small, thin allotments that were also constructed during Melbourne's 1880s land boom period. As with the Bowen Street Precinct, the building

stock is similarly characterised by a consistency stemming from their Victorian era style, single-storey height, built form, profiled chimneys and sympathetic low front boundary picket fences. While it has a complete absence of modern infill development or prominent additions and alterations, the houses were constructed in an unplanned manner around a narrow cul-de-sac and thus have varying gable and hipped roof forms, detailing and building materials. In this regard, this streetscape is considered less impressive from an aesthetic perspective than the rows of identical cottages that distinguish the Bowen Street Precinct.

- **Tyrone Street, South Yarra (HO151).** The Tyrone Street Precinct is directly comparable to the Bowen Street Precinct as a residential streetscape characterised by a sequence of intact single-storey, single-fronted modest Victorian cottages. It similarly demonstrates the key features associated with boom era workers cottages, including narrow allotments and setbacks, profiled chimneys, and the modest incorporation of late Victorian detailing, including front verandahs of constructed of corrugated iron, cast iron detailing and eave brackets. Its building stock is noticeably less intact than the Bowen Street Precinct however, and several dwellings have lost their original verandah detailing and/or have been overpainted. The harmony of its streetscape character is also less impressive due to the presence of unsympathetic high front boundary fences.
- **Cambridge Street Precinct, Armadale (HO125).** Developed between 1887-88, the Cambridge Street Precinct consists of a series of single-storey freestanding late Victorian era weatherboard dwellings erected in an identical manner. While the housing stock is more notable from a design perspective due to its unusually embellished gable ends, the precinct is nevertheless comparable in terms of its architectural unity and congruity with the regularity of setbacks, materials, profiled chimneys, Victorian detailing including front corrugated iron verandahs with cast iron lacework and timber framed sash windows, and incorporation of sympathetic timber picket fences. It is of a higher degree of integrity overall due to its complete absence of infill.

As the above comparative analysis has demonstrated, the Bowen Street Precinct comprises a highly intact series of late-Victorian workers cottages characterised by consistent setbacks, detailing, built forms and fenestration. While not without some infill development, it nevertheless compares well to similar Victorian era precincts within the municipality due to both the planned nature of its development and its overall retention of original and/or sympathetic detailing and materials. With this, it forms a highly cohesive and striking residential streetscape within the City of Stonnington.

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*
1 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
2 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
3 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
4 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
5 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
6 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Contemporary	NC
7 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C

Street address	Place type	Style/era	Grading
8 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
9 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Contemporary	NC
10 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
11 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
12 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
13 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
14 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
15 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
16 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
17 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
18 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
19 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
20 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
21 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
22 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
23 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
24 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
25 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
26 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
27 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
28 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
29 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
31 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
33 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
35 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
37 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C
39 Bowen Street, Prahran	House	Victorian Period (1851-1901)	C

References

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Stonnington City Council. 2008. Heritage Citation Report: Tyrone Street Precinct, South Yarra, Hermes ID 31186. Unpublished report. PDF file.

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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.

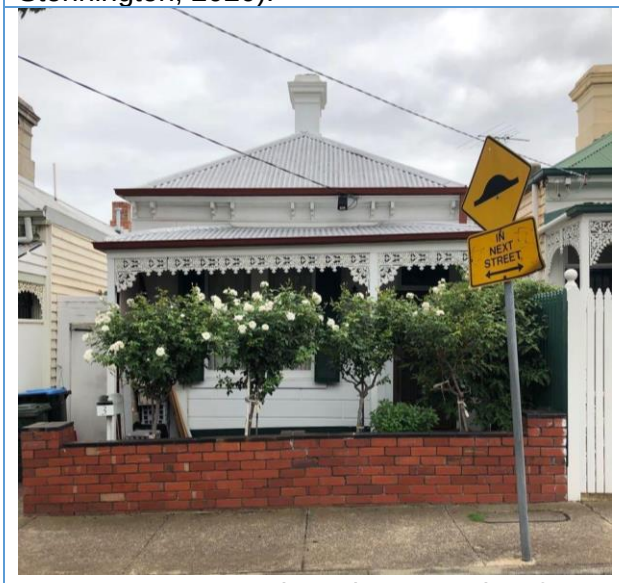
Images



1 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



2 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



3 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



4 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



5 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



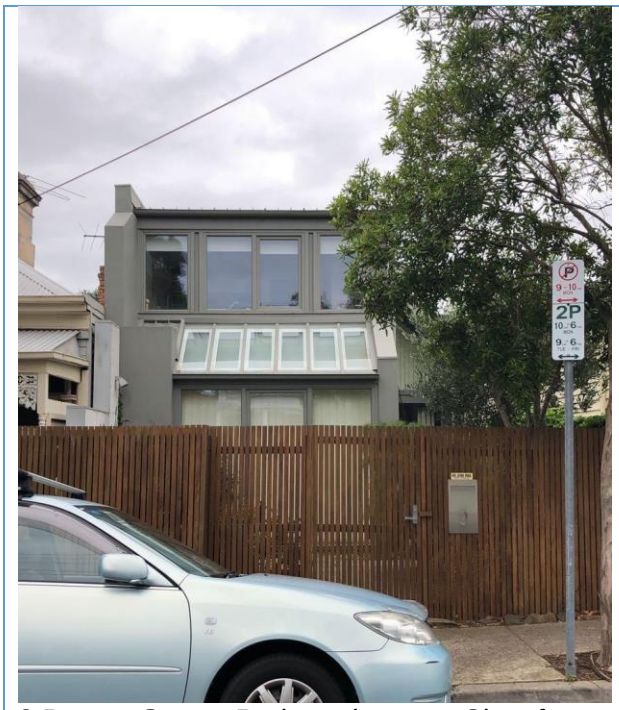
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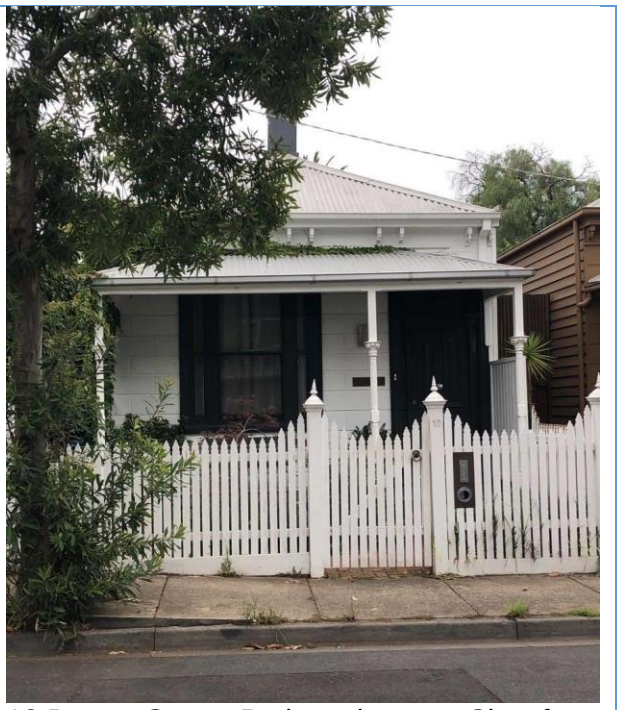
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11 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



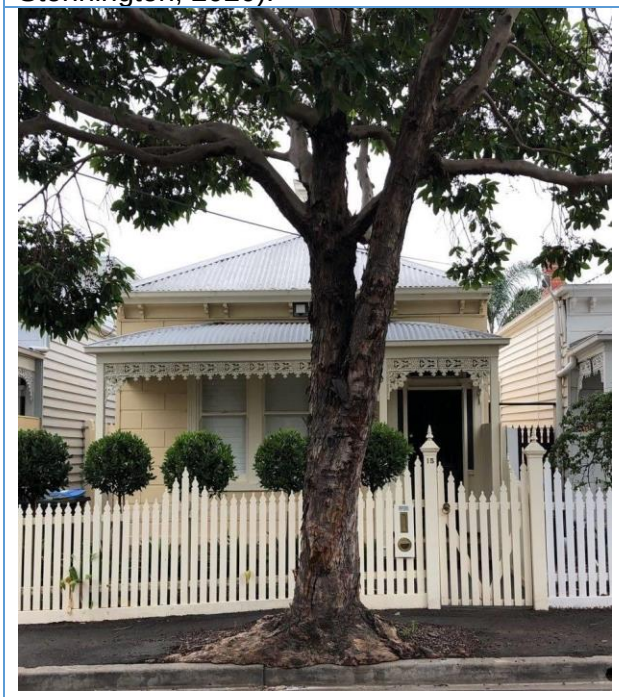
12 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



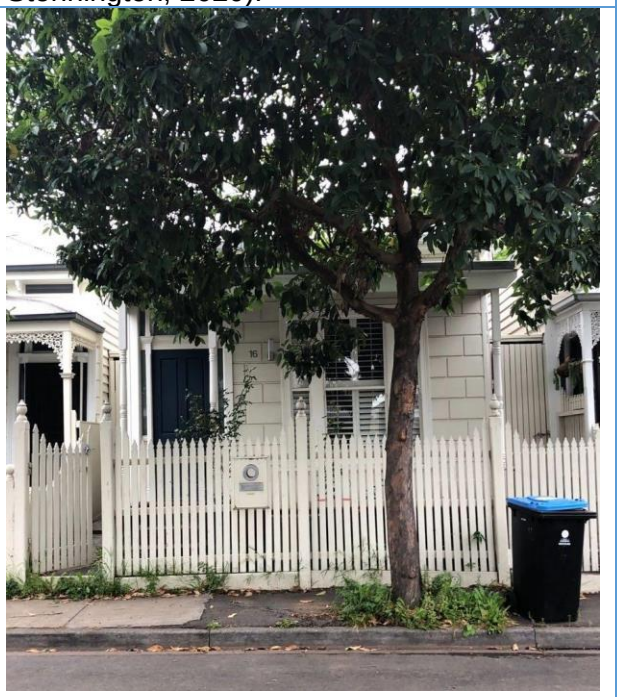
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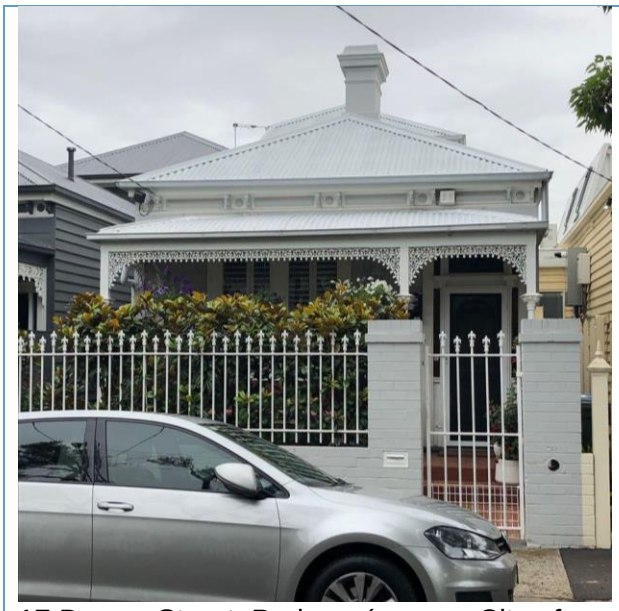
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15 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



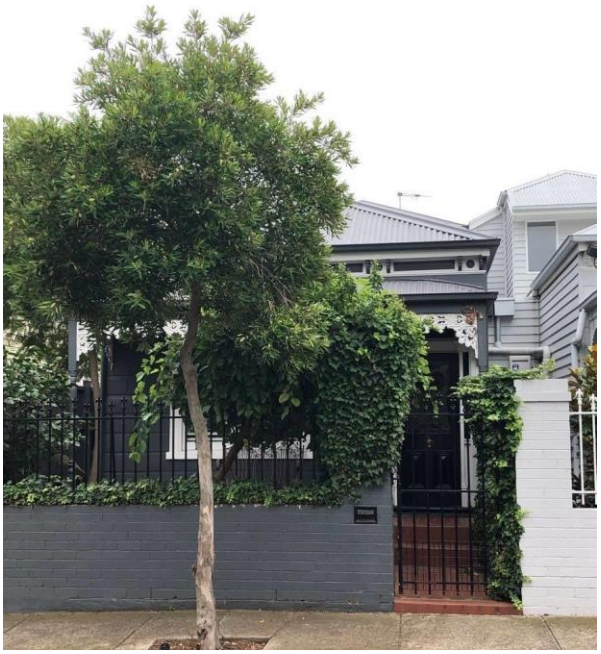
16 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



17 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



18 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



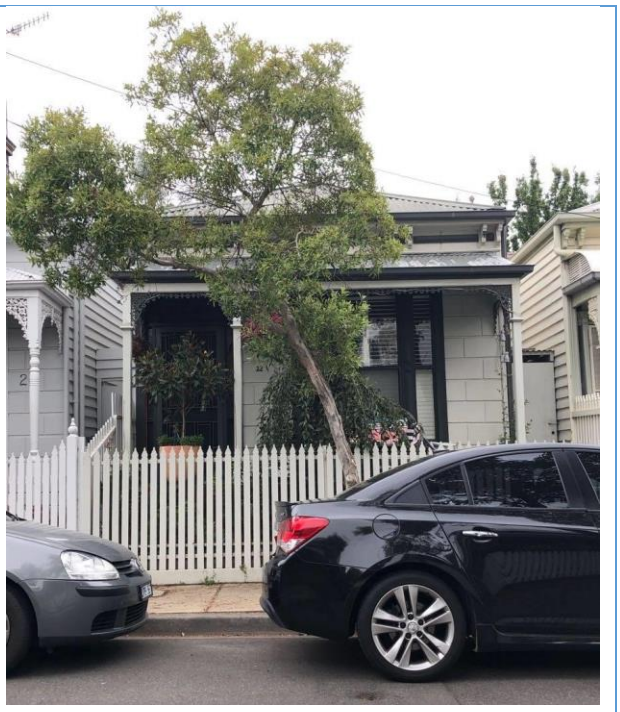
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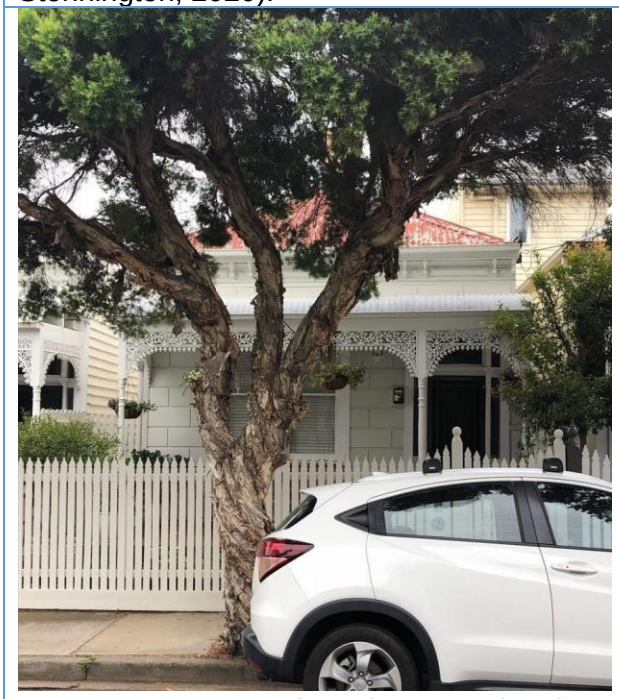
20 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



21 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



22 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



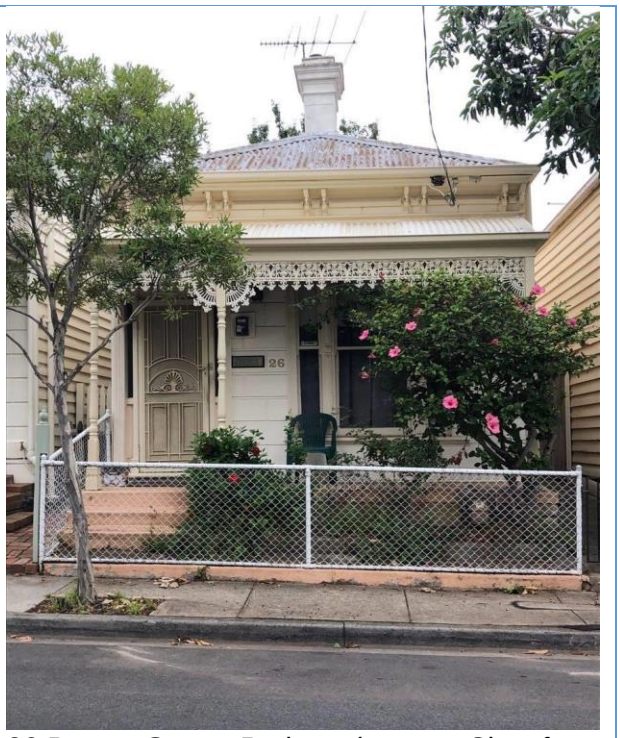
23 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



24 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



25 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



26 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



27 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



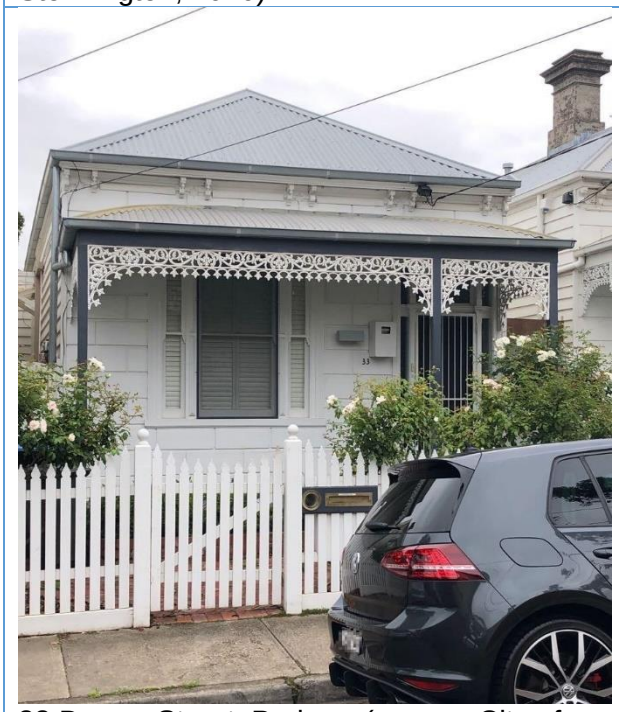
28 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



29 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



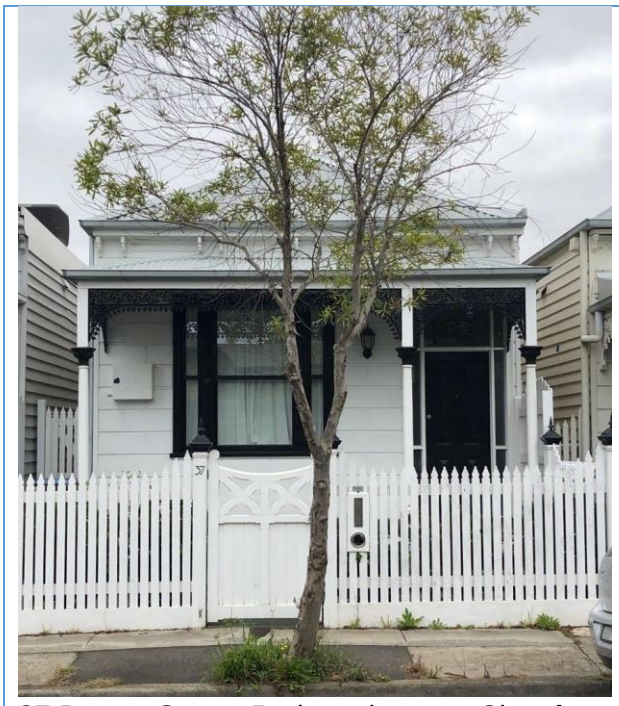
31 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



33 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



35 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



37 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).



39 Bowen Street, Prahran (source: City of Stonnington, 2020).

Authors

Former citation prepared by: Context Pty Ltd, 1993.
Updated citation prepared by: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd (Vivian Lu and Reuel Balmadres), 2022.
Quality assurance review conducted by: Corinne Softley, 2022.