Former Dentist Surgery, 139 High Street, Prahran

Heritage Place: Former Dentist Surgery
Address: 139 High Street, Prahran

HO Reference: HO771
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: Unknown
Builder: Unknown

Year of Construction: 1893



Photograph of 139 High Street, Prahran (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024)



Location map and extent of 139 High Street, Prahran

Heritage Group: Health Services
Heritage Type: Dentist

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Developing higher density living – developing apartment living

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 property at 139 High Street, Prahran (otherwise known as the Former Dentist Surgery), is significant. Specifically, the form, detailing, fenestration, materials, and scale of the 1893 building are of local heritage significance. Later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Former Dentist Surgery on High Street is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The Former Dentist Surgery at 139 High Street is of historical significance as an 1893 dental surgery which operated as a dentist from the corner site for approximately 60 years, servicing the local community, and exemplifying the importance of accessible local health services in Prahran following the land boom-period of the 1880s. The Former Surgery also represents the historical development and expansion of Prahran's major commercial thoroughfares, and more specifically represents the establishment of commercial properties on High Street, Prahran. (Criterion A)

The Former Dentist Surgery at 139 High Street, Prahran, is of aesthetic significance as an intact landmark Federation Queen Anne commercial property. Located at the corner of St. Edmonds Road and High Street, the Former Dentist Surgery addresses the northeastern corner of the intersection with a corner entrance and upper-storey tourelle. The tourelle is the key feature of the building, which when combined with the corner placement of the building and its striking use of contrasting material finishes with polychrome brickwork and rendered banding results in an aesthetically elaborate structure. The ornamentation further reinforces the aesthetic significance, through the use of segmented arches and rendered dripmoulds, the rendered tourelle with Corinthian imposts and render swags, and the wrought and cast-iron window screens on the ground floor. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Former Dentist Surgery at 139 High Street is of historical significance as an 1893 dental surgery which operated as a dentist from the corner site for approximately 60 years, servicing the local community, and exemplifying the importance of accessible local health services in Prahran following the land boom-period of the 1880s. The Former Surgery also represents the historical development and expansion of Prahran's major commercial thoroughfares, and more specifically represents the establishment of commercial properties on High Street, 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*	The Former Dentist Surgery at 139 High Street, Prahran, is of aesthetic significance as an intact landmark Federation Queen Anne commercial property. Located at the corner of St. Edmonds Road and High Street, the Former Dentist Surgery addresses the northeastern corner of the intersection with a corner entrance and upper-storey tourelle. The tourelle is the key feature of the building, which when combined with the corner placement of the building and its striking use of contrasting material finishes with polychrome brickwork and rendered banding results in an aesthetically elaborate structure. The ornamentation further reinforces the aesthetic significance, through the use of segmented arches and rendered dripmoulds, the rendered tourelle with Corinthian imposts and render swags, and the wrought and cast-iron window screens on the ground floor.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	This place does not meet this criterion.
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 Former Dentist Surgery at 139 High Street, Prahran, is a substantial double-storey brick masonry building. The building is a polychrome brick structure of two colours of masonry, a dark burnt clay and lighter red. Rectilinear in form and addressing the corner of High Street and St Edmonds Road, the structure has two frontages.

The Former Dentist Surgery presents a highly decorative finish. On both elevations, segmental arch sash windows are decoratively expressed with rendered courses directly below them, expressed further by an elaborate rendered swag. On the ground floor, the windows are guarded by cast iron lacework screens halfway up the bottom window light. Over the segmental arch on each window is a rendered dripmould. A substantial opening near the southwestern corner has been enclosed as a window but was likely formerly a formal entrance. The southern elevation fronting High Street mirrors the same design elements shown on the St Edmonds Road elevation. However, the High Street frontage has a more sympathetic paint scheme, as the rendered elements are still in their original off-cream colour.

The corner entrance to the structure has a contemporary door in the original door opening, with a rounded arch fanlight and dripmoulds set on Corinthian imposts, broken by a central keystone at the arch apex. The keystone is a decorative support to the structure's main decorative feature, being the rendered second-storey tourelle. The tourelle is broken into three distinct bays, each set with a rounded window and separated by a rendered pilaster. The rounded arch dripmoulds are set on Corinthian imposts, in keeping with the corner entrance.

The ground floor is separated from the second storey by a rendered frieze and architrave. The Former Dentist Surgery's roof is a steep hipped roof clad in slate shingles. The tourelle is surmounted by a six-sided spire or pyramidal roof with projecting gables on the three southwestern corner frontages. The building retains its original brick chimneys, both finished with expressive chimney caps and rendered moulding.

The Former Dentist Surgery remains in use as a medical clinic. The structure retains its original detailing, is in good condition and is of high integrity, representing an intact example of late nineteenth century Federation Queen Anne with remnant features related to the Gothic Revival movement.

- ### Alterations and Additions
    - Contemporary signage installed on southern, western and eastern elevations.
    - Corner entrance door replaced in the original opening.
    - Rendered details on the western elevation overpainted in a dark unsympathetic colour.
    - Large opening on the western ground floor elevation filled in as a window.

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 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 139 High Street, Prahran, is currently located was part of Lot 36 during the 1849-50 Crown Land Sales. The site was purchased by Peter Davis who also bought Lots 37 and 38. Each lot was 52 acres in size, with Lot 37 later being the site of the Prahran Railway Station, as well as land to the east and west. As outlined in the 1983 Prahran Conservation Study, following his purchase of Lots 36, 37 and 38, Davis immediately advertised smaller farm allotments within the Lots (Nigel Lewis, 1983). The allotments were then subdivided for small residential developments with narrow streets aligned with the provision of residential accommodation for worker's cottages. Davis's subdivisions were some of the first subdivisions to occur within the municipality. The Prahran Telegraph published in 1897 an article reflecting on the historical development of Prahran, noting:

> *'The first Government sale of land in what is now known as Prahran was held in 1848, consisting of thirty-six blocks of 52 acres each. Peter Davis, auctioneer, of Collins-street, whose rooms stood on the site now occupied by the Age office purchase the four blocks bounded by (now) Chapel-street, Toorak-road, Punt-road, and Commercial-road, at £4 10s per acre.'* (The Prahran Telegraph, 25 Feb 1897, 5)

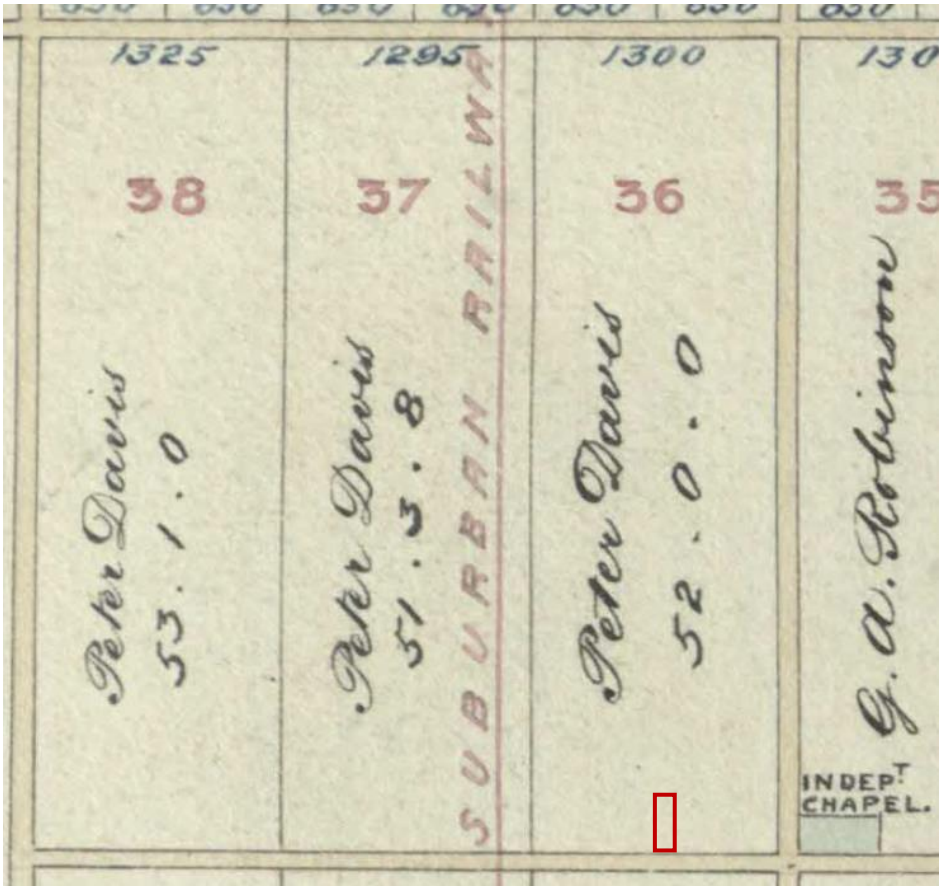


Figure 1. 1865 map showing the approximate location of the site at 139 High Street, Prahran, (then vacant) in red. *Source*: State Library of Victoria.

By the late nineteenth century, most of Lot 36 had been extensively subdivided and developed for both commercial and residential use. The main thoroughfares of Chapel Street, Toorak Road and High Street exemplified the joint development of residential and commercial use. The proximity to industry and the Prahran Markets additionally demanded accommodation for factory workers and traders.

The property at 139 High Street, Prahran, is first recorded in 1893 as the surgery of Walter Henry Dudley who practiced dentistry from the site. Also operating from the site were G. Malcolm Russell and Hamish W. Russell, teachers of elocution, violin and piano (Table Talk, 30 March 1911, 16). The site is shown in the 1896 Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works plan, with a vacant block at No. 141.

Dudley passed in 1914 and the property was left to his wife, Emily. The surgery was taken over by Dr. Denzil Govett, who leased the property from Emily Dudley. Emily Dudley put the surgery's furnishings to auction and left the State. Govett, a dentist from Shepperton, operated from the site till his passing in 1942. His obituary noted that he 'had been in practice as a dentist in High-street, Prahran, for more than 20 years' (The Age, 5 Feb 1942, 3). In 1945, following Govett's passing, the site was occupied by one Walter E. Jewson, followed by Arthur E. Sharpe in 1950.

In 1951, following the passing of Emily Dudley, the trust established by Walter Henry Dudley in his will and probate put the former surgery up for auction:

> *'THIS DAY, At 3 p.m. On the Property, 139 High-Street, Prahran. Substantial brick property situated in a most prominent position, 100 yards from Chapel-Street. Immediate VACANT POSSION. Of the Entire Property Given. The Property Can be Put to a Wide Variety of Uses and is Eminently Suitable for GUES HOUSE, INSTITUIONAL or COMMERCIAL PURPOSES. Comprising 9 Rooms, 2 Bathrooms, Kitchen, Double Garage, &c. Or Can be Used as 3 Self-contained Apartment…'* (The Age, 31 Oct 1951, 9).

The site continued to be used for commercial uses into the late twentieth century, and the property is now used as part of the High Street Medical Clinic.

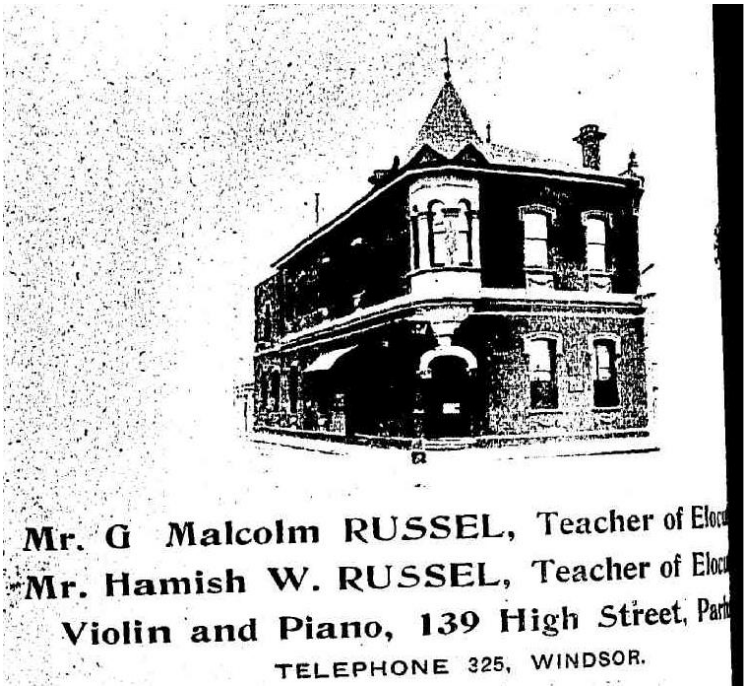


Figure 2. Advertisement from Table Talk, 30 March 1911, 16. Source: Trove

Comparative Analysis

Designed in a Federation Queen Anne derived style, the Former Dentist Surgery is a distinctive late nineteenth century structure defined by its polychrome brick masonry paired with decorative render detailing, fenestration, multiple hipped and gabled roof forms and most significantly by its elaborate corner tourelle. The below comparable sites have been chosen as both late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial corner properties, rather than for their comparable architectural features. While Queen Anne Buildings within the City of Stonnington are relatively well represented, examples of this architectural style applied to commercial buildings are less common. A comparable residential example is:

- **Wykeham Lodge, 2B Erskine Street, Armadale (HO533).** Wykeham Lodge at 2B Erskine Street is a substantial Queen Anne Revival residence constructed in 1891 two years before

the dental surgery at 139 High Street. Wykeham Lodge is comparable to the former surgery, with both buildings sharing similar architectural elements. These include a strong emphasis on rectilinear form and fenestration. Additionally, both buildings make use of corner tower features with hexagonal spire roof forms. Key differences, beyond the residential and commercial use, relate to integrity with Wykeham Lodge being extensively overpainted with the original masonry and render banding lost. Wykeham Lodge, while sharing a similar roof form, is also substantially larger and uses both hipped roof forms as well as projecting gables and terracotta tiles, complete with decorative timber gable ends. However, both buildings use stucco render decoratively for window and door mouldings – an element which would have greater affect if Wykeham Lodge were not overpainted. This analysis establishes that there are comparable elements between Wykeham Lodge and the former surgery at 139 High Street, though Wykeham Lodge is comparably more significant for its associations with architects Reed, Smart and Tappin.

Comparable commercial examples include:

- **Shop, 1025 High Street, Armadale(significant in HO400).**
  The shop at 1025 High Street, Armadale, is graded Significant within the broader HO400 High Street Rail and Retail Precinct. The store is comparable to the former dental surgery at 139 High Street, Prahran, as two double-storey commercial properties located on corner allotments with corner-facing entrances. Additionally, the shop at 1025 High Street is designed with a comparable second-storey corner bay, reminiscent of the tourelle at 139 High Street. However, key differences include the architectural style of both buildings, with 139 High Street constructed in the Federation Queen Anne style, and 1025 High Street constructed in the Federation style. Both buildings share segmental arch sash windows and a rendered frieze and architrave separating the second-storey and first storey. The key comparable elements are the siting of both properties, the general form and their shared emphasis on corner entrances. Although comparable, 1025 High Street has lower integrity due to being heavily overpainted.
- **8-12 Commercial Road, Prahran (HO303).**
  8-12 Commercial Road, Prahran, comprises a terrace of houses and corner shop noted for its unusual mixed residential and commercial composition. 12 Commercial Road, Prahran, compares as a Victorian era corner shop similarly characterised by a splayed corner entrance, brick masonry and timber framed sash windows. It is comparatively more modest to 139 High Street with regards to ornamentation, and less intact overall due to overpainting and alterations to the ground floor fenestration. Furthermore, both buildings are architecturally different as 12 Commercial Road is stylistically a Late Victorian commercial terrace, where 139 High Street is a Federation Queen Anne building with Old English Gothic Revival influences. Regardless, both buildings share a similar emphasis on corner commercial developments in Prahran in the late nineteenth century.
- **234 Chapel Street, Prahran (significant in HO126).**
  234 Chapel Street, Prahran, consists of a two-storey Victorian shop characterised by elaborate Italianate and Classical style detailing, including dentil string courses, Palladian style parapet, moulded cornices, pre-cast finials and incised patterning to the render. It compares to 139 High Street, Prahran in terms of visual distinction, materials composition, and incorporation of moulded detailing. However, 234 Chapel Street is ultimately less intact owing to extensive alterations to the ground floor, and is stylistically different from 139 High Street as an elaborate Italianate structure as opposed to the Federation Queen Anne styling

of 139 High Street. Like 12 Commercial Road, Prahran, both buildings share a similar emphasis on corner entrances, with elaborate decorations.

It is worth noting that within close proximity to 139 High Street is the Former St Matthew's Church Hall (HO54). The Former St Matthew's Church Hall on High Street is a substantial late nineteenth century Gothic Revival former Sunday school converted into commercial properties in the early twentieth century. The Church Hall is comparable as a late nineteenth century double-storey building designed utilising the principles of the Old English revival movement which informed both the Gothic Revival style as well as Federation Queen Anne. Key architectural similarities include the use of polychrome masonry with contrasting banding, hipped slate roofing of the same pitch, but differ when comparing decoration, with St Matthew's Church Hall designed with projecting gables, lancet windows and stone dressing instead of rendered bands. Both buildings are still considered comparable for their shared presence on High Street and their sympathetic designs mutually originating from the Old English Revival movement. In contrast with the Queen Anne Revival style, commercial examples of the Gothic Revival movement are well represented within the City of Stonnington. Though not immediately comparable with the property at 139 High Street, examples of Gothic Revival commercial properties include:

- 115 Glenferrie Rd, Malvern (HO349 Glenferrie Road / High Street Precinct);
- 119 Glenferrie Road, Malvern (HO349 Glenferrie Road / High Street Precinct);
- 1044 High Street, Armadale (HO400 High Street Rail and Retail Precinct); and
- Kings Arcade, 974-978 High Street, Armadale (HO57).

The above comparative analysis establishes that there are many corner-allotment commercial buildings of comparable scale and integrity in Prahran and the broader City of Stonnington. However, the key repeated difference between those well-represented structures and the former dentist surgery at 139 High Street is that stylistically the Federation Queen Anne style is not well represented in significant non-residential properties. A branch of the Old English Revival movement of the mid-nineteenth century, the Federation Queen Anne style takes inspiration from the Gothic Revival movement, and Gothic Revival commercial properties are well represented in the City of Stonnington as established above with regards to the neighbouring property, the Former St Matthew's Church Hall. However, 139 High Street differs to all the above examples due to the landmark status it embodies through the combination of its tourelle and placement addressing the corner of St. Edmonds Road and High Street While the other commercial examples analysed above are all corner properties, the tourelle at 139 High Street provides a particularly distinct architectural presentation.

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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



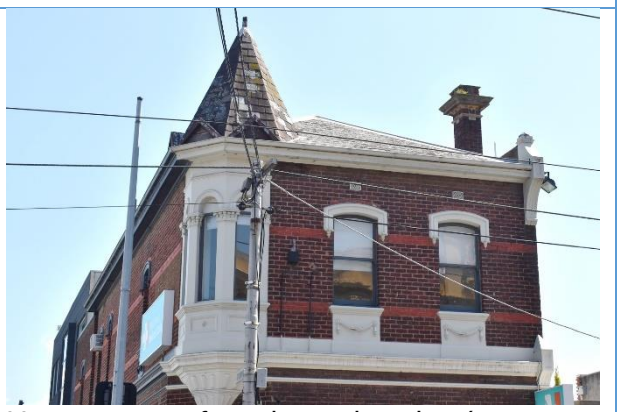
Overview of western elevation from the corner of St Edmonds Road and High Street, Prahran (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



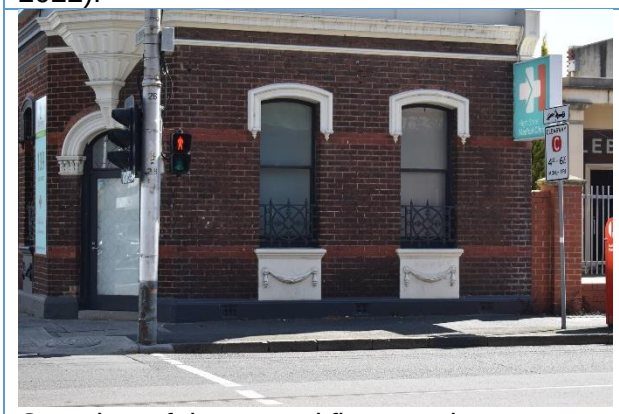
Detail view of ground floor western elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



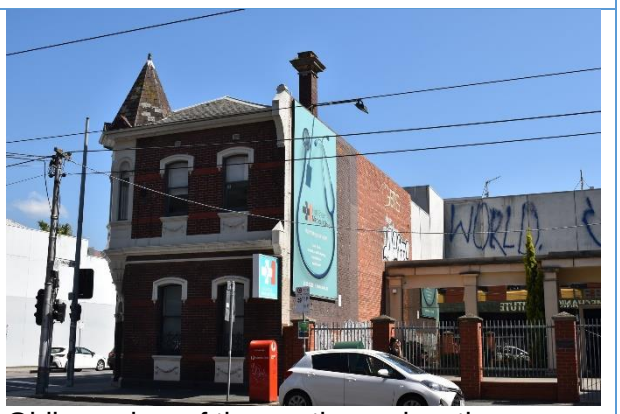
Overview of southern elevation fronting High Street (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Upper storey of southern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



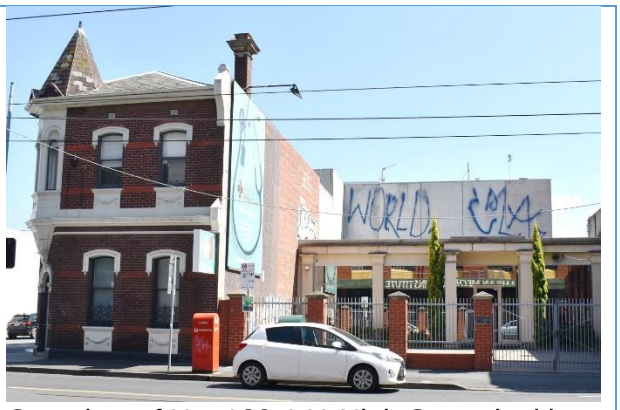
Overview of the ground floor southern elevation (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



Oblique view of the southern elevation, showing No. 141 on the right (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



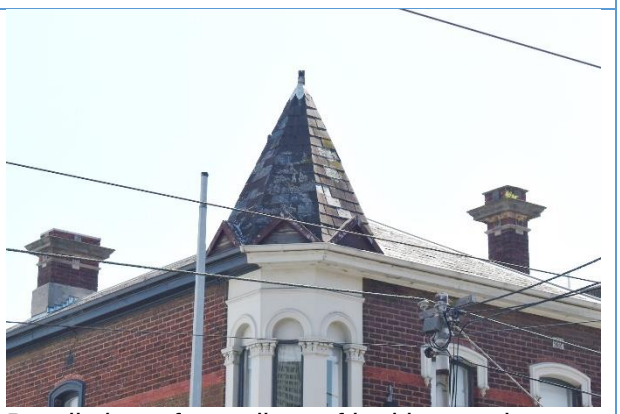
Oblique view of the upper storey looking northwest (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



Overview of No. 139-141 High Street looking north (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



Overview looking northeast at the corner entrance of 139 High Street (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).



Detail view of tourelle roof looking northeast (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2024).

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