Smooth-barked Apple Tree, 646/648 High Street, Prahran

Heritage Place: Smooth-barked Apple Tree
Address: 646/648 High Street, Prahran

HO Reference: HO773
Citation status: Final
Date Updated: 5 April 2024

Designer: N/A
Builder: N/A

Year of Construction: c.1890s-1900s



Photograph of the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Location map and extent of the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran.

Heritage Group: Parks, gardens and trees
Heritage Type: Tree

Key Theme: Building suburbs
Key Sub-theme: Creating leafy suburbs / Gardens

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 Smooth-barked Apple Tree (*Angophora costata*) at 646/648 High Street, Prahran is of local heritage significance. The altered landscape and grounds are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Smooth-barked Apple Tree is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The Smooth-barked Apple Tree is of historical significance as a mature ornamental native tree planting associated with the emergence of private suburban gardens in the municipality during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A feature of freestanding middle-class villas, these gardens and their accompanying plantings not only encapsulated the suburban ideal of *ruse in urbe* (country in the city), but also established the municipality's upper-middle class pockets as leafy suburban areas. As a remnant of the former suburban garden at the former Victorian villa at 648 High Street, Prahran, the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran demonstrates a key landscape feature of late nineteenth and early twentieth century middle-class suburban development. (Criterion A)

The Smooth-barked Apple Tree is of aesthetic significance as a pronounced and striking tree planting. It is distinguished by its impressive height, round and spreading canopy and characteristic symmetrical twisted branch structure and smooth, pale pink-brown coloured bark. These features, combined with its prominent siting and visibility from the street front, form a landmark feature along a main thoroughfare. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	The Smooth-barked Apple tree is of historical significance as a mature ornamental native tree planting associated with the emergence of private suburban gardens in the municipality during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A feature of freestanding middle-class villas, these gardens and their accompanying plantings not only encapsulated the suburban ideal of ruse in urbe (country in the city), but also established the municipality's upper-middle class pockets as leafy suburban areas. As a remnant of the former suburban garden at the former Victorian villa at 648 High Street, Prahran, the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran demonstrates a key landscape feature of late nineteenth and early twentieth century middle-class suburban development.

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 Smooth-barked Apple Tree is of aesthetic significance as a pronounced and striking tree planting. It is distinguished by its impressive height, round and spreading canopy and characteristic symmetrical twisted branch structure and smooth, pale pink-brown coloured bark. These features, combined with its prominent siting and visibility from the street front, form a landmark feature along a main 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 Smooth-barked Apple Tree (*Angophora costata*) is located at the boundary between 646 High Street, Prahran and 648 High Street, Prahran. The property at 648 High Street, Prahran comprises a block of interwar flats, while 646/648 High Street, Prahran consists of a former private hospital originally known as Koonwarra, and later, Windermere. It continues to remain in use as a private healthcare facility under Cabrini Health. The tree is located along the property's eastern boundary between the boundary fence and the asphalt car park and is elevated above

the surrounding carpark. The tree is located within a narrow raised garden bed with a projecting circular section edged with bluestone surrounding the base of the tree.

The Smooth-barked Apple Tree has a large single trunk with smooth but slightly pitted pale pink bark, and large twisting branches. The tree is tall and the large spreading canopy overhangs the healthcare facility and neighbouring apartment development at 648 High Street, providing shade and amenity, and forms a prominent landmark and an important view as seen from High Street. As per the National Trust Significant Tree Register, it is considered the largest known example of its type in Victoria.

The mature Smooth-barked Apple Tree is considered in good condition. While its immediate surrounds have changed somewhat, the tree remains in situ within the healthcare facility car park at 646/648 High Street, Prahran.

- ### Alterations and Additions

- Former garden surrounds re-landscaped and converted into a car park.

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 Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran sits formerly comprised Lot 53 during the 1849-50 Crown Land Sales (Surveyor-General's Department 1849). First purchased by Mary Chomley of the prominent early colonial Griffith family, the allotment consisted of approximately thirty and a half acres bounded by Orrong Road and High Street, the line of Barnato Grove and the line of Michie Mews (Malone 2003, 22; Surveyor-General's Department 1849).

While the allotment was considered prime residential and commercial land due to its fairly level nature and lack of drainage problems, it was nevertheless slow to develop due to its proximity from the city centre. Consequently, although a scattering of working-class timber dwellings on small allotments had been erected west of the subject area further to the west by 1856, Portion 53 remained largely undeveloped (Surveyor-General's Department 1856). The only exception to this was Mary Chomley's Merville Estate, which was situated south-east of the subject site (Surveyor-General's Department 1856) (see Figure 1).

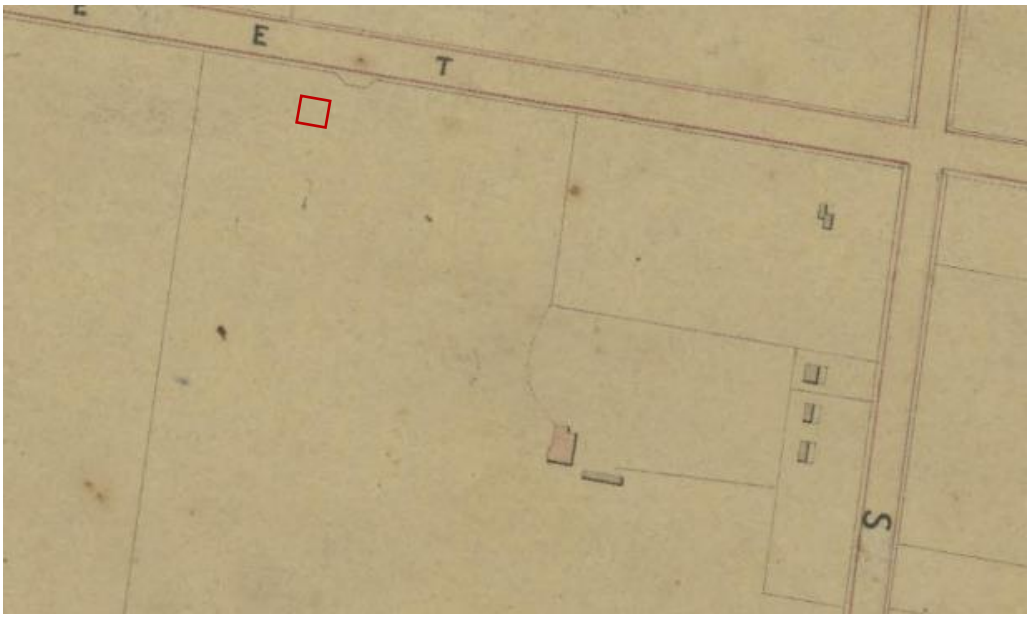


Figure 1. 1856 map showing approximate location of the Smooth-barked Apple Tree (then vacant) in red and Mary Chomley's Merville Estate to the south-east. *Source:* Public Record Office Victoria.

Following the sale of Chomley's Merville Estate in 1868, the subject site and surrounds were gradually subdivided to form a nest of streets. In 1884, six-acre allotments fronting High Street, inclusive of the subject site, were offered up for sale as '11 elegant villa sites'. By 1900, several Victorian era villas had been erected east of the subject site. Killara was erected at 644 High Street, and a MMBW plan depicts a landscaped garden along its western elevation (see Figure 2). 646/648 High Street, Prahran (then listed as 646 High Street, Armadale) however, remained undeveloped (MMBW 1900) (see Figure 2). Noticeably, the scale of these houses reflected the wealthier character of this pocket of Prahran (then formerly part of Armadale) in comparison to the workers cottages further to the west along Chomley Street.

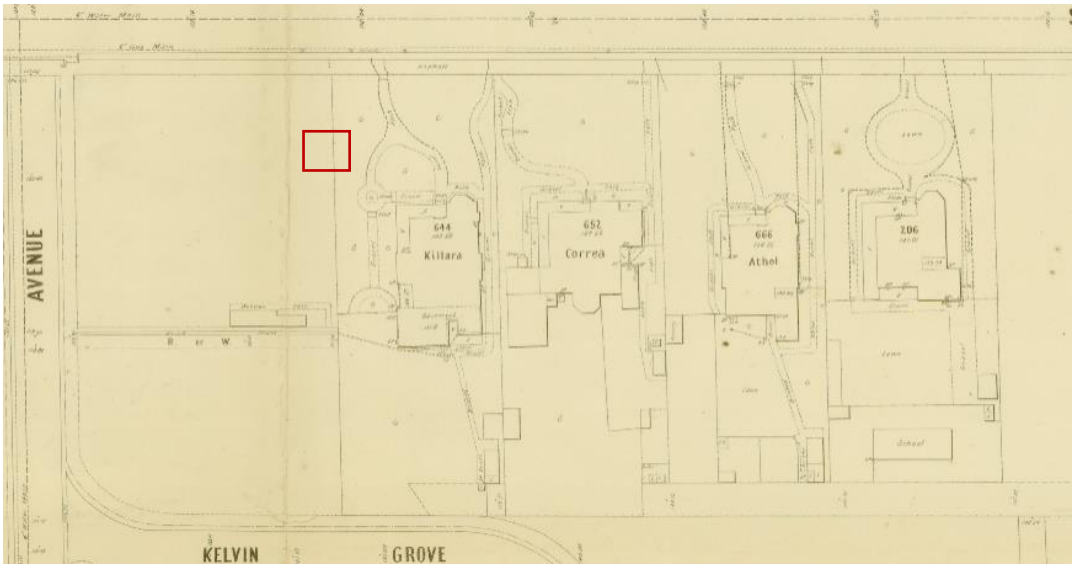


Figure 2. 1900 MMBW detail plan. 1000 showing the site of the Smooth-barked Apple Tree (then a vacant allotment) in red. *Source*: State Library of Victoria.

The Smooth-barked Apple Tree appears to have been planted during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century at the western boundary of Killara at 644 High Street, Armadale (presently the site of 649 High Street, Prahran), thereby forming part of the villa's garden landscape. In c.1905, Killara was converted into a private hospital overseen by Harrison & Cook (Sands & McDougall 1905). Killara was subsequently re-named Koonwarra Private Hospital by 1910. It is probable that the Smooth-barked Apple Tree was planted during Killara's use as a residential building due to the depiction of corresponding gardens in the 1900 MMBW map. It is visible on a 1931 aerial as a semi-mature planting at the boundary between present day 646/648 High Street, Prahran (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. 1931 aerial showing the the Smooth-barked Apple Tree in red. *Source:* Landata.

Koonwara Private Hospital expanded in c.1910, and a freestanding building was established to the west (see Figure 3). While the former Killara appears to have been reverted back into residential use by 1925, it is likely that the new building and the former Killa residence were both consolidated to form the Koonwara Private Hospital (Sands & McDougall 1910-1925). The tree continued to remain a key landscape feature of both the Koonwarra Private Hospital grounds (re-named Windermere Private Hospital by 1928) and the adjacent residence to the east (The Argus 1928, 8).

The Smooth-barked Apple Tree's surrounds changed substantially following the demolition and re-landscaping of the Victorian villa and grounds to the east and the subsequent development of flats on the site in the interwar period, as well as the conversion of hospital grounds to a carpark to the west (see Figure 4). As of 2023, it remains in situ on its raised bluestone garden bed.



Figure 4. 1951 aerial showing the the Smooth-barked Apple Tree in red. *Source:* Landata.

Comparative Analysis

Stonnington's reputation as a pleasant leafy suburb initially stemmed from the establishment of private nineteenth residential gardens amongst the municipality's wealthy. While this was chiefly concentrated in the large Victorian estates of Toorak, gardens of a suburban scale were also a feature of freestanding villas throughout the upper-middle class pockets of Prahran and Windsor by the early twentieth century. In these pockets, private gardens were an expression of the suburban ideal of *ruse in urbe* (country in the city), which typically meant a freestanding house surrounded by its own garden (Davison 1978, 145; Context Pty Ltd 2020, 128).

Private landscaped gardens often featured with a mixture of native and introduced ornamental plantings, and many of them were influenced by the design and appearance of English gardens in the metropole. While native to the eastern coast of Australia along the central coast of New South Wales and west of the Great Dividing Range, the Smooth-barked Apple Tree was eventually cultivated in Victorian gardens for ornamental purposes due to its evergreen qualities, flowering buds and pale pink-brown bark (Hubbard 1991; The Newcastle Sun 1931, 2).

While most of these private gardens are no longer extant, there are a handful of mature trees associated with them have survived and are therefore comparable to the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran. However, as there are currently no trees included in their own right within the Heritage Overlay in the City of Stonnington, these trees are either protected under the municipality's General Local Law, or under tree controls within a larger heritage place. They include:

- **Smooth-barked Apple Tree, 88 St Georges Road, Toorak.** Situated in the front garden of the residence 88 St Georges Road, Toorak, this Smooth-barked Apple Tree compares to the subject site in terms of species and association with a former twentieth century garden. It is less impressive than the Smooth-barked Apple Tree, 646/648 High Street, Prahran in terms of size, and also lacks its round and spreading canopy growth.
- **Bella sombra, Trelowarren House, 543 Orrong Road, Armadale ('significant' under General Local Law).** Native to South America, the Bella sombra at Trelowarren comprises

a mature example of an unusual species. It forms a significant feature in the landscape, and is located north of the 1870s Trelowarren House at 543 Orrong Road, Armadale. As with the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran the tree dates to the Victorian era and is associated with the gardens of Trelowarren House. While it compares as an impressively sized ornamental planting that can be traced back to the early private gardens of the Stonnington municipality, it differs in terms of species.

- **English Elm, cnr Glenferrie Road and Sorrett Avenue, Malvern (tree controls within HO396 Sorrett Avenue Precinct).** Estimated at 140 years in age, the English Elm at the corner of Glenferrie Road and Sorrett Avenue, originally one of a pair, formerly parked the original entrance to the Sorrett Estate. It was planted in 1859 and is considered a landmark in the area. While more impressive than the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran in terms of longevity and association with the former Sorrett Garden (now demolished), it nevertheless draws similarities as a surviving mature tree associated with a nineteenth century private garden. As with the Bella sombra at Trelowarren House, it comprises an introduced as opposed to a native species.

Moreover, the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran also compares well to other examples of the species located elsewhere in Victoria. They include:

- **Rusty Gum Myrtle, Reserve Street, Berwick, Casey City (HO24**). Estimated at over 100 years old, the Smooth-barked Apple Tree (otherwise known as the Rusty Gum Myrtle), comprises a commemorative tree planting situated on a public reserve. Despite differences in provenance, it is nevertheless comparable in terms of age, size and contribution to the landscape. It lacks the impressive height of the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646 High Street, but similarly maintains a striking symmetrical twisted branch structure.
- **Angophora costata, Ashburton Community Centre, 160 High Street, Ashburton, Boroondara City.** Located on the north-east corner of the Ashburton Community Centre, this tree comprises a prominent Smooth-barked Apple Tree that is comparable in terms of its contribution to the public landscape. It is of an impressive size and similarly demonstrates the signature symmetrical twisted branch structure. Planted in the interwar period, it is smaller than the Smooth-barked Apple Tree at 646/648 High Street, Prahran due to its younger age.
- **Angophora costata, 11 Alister Street, Fitzroy North.** As with the subject site, this tree consists of a mature Smooth-barked Apple Tree associated with a residential garden. Although younger as an interwar era planting, it is comparable in terms of height, canopy spread and characteristic twisted branch structure. It similarly forms a prominent landscape feature along the residential streetscape due to its impressive size.

While the Smooth-barked Apple Tree, 646/648 High Street, Prahran is not the only surviving tree associated with a late nineteenth/early twentieth century garden, it nevertheless displays outstanding qualities in terms of height, canopy spread and maturity, and makes a substantial contribution to the public landscape due to its prominent siting and visibility from the street front. It is one of two Smooth-barked Apple Trees in the municipality associated with an early residential garden, and according to the National Trust Significant Tree Register, it also comprises the largest known Smooth-barked Apple Tree in cultivation in Victoria. As such, although it is currently protected under General Local Law, there are substantial grounds to also include it as an individually listed item on the Heritage Overlay, which would allow for its qualities to be managed from a heritage perspective.

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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.

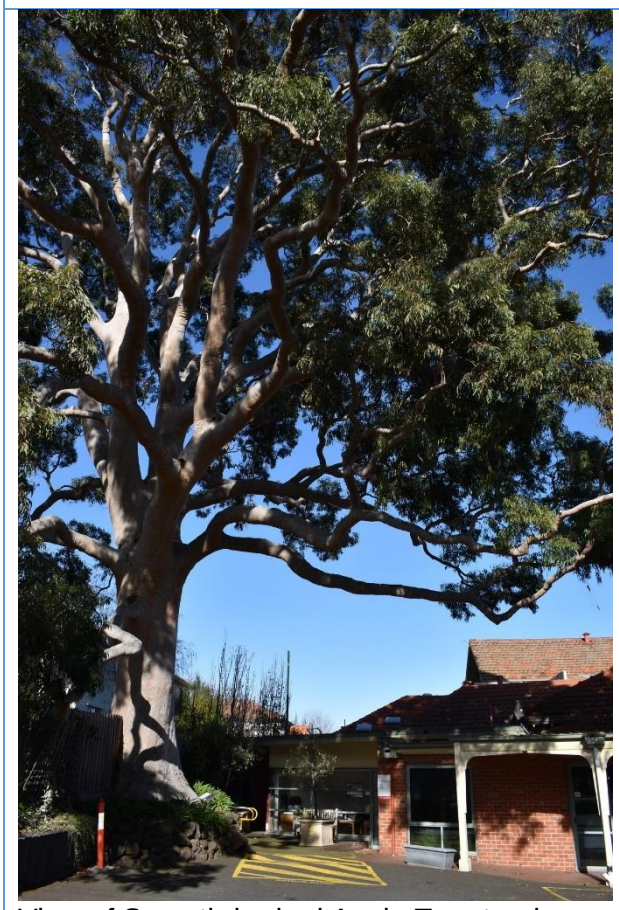
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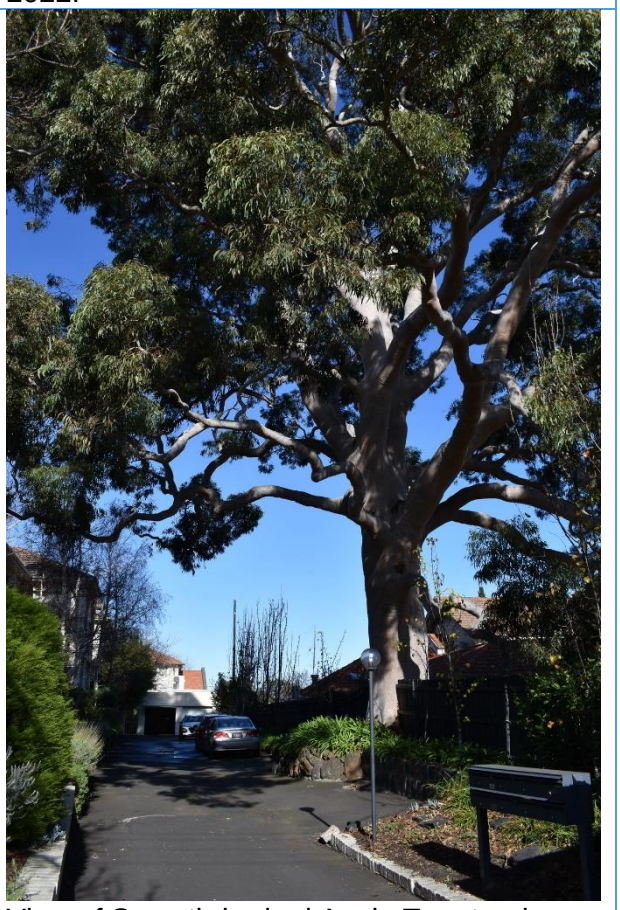
Overview of the Smooth-barked Apple Tree from High Street. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



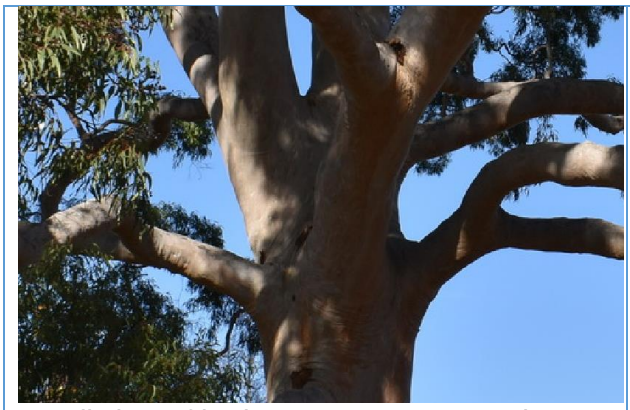
View of Smooth-barked Apple Tree trunk from carpark of 646/648 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



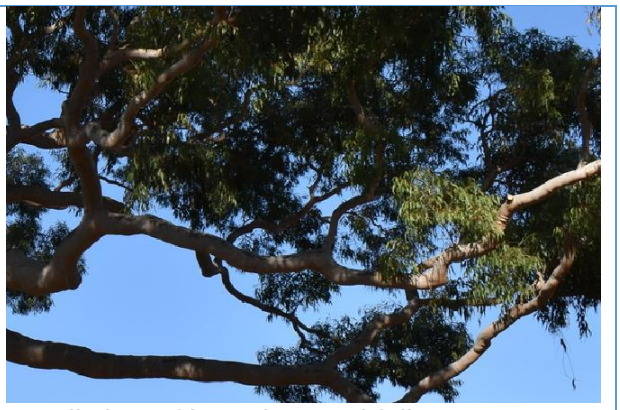
View of Smooth-barked Apple Tree trunk from carpark of 646/648 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of Smooth-barked Apple Tree trunk from driveway of 648 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Detail view of bark. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



Detail view of branches and foliage. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of raised garden bed from side of 646/648 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.



View of raised garden bed from side of 648 High Street, Prahran. *Source*: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022.

Authors

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Quality assurance review conducted by: Vivian Lu, 2023.