

FAWKNER STREET/DAVIS AVENUE PRECINCT

HERITAGE PRECINCT CITATION

Currently protected
under HO131

NAME OF PLACE:	Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct.
OTHER NAMES OF PLACE:	Great Davis Street, Davis Street, Fawkner Park Terrace.
ADDRESS / LOCATION:	Centred on Fawkner Street and Davis Avenue, South Yarra.
PROPERTY INFORMATION:	None.
EXISTING LISTINGS:	Currently protected under HO131
LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:	Local.
ASSESSED BY:	John Statham, Heritage Advisor, City of Stonnington.
ASSESSMENT DATE:	May 2014.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

The Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct, South Yarra, is a residential area of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century buildings developed in Clifford's Paddock after marshy land was drained. It includes all dwellings in Fawkner Street, others in the southern sections of Davis Avenue; and a small group of shops and houses in Punt Road and dwellings in Osborne Street which form the two gateways to the precinct.

Elements which contribute to the significance of the precinct include:

- High degree of intactness of the area to its early twentieth century state. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century housing includes single-storey cottages coexisting with more substantial detached and semi-detached dwellings.
- The unusual street layout of the area, particularly the sweeping curve at the south end of Davis Ave.
- Intactness of individual buildings to their original states. Dwellings typically survive with their presentation to the street largely unaltered retaining verandahs and decorative detailing.
- Single- and occasionally two-storey scale.
- Absence of prominent additions and alterations.
- Face brick, timber or render materiality and roofscapes with chimneys and pitched roof forms clad in corrugated galvanised steel or slate tiles.
- Interwar or earlier stands of Plane trees in Davis Avenue.

How is it significant?

The Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct, South Yarra, is of local historical and aesthetic significance.

Why is it significant?

The Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct, South Yarra, is of historical significance as evidence of the surge of urban development which swept across South Yarra, Prahran and Melbourne more generally during land

boom of the 1880s (3.3.3 *Speculation and land boomers-subdivision from 1880 onwards*). Unlike nearby workers accommodation built on higher ground through the 1850s and 60s, the area illustrates the development of the area as middle class residential stock on land made available after the draining of the swamp (8.2 *Middle class suburbs and the Suburban ideal*).

The Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct is of aesthetic significance for its largely intact collection of fine late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings (3.3.5 *Recovery and infill 1900-1940*). The precinct generally contains representative examples of modest cottages and polite villas of the period as well as a number of more substantial semi-detached pairs of one- and two-storeys. Dwellings at No 2 Davis Avenue and 5 Fawkner Street along with shops and early dwellings to Punt Road are of particular distinction.

PHOTOS



Figure 1 *Early retail group to Punt Road.*



Figure 2 *Taller built form in Davis Avenue.*



Figure 3 *Victorian and Edwardian villas in Fawkner Street*

LOCALITY PLAN

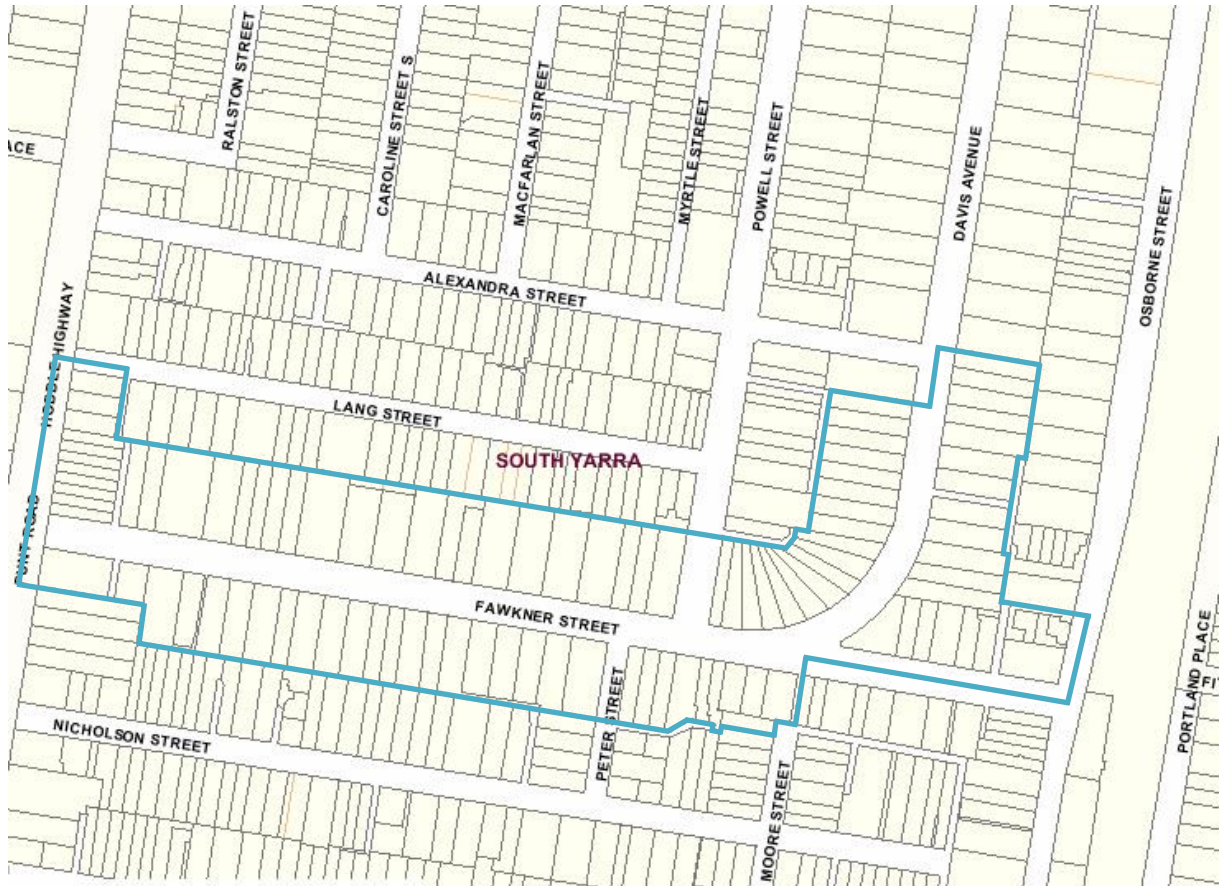


Figure 3 The extent of the proposed HO area is unchanged.

DESCRIPTION

The precinct is located within an area bounded by Toorak Road, Punt Road, Commercial Road and the Sandringham rail line in South Yarra. Despite its location close to major transport arteries, its character is suburban in nature notable for wide streets lined with polite housing and mature trees. The area is distinguished by its street layout, in particular, the curving form of Davis Avenue as it meets Fawkner Street. The precinct comprises dwellings along both sides of Fawkner Street and a section of Davis Street extending northwards to Alexandra Street. In addition, it includes a two-storey Victorian retail group at Nos 338-352 Punt Road and adjacent housing at Nos 354 and 356-8 Punt Road along with dwellings at Nos 85 and 87 Osborne Street which form the two gateways to Fawkner Street.

Built form in the area is predominantly comprised of semi-detached residential pairs and small detached villas with narrow side setbacks. The majority of buildings are finished in face brick or render although a small number of timber dwellings such as those at Nos 13, 15 and 17 Fawkner Street are also present. Early buildings in the area have typically been overpainted. The character of the precinct largely derives from straightforward

residences adopting reasonably typical builders' designs. However, a number of dwellings of individual note such as No 2 Davis Avenue and No 5 Fawkner Street, are also present. The greater part of the extant built form dates from c.1880s although a small number of sites remained undeveloped until the early decades of the twentieth century. Edwardian dwellings at No 334 Punt Road and No 4 Fawkner street contribute to the character and significance of the area through their scale and form and illustrate the manner in which the recession of the early 1890s halted local development for over a decade. Stands of plane trees in Davis Avenue are visible in a 1945 aerial photograph of the area suggesting a c.1920s planting.¹

Some later development occurred in the area when a number of early dwellings visible on the MMBW plan of 1896 were demolished through the twentieth century. One, very substantial, block of Modern flats has been constructed at No 37 Fawkner Street. However, post-war development more typically takes the form of polite one- and two-storey developments such as those in those vicinity of No 14 Fawkner street and others in the vicinity of No 50 Fawkner Street. The early character of the area has been diminished to some extent through the introduction of tall, often impermeable, walls to the street and vehicle accommodation in front setbacks.

HISTORY

In the Crown land sales of June 1849 and May 1850, the NSW Government offered Crown land in South Yarra for sale at auction. The large tract bounded by Punt Road, Toorak Road, Commercial Road and Chapel Street was divided into three long rectangular blocks, each of about 52 acres. All three were bought by Peter Davis a real estate agent, possibly acting on behalf of a consortium. The land benefited from frontages to four major roads but its development potential was limited by a large swamp occupying the central section of the purchase and extending south to Commercial Road.² Davis quickly sold the higher ground, typically offering smaller farm allotments for sale. Some of these were then quickly subdivided for close residential development with narrow streets and small house lots.

The Prahran Character and Conservation Study³ noted,

The well established development north of Toorak Road seems to have prompted Davis's speculation as he described the land as 'unquestionably the finest location in the vicinity of Melbourne for respectable residences' being near Colonel Anderson's, Major Davidson's, Mr Ogilvy's and Mr Bell's residences, as well as near the Botanic Gardens'. The land also had the advantage of being outside the control of the Melbourne Town Council and the Melbourne Building Act (which had come into force on January, 1850 but didn't apply outside the municipal boundary east of Punt Road). Davis's reference to the Melbourne Building Act suggests he had an eye for the prospects of subdivision into very small blocks for working man's cottages. Two areas developed rapidly, one around the corner of Punt Road and Toorak Road within the area marked by Fawkner Street and Powell Street, and the other east of the railway cutting and around into Chapel Street ...

1 Victorian Department of Lands and Survey, *Melbourne 1945 photo maps*, available at: www.lib.unimelb.au/collections/maps.

2 Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area 1*, pg.23.

3 Nigel Lewis et al, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*, 1992, pg 24.

However, Kearney's map of c.1855 shows neither modern day Fawkner Street nor Davis Avenue. City of Prahran Ratebooks suggest that Davis Avenue (known at that time as Great Davis Street) was established shortly after this time but petered out at the swamp (known as Clifford's Paddock). Likewise Lang Street was substantially developed in the vicinity of Punt Road but extended eastwards only to the edge of the swamp. Although the marshy land in Clifford's Paddock remained an impediment to development, it contained valuable beds of clay used to produce the bricks which underpinned the local building industry.⁴

An attempt was made to drain the swamp in 1858 when Davis had channels dug to drain rainwater into a gully running along Osborne Street and across Gardiners Creek (now Toorak) Road to swampy land near the Yarra River. Davis' efforts were unsuccessful and had the unintended consequence of diverting stormwater into Great Davis Street isolating the small number of residents during wet weather. In the years after the establishment of the Municipal District of Prahran, draining the swamps became a Municipal priority and drainage works were substantially completed over a number of work programmes through the early 1860s.⁵ Nonetheless, stormwater management in Great Davis Street remained problematic into the 1880s and beyond.⁶

A subdivision plan of c.1875⁷ provides the first record of the subdivision that would result in the current arrangement of streets. Great Davis Street was proclaimed a public road in 1877. The plan shows a markedly different approach to development to that visible on Kearney's map of twenty years earlier. The subdivision was centred on Great Davis Street, which was to be extended south as a broad thoroughfare, before curving across the former swampland to meet Punt Road to the west. The thoroughfare was lined with substantial allotments for middle class residences. Today, the curving layout has produced a fan-like arrangement of tapering building allotments at the bend. However, this does not appear to have been part of the original intent. The thoroughfare was linked to Osborne Street by way of Fawkner Park Terrace.

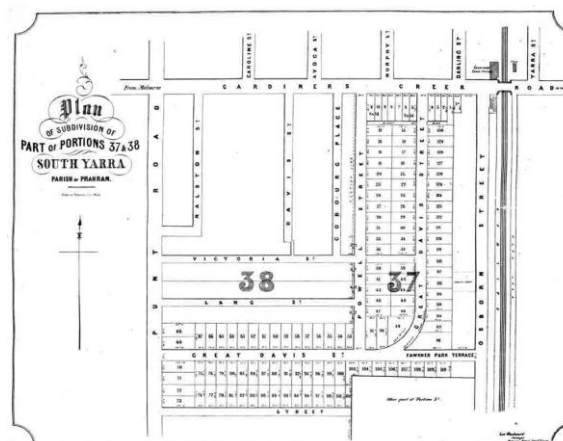


Figure 4 George Woodward, Subdivision Plan, c1875, Stonnington History Centre Registration No PH12016

4 Malone, op cit, pg 28.

5 Malone, op cit, pg 35.

6 Documents, Great Davis Street drain, Stonnington History Centre, PH10198.

7 Stonnington History Centre identifies this item as c.1875. SLV Catalogue identifies the same item as dating from c.1880.

Former City of Prahran Ratebooks suggest that the development occurred in piecemeal fashion. By 1876, some dwellings had been constructed, Davis retained some large lots while others had been sold on.

The MMBW Drainage Plan of 1895 shows the area in, more or less, its current form. By this time, the use of the name Great Davis Street was limited only to the north/south section of the thoroughfare. The east/west section of Great Davis Street and Fawkner Park Terrace had been combined under the single street name of Fawkner Street. The plan shows the area in a mature state. Virtually all of the sites created in the c.1875 subdivision had been developed with cottages and villas. Only two sites at No 384 Punt Road and at No 4 Fawkner Street remained undeveloped. Ratebooks indicate that the area was home to Gentlemen and professionals with few of the labourers, tradesmen and artisans that had characterised this section of South Yarra a generation earlier.

Through the first decade of the twentieth century the names Great Davis Street and Davis Street were used, more or less, interchangeably. From about 1910, the thoroughfare was known as Davis Avenue.

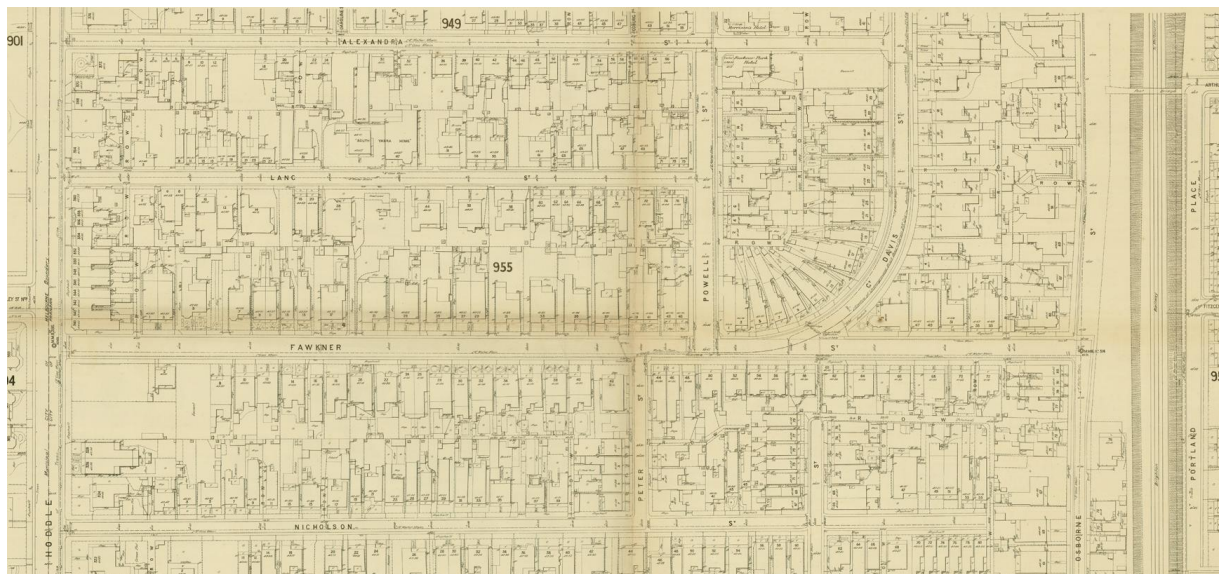


Figure 5 (part) MMBW Detail Plan 955, Prahran, 1895.

Some early dwellings were demolished and their sites redeveloped through the twentieth century. Flats at Nos 20/20A Davis Avenue were constructed during the interwar period. More substantial Modern flats were constructed at No 37 Fawkner Street during the c.1970s. Some modest residential development occurred along the south side of Fawkner Street during the last decades of the twentieth century. However, works of this type are not common and the area generally retains the character evident in MMBW Plan of 1896.

ANALYSIS

Thematic context

In broadly chronological order, the area illustrates the following themes identified in the Stonnington Thematic Environmental History (Context Pty Ltd, 2006 with upgrades 2009):

- 3.3.3 *Speculators and land boomers*
- 8.2 *Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal*
- 3.3.5 *Recovery and infill 1900-1940*

Assessment against HERCON criteria

DTPLI Practice Note 01, *Applying the Heritage Overlay*, requires assessment against HERCON criteria as part of the process of establishing significance. The Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct embodies significance in the forms discussed below.

- Criterion A** Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history. (historical significance).
- Criterion B** Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history. (rarity).
- Criterion C** Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).
- Criterion D** Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).
- Criterion E** Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).
- Criterion F** Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

Comparative analysis

Other Heritage Overlay areas

Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct is currently protected under HO131. The precinct is of a similar level of intactness, interest and significance to other areas in South Yarra protected under existing heritage controls. Much of South Yarra hill on the northern side of Toorak Road is protected under HO355. This area is generally noted for imposing Victorian dwellings. While built form in the Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct is less grand than that in HO355, it forms a useful comparison as a largely intact grouping of more straightforward builders' designs. The Moore and Hardy Streets Precinct (HO144) and the Tyrone Street Precinct (HO151) a little to the south of Fawkner Street and Portland Place (HO145) a little to its east compare more readily. These areas retain similar building stock developed around the same time for a similar, middle class clientele. In terms of its intactness and integrity, the subject area retains comparable levels of early built form to these areas and benefits from the unusual street layout which produces a more suburban character than is present in streets to the south and east. A number of other local streets such as Medley Place (HO457) and Wilson Street (HO379) retain more modest buildings from the same period. Each of these areas survives as fragments within a substantially-redeveloped locale. Considered individually or as a group, these remnant areas provide insights into the range and variety of the earliest built form in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct was identified and assessed as an independent precinct as part of the *Prahran Character and Conservation Study* (Lewis, Butler et al, 1992) and was subsequently

reassessed as part of the *City of Prahran Conservation Review* (Context Pty Ltd, 1993) leading to its inclusion under a heritage control. The early character of the area has suffered to some extent over the intervening decades, through the introduction of upper level additions, vehicle accommodation, tall fences and the like. However, it has benefitted from the general gentrification of the area and the character and significance identified by the early studies survives. The area is not of sufficient interest or rarity to be considered significant at a State level. However, it strongly illustrates those HERCON criteria listed above and compares with other local Heritage Overlay areas in terms of its character, intactness, integrity and significance. The area continues to be of 'Local Significance' and a Heritage Overlay remains appropriate.

Curtilage

No changes to the existing boundaries to HO131 are recommended.

Building gradings

Council's building gradings for this area derive from mapping undertaken in 1992. These generally continue to reflect the contribution made by individual dwellings to the character and significance of the precinct. While the significance of some buildings may have been diminished through inappropriate works or reinstated through restoration, a wholesale review of building gradings does not appear necessary at this stage.

However, a small number of anomalous building gradings were noted during site inspections undertaken in the preparation of this report. These are limited to Nos 12, 14, 16 and 20 Fawkner Street. These buildings were constructed in c.1970s and c.1980s and contribute little, apart from a broadly sympathetic scale, to the significance of the area. Nonetheless, the Prahran Character and Conservation Study graded each of these buildings B. This overstates the contribution made by these buildings to the identified significance of the precinct. These are clearly errors made as part of the original study which have never been rectified. Council's records should be adjusted to show these as ungraded buildings, that is the buildings should be given a U grading. It should be possible to address these matters as 'housekeeping'.

SCHEDULE OF BUILDINGS

Definitions of the gradings are explained in the *Stonnington Heritage Guidelines*. Building gradings reflect the intactness of the built form on the site and its streetscape context. Buildings have been graded according to their relationship to the identified significance of the precinct and the ability of the built form to demonstrate key historic themes in the development of the area. It should be noted that a property may have characteristics other than built form (such as subdivision pattern, orientation, location) that also contribute to the historic themes and the significance of the precinct as a whole.

DAVIS AVENUE (west side)

Street No	Grading	Description
1/3	B	Single storey semi-detached Victorian shop and residence
5	B	Single storey Victorian villa
7	B	Single storey Victorian villa
9	B	Single storey Victorian villa
11	B	Single storey Victorian villa
13	B	Single storey Victorian villa
15/17	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
19	B	Single storey Victorian villa
21/23	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
25/27	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
29/31	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
33	B	Single storey Victorian villa
35	B	Double storey Victorian villa

DAVIS AVENUE (east side)

Street No	Grading	Description
2	A2	Single storey Victorian villa
4	B	Single storey Victorian villa
6	B	Single storey Victorian villa (altered)
8	B	Single storey Victorian villa
10	B	Single storey Victorian villa
12	B	Single storey Victorian villa
<i>Right of way</i>		
14	B	Single storey Victorian villa
16	B	Single storey Victorian villa
18	B	Single storey Victorian villa
20/20A	B	Double storey interwar flats (2 buildings)
22/24	B	Double storey Victorian semi-detached pair

FAWKNER STREET (north side)

Street No	Grading	Description
1/3	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
5	A2	Single storey Victorian villa
7	U	Double storey villa c.2000s.
9/11	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
13	B	Single storey Victorian villa
15	B	Single storey Victorian villa
17	B	Single storey Victorian villa
21	B	Single storey Victorian villa
23	A2	Single storey Victorian villa
25	B	Single storey Victorian villa
27/29	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
31	B	Single storey Victorian villa
33	B	Single storey Victorian villa
35	B	Single storey Victorian villa
37	U	Four storey post-war flats
39/41	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
43/45	B	Double storey Victorian semi-detached pair
<i>Davis Avenue</i>		
47/49	C	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
51	C	Single Storey Victorian villa
53/55	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair

FAWKNER STREET (south side)

Street No	Grading	Description
2	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
4	B	Single Storey Edwardian villa
8	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
10	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
12	U	Single Storey villa c.1970s
14	U	Single Storey villa c.1980s
16	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
18	U	Single Storey villa c.1970s
20	U	Single Storey villa c.1970s
22	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
24/26	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
28	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
30	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
32	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
34	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
36	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
38	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
40	B	Single Storey Victorian villa
42	U	Single Storey villa c.1970s
<i>Peter Street</i>		
44	C	Single Storey Victorian villa
46	U	Double Storey villa c.1980s
48	C	Single Storey Victorian villa
50	U	Double Storey villa c.1980s
52/52A	U	Double storey semi-detached pair c.1980s
54/56	B	Single storey Victorian semi-detached pair
58	C	Double Storey Victorian villa (altered)

OSBORNE STREET (west side)

Street No	Grading	Description
85	B	Single storey Victorian villa
87	U	Double storey flats c.1970s

PUNT ROAD (east side)

Street No	Grading	Description
334	C	Single storey Edwardian villa
<i>Fawkner Street</i>		
338-352	B	Double storey Victorian retail group
354	A2	Double storey Victorian villa
356-8	B	Double storey Victorian villa
360	U	Vacant land

REFERENCES

- Nigel Lewis and Associates, *Prahran Conservation Study*, 1983.
- Nigel Lewis, Graeme Butler et al, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*, 1992
- Context Pty Ltd, *Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993
- Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area 1*.
- MMBW Detail Plan 955, Prahran, 1895. Available at www.slv.vic.gov.au.
- Sands and McDougall, *Postal Directories*, various editions 1879-1890.
- City of Prahran Rate Books, various years.
- Victorian Department of Lands and Survey, *Melbourne 1945 photo maps*, available at: www.lib.unimelb.au/collections/maps.
- Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006 (with updates 2009).