

296-298 MALVERN ROAD PRAHRAN

INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd with Di Foster, historian, to investigate the significance of the property at 296-298 Malvern Road, Prahran, and to determine the appropriateness of its inclusion within the schedule to the Heritage Overlay within the planning scheme. The report builds on work carried out by Context Pty Ltd in the *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993.

The *City of Prahran Conservation Review* graded the building as A2+ (almost certainly of regional significance). It is not presently listed on the Victorian Heritage Register or the Register of the National Estate, nor is it classified by the National Trust.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that 296-298 Malvern Road is of regional significance and should be added to the schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the local section of the Stonnington Planning Scheme and nominated to the Australian Heritage Commission for inclusion in the register of the National Estate.

HISTORY

Crown allotment 42 was sold to G. A. Robinson of Tivoli, South Yarra, at the Crown Land Sales in 1849. The area extended from Chapel Street to the line of present day Bangs Street. Robinson, a speculator, bought several blocks of land in Prahran, and lot 42 was soon subdivided and re-sold.¹

Kearney's map of 1855 shows the beginnings of commercial development along Chapel Street and a few scattered shops along Malvern Road. Essex Street is shown to the east of Chapel Street.

In 1888 a weatherboard building in Malvern Road, on the east corner of Essex Street, was owned by John Ayers.² Ayers, a musician and music seller, owned at least three of the adjoining properties. In 1889 Ayers replaced the small timber building with a substantial pair of two storey buildings of nine rooms, later numbered 296-298 Malvern Road.³ John and Adele Ayers used the building, which increased in size to eleven rooms, as a music warehouse. By 1900, the warehouse was used by another musician, Professor of Singing, George Webb.⁴ John Ayers remained the owner of the property in 1910 when it was used by clothing manufacturer, Charles Wright.⁵ The property was then used by a bookseller and furniture retailer.⁶

From around 1920, mechanic Arthur Boardman ran his business Torpedo, Motor and Cycle Works from the Malvern Road buildings.⁷ At that time the owner was Edward Casper. A manufacturer, Ernest Grunfeld occupied the buildings from 1953.⁸

DESCRIPTION

296-298 Malvern Road, was formerly a pair of early Victorian shops located on a busy suburban artery near the heart of Prahran. It is presently occupied by a single tenant. The character of this section of Malvern Road has been overwritten continually since the construction of this building. Today, the area is dominated by the towering Housing Commission development. Schools, shops, residences and medical suites occupy sites nearby while trams pedestrians and heavy traffic occupy the streets. The premises at 296-298 Malvern Road constitute an important remnant of the built fabric of early Prahran in this area.

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- 1 Betty Malone, Prahran, section 7, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.
 - 2 City of Prahran Rate book, Prahran Ward, rate no. 1072, supported by the construction date, 1889, inscribed on the parapet
 - 3 Ibid. rate no. 5293
 - 4 Ibid. rate no. 5553.
 - 5 Ibid. rate no. 6227.
 - 6 *Sands and McDougall Directories, 1910-1930.*
 - 7 City of Prahran Rate book, Prahran Ward, rate no. 7067.
 - 8 Ibid. rate no. 10164.

The present tenant occupies a semi-detached pair of shops in a simple, two storey building whose symmetrical facade is built on the front boundary of the property. The ground floor may have been somewhat remodelled to provide large internal areas and an uncomplicated glazed facade. The form of the original recessed entries have survived, as have early doors and some early window joinery but decorative render has been removed at this level to produce surfaces that are free from ornament. The cast iron verandah to the ground floor has also been removed, although the fixing points of the columns remain visible on the kerb.

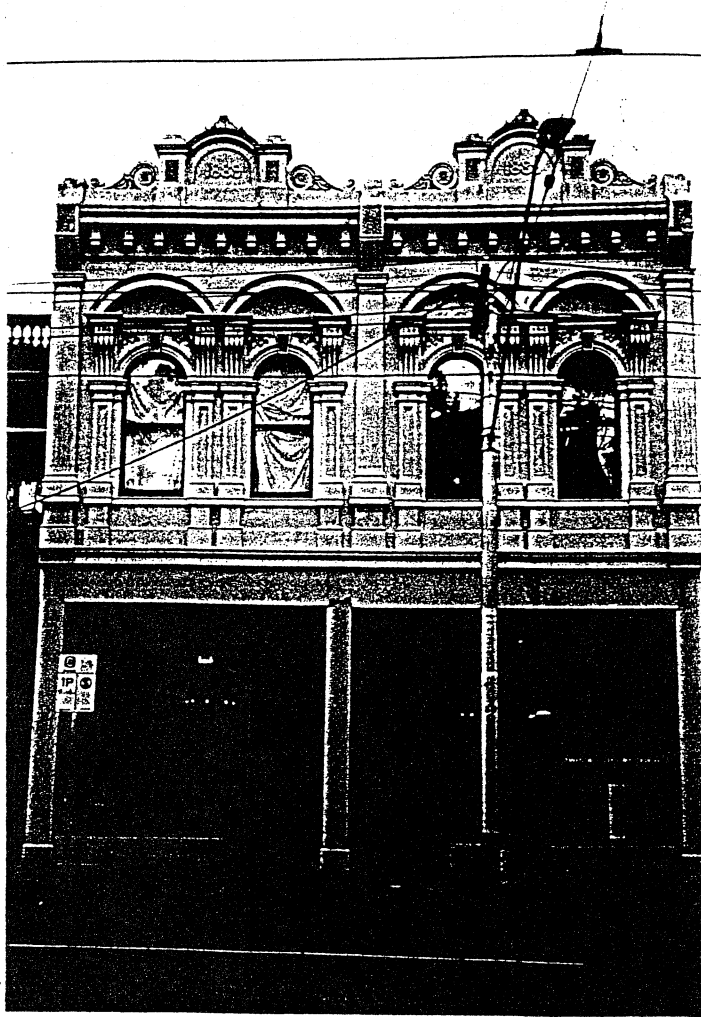


Illustration 1 296-298 Malvern Road, 1998.

The first floor, by contrast, is rich in decorative stucco. Fluted pilasters at the centre and ends of the building rise from the first floor level to an elaborately modelled parapet. The parapet for each shop is underscored by dentils and surmounted by scroll devices which flank decorative panels bearing the construction date. However the foci for the upper sections of each building are the elaborate aedicules that represent an elaborate, structural frame around each of the four first floor windows. Fluted consoles and pilasters modelled in render support segmental arches above the windows. The window penetrations are enriched by rendered archivolts with decorative keystones and sash windows with arched timber joinery. A number of pedestals to the parapet appear designed to support decorative urns, most probably removed in this century due to structural instability. Reinstatement of these urns would further enliven the composition.

The composition draws heavily from Italianate sources and the Victorian taste for facades that explore the complex interplay of classical elements. It achieves an unusual richness through the vigorous sculpting of surfaces and the layering of architectural elements. The building appears to be in excellent condition.

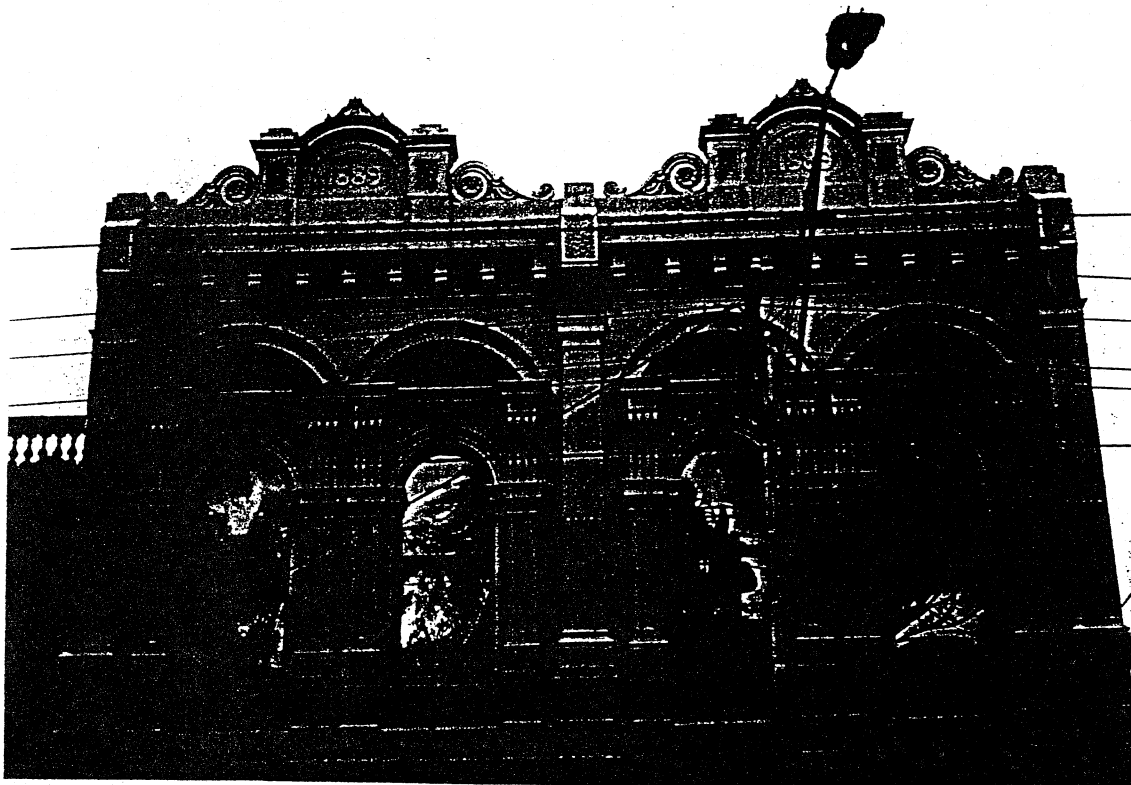


Illustration 2 296-298 Malvern Road, 1998.

ARCHITECT

The architect of 296-298 Malvern Road is not known. The richness of the ornament found in this pair of shops has attracted suggestions that they are the work of Norman Hitchcock,⁹ however this seems unlikely as Hitchcock lived and worked predominantly on the opposite side of the city and was close to retirement when these terrace houses were built.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

296-298 Malvern Road is unusual within the Prahran area. It is an example of the highly ornate architectural expression which emerged in Melbourne during the boom period of the 1880s and enjoyed a brief popularity until the depression of the early 1900s. This approach, often erroneously described as Boom Style but more appropriately referred to as being of the Boom *period*, built on the Renaissance Revival architecture of the preceding decades which had largely obeyed classical canons, but employed the lavish application of architectural ornament to produce florid and highly articulated facades which recalled mannerist expression of Michelangelo and Serlio. Notable local examples include the Sum Kum Lee building, in Little Collins Street and the Block Arcade, Collins Street.

This vigorous application of applied ornament also became influential as a mode of residential architectural expression, exemplified by the National Trust property Labassa, Caulfield. While nearby Chapel street and adjacent sections of Malvern Road are rich in Renaissance Revival architecture, examples of this short lived boom expression are surprisingly rare in the Prahran district.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The building at 296-298 Malvern Road is of regional significance as a fine, representative and substantially externally intact commercial exemplar of the florid, mannered classical idiom of the Boom period. It retains the form and some of the original joinery to its shopfronts, a factor which greatly adds to this significance.

⁹ Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, Vol. 4, p 22.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Falk *Development of the architectural practice of Norman Hitchcock*, unpublished investigation programme held at Melbourne University 1972.

REFERENCES

City of Prahran Rate book, Prahran Ward.

Context Pty Ltd, City of Prahran Conservation Review, 1993

Malone, Betty, Prahran, section 7, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.

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