

# MEDLEY PLACE PRECINCT

## HERITAGE PRECINCT CITATION

Currently part HO 126
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<b>NAME OF PLACE:</b>	Medley Place area.
<b>OTHER NAMES OF PLACE:</b>	Williams Alley, Williams Place, Medley Street, St Joseph's Church, Presbytery, Hall and School.
<b>ADDRESS / LOCATION:</b>	Medley Street, Medley Place, Fitzgerald Street, South Yarra.
<b>PROPERTY INFORMATION:</b>	24-54 Fitzgerald Street, 1-10 Medley street, 12-32 Medley Place South Yarra.
<b>EXISTING LISTINGS:</b>	Part HO126. The organ at St Joseph's Church has been classified by the National Trust of Australia (Vic)
<b>LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:</b>	Local.
<b>ASSESSED BY:</b>	John Statham, Heritage Advisor, City of Stonnington.
<b>ASSESSMENT DATE:</b>	May 2011.

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### *What is significant?*

The Medley Place Precinct, South Yarra, is a residential area of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century buildings developed adjacent to, and incorporating, St Joseph's Catholic Church and School. This development largely took place during the 1880s land boom although some important buildings were added, most notably to the church group, during the early part of twentieth century. The precinct remains highly intact to its early 1920s state with all of its original dwellings, most of the original church group and the unusual subdivision layout, incorporating an early square. There are no modern infill buildings and few visible additions in the area.

Elements which contribute to the significance of the precinct include:

- High degree of intactness of the area to its early 1920s state. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century housing includes single-storey terrace rows coexisting with modest detached or semi-detached dwellings.
- Open spacious church grounds in the north and the very fine grained pattern to the south illustrating the variety of densities often achieved in Prahran and South Yarra during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the contrast between the two.
- Individually noteworthy buildings of high architectural quality, including Church School, Manse and more modest terrace rows such as those along Medley Place.
- Intactness of individual buildings to their original states. Dwellings typically survive with their presentation to the street largely unaltered retaining verandahs and decorative detailing.
- The unusual street layout of the area generally and Medley Place/Williams Square in particular and the extent to which they illustrate the ad hoc nature of nineteenth century planning.
- Absence of modern infill development and 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.

#### *How is it significant?*

The Medley Place Precinct, South Yarra, is of local historical and aesthetic significance.

#### *Why is it significant?*

The Medley Place 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*). The area illustrates the way in which rapid and unplanned speculative development through the 1880s often produced irregular and ad hoc subdivisions with dense streetscapes of modest workers' housing adjacent to grander institutional or retail precincts (3.3.4. *Uncontrolled and unplanned development*). Streets of workers' cottages were once commonplace in areas adjacent to Chapel Street. St Joseph's Church and associated buildings dominate Fitzgerald Street and demonstrate the role of the church as a focal point for the local community (10.2.3 *Churches as an illustration of key phases of suburban development*). It was the first Catholic church to be constructed within the former City of Prahran and the first to provide Catholic education in the area. The incorporation of a modest public square into the subdivision is unique within the early Municipality.

The Medley Place Precinct is of aesthetic significance for its highly intact collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. The precinct contains representative examples of modest cottages and villas of the period as well and a number of individually noteworthy buildings. St Joseph's Church is of particular significance as a fine Victorian Gothic building. The Edwardian school building on the adjacent site is also of high individual significance. The Presbytery and later hall are handsome and important buildings in their own rights and contribute to the scale, character and red brick expression of the church group. The precinct's planning arrangements, in which a cluster of modest Victorian dwellings abuts a group of substantial ecclesiastical buildings, and the contrasting grain of the two, combine to create an extraordinary urban landscape.

## PHOTOS



Figure 1 St Joseph's Church (School at rear).



Figure 2 Medley Place.

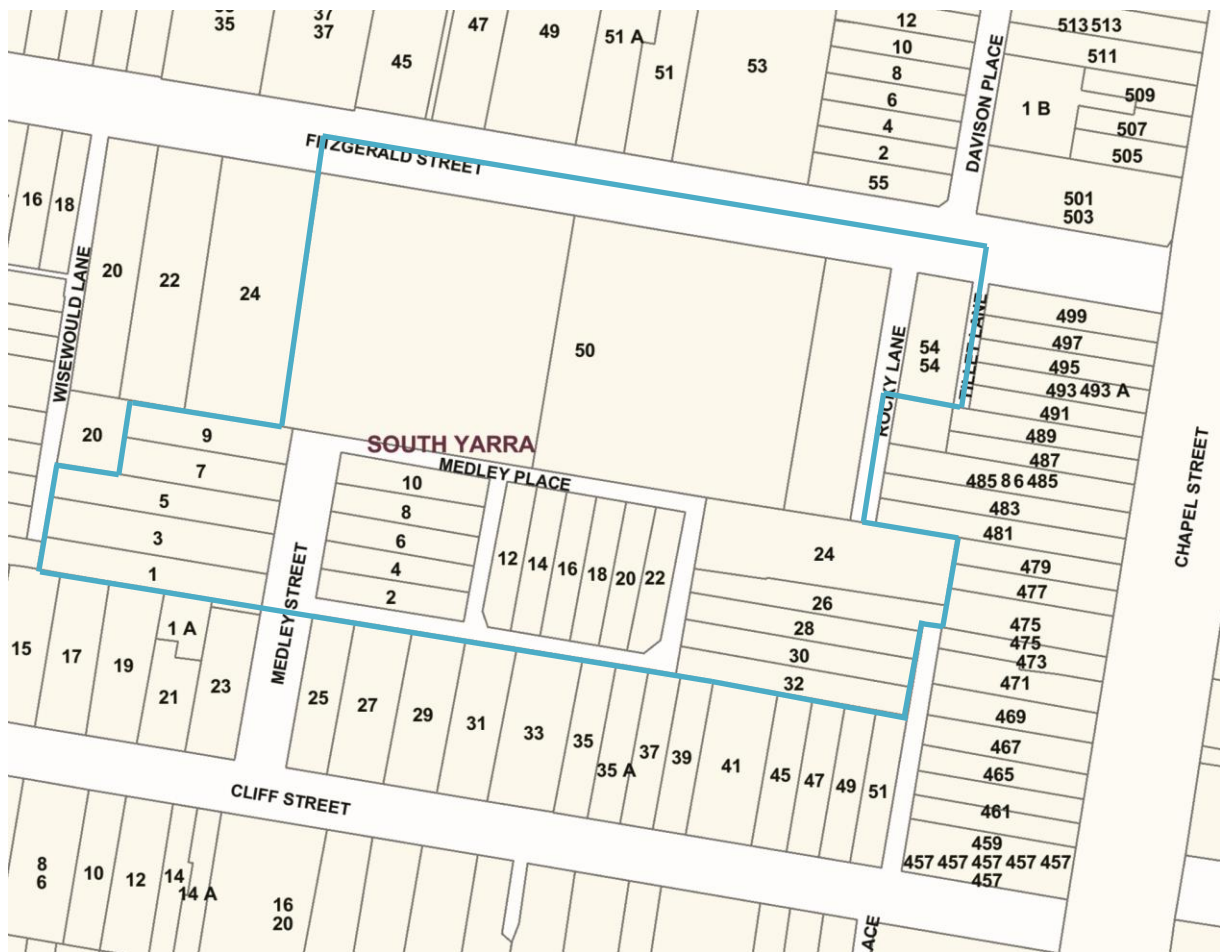


Figure 3 Extent of proposed HO area.

## DESCRIPTION

Despite its location a short distance from Chapel Street, the precinct adopts a suburban demeanour with modest nineteenth century residences adjacent to an expansive church group. The juxtaposition of scales is highlighted by a tall brick wall to the south of the church group effectively separating the two distinct urban landscapes.

Built form to the south of the wall comprises a highly intact collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. It contains representative examples of modest cottages and villas of the period. This area is notable for its planning arrangements incorporating some unusually narrow streets and a small public square. This is currently used for car parking which reduces its legibility.

To the north of the wall, St. Joseph's Church dominates the area. Its designers drew on Gothic Revival antecedents to produce a cruciform building with a bell tower topped by a sandstone spire. Externally, St. Joseph's is clad in red brick with Waurn Ponds sandstone detailing and a wide base course of bluestone. A statue

of St Joseph and the infant Jesus is situated in an alcove beside the original entrance porch. Recent works have altered the entry arrangements and the church is currently accessed by way of a bluestone paved bridge over a reflecting pool leading to a side entry. The entranceway is sheltered by a glazed covered way which connects the church to the former school building, now a Parish Centre. Internally, the choir loft houses an organ built by William Anderson in 1894. The organ has been classified by the National Trust of Australia (Vic).

Constructed c.1917, the former school building to the west of the church adopts a red brick materiality with Marseilles-tiled roof and timber detailing and draws its inspiration from Arts and Crafts sources. Of particular note is the complex arrangement of intersecting gable ends and dormer windows to its roof. Detailing is generally residential in scale with a polite verandah and banks of casement windows to the eastern elevation and polychrome decorative banding in subtly contrasting red and Hawthorn brick to the street.

The two-storey presbytery further to the west dates from 1901.<sup>1</sup> At the time of its construction, this was a particularly forward-looking design incorporating timber shingles terra cotta, roof tiles and other materials reflecting an Arts and Crafts sensibility and an understated oriental influence recalling the contemporary work of, architects, Beaver & Purnell. Detailing of this type would become commonplace during the 1910s but was rare at the turn of the twentieth century.

The building at 54 Fitzgerald Street, known at various times as St Joseph's Hall and St Joseph's Youth Club, adopts a simple two-storey form that reiterates the sandstone detailing and red brick expression of the church. It was constructed to provide two shops at ground floor level and a hall space above. Despite alterations at ground floor level, the building remains legible as an important element within the broader Church group. The building has been subdivided as apartments.

## 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.<sup>2</sup> Davis quickly sold the high ground, typically offering blocks of 6-10 acres for sale. The Chapel Street frontage comprised ten such allotments<sup>3</sup> seven of which were sold by August 1849.

By 1856, Arthur Street, Fitzgerald Street, Cliff Street and Grosvenor Street had been established on allotments in the eastern sections of Davis' purchase.<sup>4</sup> Each commenced at Chapel Street and extended westwards, terminating at the Phoenix Street which ran along the eastern edge of the swamp. By the mid-1870s<sup>5</sup>, Cliff Street had undergone substantial development with a range of residences and businesses to either side of the street.

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1 St Joseph's Church from, [parish\\_of\\_south\\_yarra.org.au](http://parish_of_south_yarra.org.au)

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

3 Malone, *op cit*, pg.26.

4 Malone, *op cit*, pg.25.

5 Sands & Mc Dougall Postal Directories, 1876-1886

From 1876, Directories note a right-of-way to the north side of Cliff Street providing access to three dwellings to the rear of the Cliff Street frontage. In 1884, this ROW is described as William's Place. Formal subdivision of the area commenced around this time and by 1886, the area had adopted its current form and the ROW was known as Williams Street. The subdivision incorporated a number of notable planning devices including a small public square, known as Williams Square, visible in the MMBW Plan of 1896.

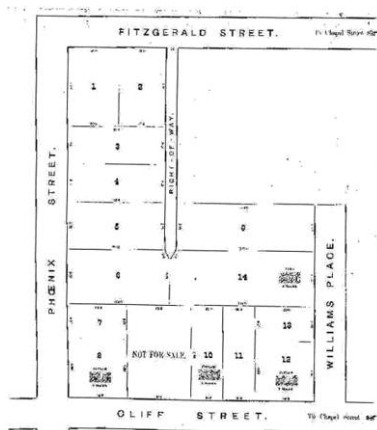


Figure 4 Subdivision Plan, 1883, Stonnington History Centre Registration No PH11186

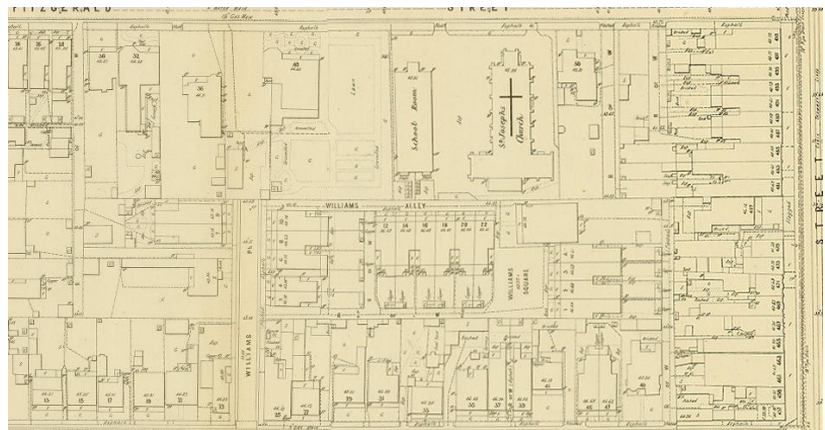


Figure 5 (part) MMBW Detail Plan 953, Prahran, 1896.

In the northern section of the development, buildings were constructed along a narrow thoroughfare around half the width of a typical street. The layout appears to have anticipated that a complementary residential development would occur on the block to the north and that the road network established in Williams Street, would be extended and completed as part of the development of the neighbouring site. This arrangement, in which streets straddle lot boundaries with costs shared between the two owners, was common in the development of early Prahran. However, it did not occur on this occasion. The Mission of South Yarra purchased the allotment to the north and the construction of St Joseph's Church began in March 1888. This ended the potential for the construction of a full width William Street and fixed the form of this narrow accessway. It was subsequently known as Williams Alley. Through the early part of the twentieth century, Williams Place and Williams Alley became known as Medley Street. In the period after WWII, the nineteenth century differentiation between the wider and narrower sections of the street was reintroduced. They were subsequently known as Medley Street and Medley Place respectively.

*Some of the Fruits of Fifty Years: Annals of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, written in 1896 described the foundation of St Joseph's church. It noted:

*The Mission of South Yarra was originally part of St Mary's Parish St Kilda. It was formed into a separate district in October 1887 by the Most Reverend TJ Carr, the archbishop of Melbourne, who appointed JF Fitzgerald its first pastor. Prior to the separation from St Mary's, Father Quirk ... had collected £1100 towards building a church for the Catholic residents. For this purpose, the Government had given a grant of land, situated in Punt Road near Commercial Road. As the position was not central, Father Fitzgerald and his Committee were compelled to sell it and the sale realised £5000. Of this amount, the sum of £4100 was spent purchasing the present site which contained a villa and grounds suitable for a priest's residence (presumably No 40 Fitzgerald Street visible in the MMBW Plan*



above<sup>6</sup>). The foundation stone of the present church was laid on 18th March 1888, by his Grace the Archbishop, and the occasional sermon was preached by the Ven. Archdeacon Slattery of Geelong. From his appointment until the church was blessed, opened and ready for use, Father Fitzgerald celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays and Holidays of Obligation in a public Hall in Toorak Road. At first, part of the church was boarded off and served for four of five years as a school.

In August 1891, Father Fitzgerald went for a trip to Europe and in October of the same year the present pastor, The Rev RS Benson was appointed. Meanwhile the congregation had grown so much, and the children had so multiplied, that further accommodation became necessary. The church was therefore enlarged and beautified, and a commodious school hall, capable of accommodating over 400 Children was built. On the 14th August 1892, the additions to the church and the new school were solemnly opened and blessed by the Archbishop, the sermon being preached by Dean Hegarty ... A sum of £2200 was expended on these improvements.



Figure 6 St Joseph's School, 1985 from [parish\\_of\\_south\\_yarra.org.au](http://parish_of_south_yarra.org.au)



Figure 7 St Joseph's Presbytery.

By 1917, the congregation had raised sufficient funds to construct a two-storied brick school and hall. Laying the foundation stone for the building on 17th June 1917 was the first official function of Melbourne's new Archbishop, Dr Mannix. It was constructed to designs by Bart Moriarty and built at a cost of £6700.<sup>7</sup> The building survives and is currently used as a Parish Centre. The older timber school building was converted into an infants' room. It has since been demolished. The school was initially staffed by lay teachers. A community of Good Samaritan Sisters assumed charge of the school from 1905 until 1933 when the Presentation Sisters assumed responsibility for the school.

<sup>6</sup> Mc Dougall, *Church Community and Change*, pg.59 provides an illustration showing the villa in 1897. It adopts the same broad form as the dwelling at No 40, visible in the contemporary MMBW Plan.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Chatham, *Across the Slate*, pg.36.

By the turn of the century, the modest villa at 40 Fitzgerald Street, which had been used as a priest's residence, had outlived its usefulness. It was demolished and the foundation stone for the present Presbytery building was laid in 1901.<sup>8</sup> The new presbytery is first noted in the Sand and McDougall Directory of 1902.

On 3rd September 1922, Dr Mannix returned to the Parish to open the final additions to the church which included a tower and spire and a baptistery.<sup>9</sup> St Joseph's Hall (later St Joseph's Youth Club) at 54 Fitzgerald Street was constructed as part of the same programme of works. An early dwelling located immediately to the east of the church and visible in the MMBW Plan of 1896 was demolished around the same time.<sup>10</sup> This vacant site is currently used as a carpark.

Works undertaken c.2005 altered the entry arrangements such that the church is currently accessed by way of a bluestone paved bridge over a reflecting pool leading to a side entry. A glazed covered way connecting the church to the former school building, now a Parish Centre, was constructed as part of the same suite of works.

## ANALYSIS

### Thematic context

The building illustrates the following themes identified in the Stonnington Thematic Environmental History (Context Pty Ltd, 2006 with upgrades 2009).

*3.3.3 Speculation and land boomers - subdivision from 1880 onwards*

*3.3.4. Uncontrolled and unplanned development*

*10.2.3 Churches as an illustration of key phases of suburban development.*

### Comparative analysis

#### Urban design

Considered in the context of modern subdivision, the planning arrangement found in Medley Place is exceptional in The City of Stonnington. Firstly, the incorporation of a modest square into a street layout is not found elsewhere in the Municipality. Planning devices of this type are more typical of European cities. Secondly, the subdivision layout in which dwellings line one side of a pedestrian walkway is also unusual. However, *ad hoc* planning arrangements were not uncommon in this section of the Municipality during the boom of the 1880s. No planning laws (beyond those associated with fire prevention) were in place and properties were developed in whatever manner their owners saw fit. Within a few hundred metres of Medley Place, numerous unconventional planning solutions were implemented to facilitate the development of small or odd-shaped blocks or fragments of land left undeveloped after the construction of the Melbourne-Brighton railway line. Tyrone Street and Hyland Street are single-sided streets broadly recalling the arrangement found in Medley Place. Moore Street terminates abruptly in a narrow right-of-way leading to Fawkner Street. However, the most direct comparison survives in Portland Place, a little to the west, where dwellings were also constructed along one side of a narrow laneway.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> St Joseph's Church from, [parish\\_of\\_south\\_yarra.org.au](http://parish_of_south_yarra.org.au).

<sup>9</sup> McDougall, *op cit*, pg.58.

<sup>10</sup> Sands & McDougall Directories refer to this dwelling until the 1920s when entries cease, suggesting demolition. The extant car park is visible in aerial photographs dating from 1945 held at the University of Melbourne.

<sup>11</sup> Malone, *op cit*, pg.37.

### ***Catholic Education in the City of Prahran***

The first Catholic masses in the local area were held in Glasgow's Public House in 1853<sup>12</sup>. In the same year, Catholics received a grant of two acres of land on Dandenong Road near Chapel Street. A small red brick church was constructed soon afterwards. Although situated in East St Kilda, outside of the Municipal boundary, it served congregations in Prahran. The simple red brick building was demolished and replaced with a larger bluestone church in 1869.

Jill McDougall notes,<sup>13</sup>

*During the era of Prahran's early development, anti-Catholic sentiments ran high ... Against this background of hostility, the Catholics banded together to form a cohesive group with a strong spirit of self reliance and independence. The early church authorities place great importance on the establishment of Catholic Schools which were seen as preservers and bastions of the Faith. Of the four Catholic churches built in the Prahran municipality, only one (St Peter's, Toorak) does not have a school attached.*

As noted above, St Josephs in Fitzgerald Street was the first Catholic church to be constructed within the Prahran Municipal boundaries. The church was constructed in 1888 and immediately began providing school services to the local community. A timber school hall was constructed in 1892 and a grand two-storey red brick school building constructed in 1917. The church and the younger of these two school buildings are extant. The group is protected as part of HO126.

When a separate Armadale-Toorak parish was established in 1922, the early mansion, *Cavendish House*, at 629 High Street, East Prahran was purchased at a cost of £6450.<sup>14</sup> A brick school was constructed on land to the rear of the mansion which was used for Mass on Sundays. A church, addressing High Street, was constructed in 1930. Today, the church of Our Lady of Lourdes, the school and the original mansion survive on the site. In 2011, this group was assessed and recommended for a heritage control.

The church of St Francis Xavier near the corner of High Street and Donald Street in Prahran served one of the smallest congregations in Melbourne.<sup>15</sup> The unusual two-storey building addressing Donald Street was constructed in 1922. It comprises a church at ground floor level with classrooms above. The adjacent, Modernist church at the intersection of High Street was constructed in the early 1960s. It was awarded second place in the RAI A building of the year awards in 1964. Both buildings survive on the site and are currently included in HO126.

Although not directly associated with a church, the establishment of the Presentation Convent and College in Dandenong Road predates all of the above. *Some of the Fruits of Fifty Years: Annals of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, written in 1896, noted that,

*... a community of five Presentation Nuns arrived from the mother house in Limerick on Sunday, 21st December 1873. They immediately undertook the management of a primary school for girls in St Mary's Church (east St Kilda), and at the same time they conducted a primary school in their temporary residence. On 10th December 1874 this small community removed to a house which stood on the present (Windsor) convent grounds.<sup>16</sup> In 1877 a boarding school was opened, and thus provision was made for every class of Catholic children in the district.*

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12 McDougall, *op cit*, pg.56.

13 *ibid*.

14 McDougall, *op cit*, pg.62.

15 McDougall, *op cit*, pgs 62-3.

16 Malone, *op cit*, pg.35, describes this building as the Turret Lodge.



### ***Other Heritage Overlay areas***

The southern sections of the Medley Place area are typical of the dense, working class developments which once proliferated in the streets adjacent to Chapel Street. The early character of these streetscapes has, in the main, been lost as more retail and light industrial development has spread along side streets and through the introduction of flats and other modern infill buildings during the inter- and post-war periods. Large tracts of early workers cottages were demolished to allow the construction of the Horace Petty Estate and the City of Prahran Swimming Pool. Nonetheless, small pockets of this type of early development survive in Windsor and are protected under HO129 and HO138.

While it is not the only collection of early cottages to survive locally, the combination of intactness, unusual planning outcomes and their juxtaposition against the massive church buildings is rare within the Municipality. The nearby Heritage Overlay area centred on Wilson Street (HO379) to the east of Chapel Street shares some features with the Medley Place area. Despite its location a few hundred metres from Chapel Street, Wilson Street also retains a nineteenth century village character. This derives, to a large extent from its topography, narrow streets and substantially intact Victorian building stock but benefits from the presence of the St Martin's Church (HO28) as the focus of the precinct.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Medley Place Area was identified and assessed as an independent precinct with its own character and significance as part of the Prahran Conservation Study (Nigel Lewis and Associates, 1983). A decade later, the Medley Place area was protected as part of the Chapel Street retail precinct (HO126). It contributes little to that area and compares more directly, in terms of its character and significance with small, more suburban heritage precincts such as Wilson Street (HO379) where a modest working class suburban character centred on a church survives. Generally speaking, these residential areas are better protected under area-specific heritage controls which identify and support those particular aspects of significance that are embodied in the heritage place.

On this basis, it is recommended that a new Heritage Overlay area is created in accordance with that described in the early Study and consistent with Figure 1 above. No new buildings would be introduced to the Heritage Overlay as a consequence of this change. Generally speaking, no gradings would be altered as part of this exercise. However, it is noted that Council's current gradings are based on City of Prahran Character and Conservation Study Building and Streetscape Grading Register (Nigel Lewis et al, 1992). The Building Grading Database describes all four buildings within the St Joseph's group as 30 Fitzgerald Street and provides a single A1 grading for all of the built form contained therein. The buildings in the group had previously been graded individually as part of Prahran Conservation Study. The earlier Study provided a more detailed assessment with individual gradings of A1 and A2, as appropriate, assigned to each of the buildings. Consequently, the earlier gradings have been reproduced below. It is recommended that these, more conservative, gradings are endorsed by Council.

## 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.

### FITZGERALD STREET

Street No	Grading	Description
50	A2	Presbytery
50	A1	St Joseph's School
50	A2	St Joseph's Church and car park
<i>Right of way</i>		
54	A2	Former St Joseph's Youth Club

### MEDLEY STREET (west side)

Street No	Grading	Description
1	B	Single storey- Edwardian villa
3-5	B	Single-storey Edwardian semi-detached pair
7-9	B	Single-storey Victorian semi-detached pair

### MEDLEY STREET (east side)

Street No	Grading	Description
2-4	B	Single-storey Edwardian semi-detached pair
6-10	B	Single-storey Edwardian terrace row

### MEDLEY PLACE

Street No	Grading	Description
12-22	B	Single-storey Edwardian terrace row
24	B	Single-storey Victorian weatherboard villa
26-32	B	Single-storey Victorian terrace row

## REFERENCES

- Nigel Lewis and Associates, *Prahran Conservation Study*, 1983.
- St Joseph's Church from, [parish\\_of\\_south\\_yarra.org.au](http://parish_of_south_yarra.org.au).
- Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area 1*.
- MMBW Detail Plan 954, Prahran, 1895. Available at [www.slv.vic.gov.au](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au).
- Sands and McDougall, *Postal Directories*, various editions 1876-1945.
- AH Massina, *Some of the Fruits of Fifty Years: Annals of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, 1896.
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- Jane Chatham, *Across the Slate: Prahran's Schools 1850s-1985*, 1985
- Victorian Department of Lands and Survey, *Melbourne 1945 photo maps*, available at: [www.lib.unimelb.au/collections/maps](http://www.lib.unimelb.au/collections/maps).
- Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, 2006 (with updates 2009).