

THE AVENUE PRECINCT

HERITAGE PRECINCT CITATION

Partially protected
under HO148

NAME OF PLACE:	The Avenue Precinct.
OTHER NAMES OF PLACE:	The Avenue, Westbury Street North.
ADDRESS / LOCATION:	42-56 The Avenue, Windsor.
PROPERTY INFORMATION:	<p>Sites under existing HO148: 44-56 The Avenue, Windsor.</p> <p>Proposed additional sites: 42 The Avenue, Windsor.</p>
EXISTING LISTINGS:	Partially protected under HO148.
LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:	Local.
ASSESSED BY:	John Statham, Heritage Advisor, City of Stonnington.
ASSESSMENT DATE:	May 2013.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

The Avenue Precinct, Windsor, is a small residential area of freestanding villas developed through the 1880s (Nos 42, 44 and 46) and 1890s (Nos 48-56).

Elements that contribute to the significance of the precinct include:

- The consistent construction dates
- The consistent open setbacks of the villas.
- The detached form of individual villas.
- Complete absence of modern infill development and prominent additions and alterations.
- Modest scale of the residential buildings which are typically of one storey.
- All of the buildings within the group are of high individual architectural distinction and have been identified as significant buildings under the City of Stonnington Planning Scheme. *Otira* at No 56 is graded A1.
- Face brick, timber or render materiality and roofscapes with chimneys and pitched roof forms clad in tiles.
- Intactness of the individual dwellings to their original states. The villas typically survive with their presentation to the street unaltered retaining verandahs and decorative detailing.
- Garden setbacks to the street which are (with the exception of 46 and 54) free from prominent vehicle accommodation.
- Most buildings retain original fences to the street.
- The large plane trees in the median strip along the eastern side of The Avenue.

How is it significant?

The Avenue Precinct, Windsor, is of local historical (HERCON Criteria A, C, & F) and aesthetic significance (HERCON Criteria B, D & E).

Why is it significant?

The Avenue Precinct is of historical significance retaining remnants of one of the earliest and most elegant streets in the former City of Prahran (*8.2 Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal*). Development in the area generally derives from the surge of building construction which swept across South Yarra, Prahran and Windsor during the land boom which continued into the 1880s and beyond. (*3.3.1 Crown Land Sales, 3.3.3 Speculation and land boomers*). The Precinct is unusual for the extent to which development proceeded unabated during the recession of the 1890s. Areas of this level of intactness to their early state are becoming increasingly rare. The Precinct is of some additional interest for its associations with, noted developer, Henry Cheel and with St Matthew's Church.

The Avenue Precinct is of aesthetic significance for its, largely intact, collection of late Victorian buildings. By local standards, these are unusually grand reflecting the stature of their original occupants (*8.4.1 Houses as a symbol of wealth status and fashion*). Mature plane trees along the eastern side of The Avenue provide a garden setting for the group (*8.7.1 Creating leafy suburbs*).

The significance of the Precinct is evidenced by the unusually high gradings assigned to buildings within the group (Refer to the Schedule of Gradings appended to this report). Such consistently high levels of individual significance are rarely encountered within Council's Heritage Overlay areas.

PHOTOS



Figure 1 No 42 The Avenue.



Figure 2 Nos 44-48 The Avenue



Figure 3 No 54 The Avenue



Figure 4 Nos 48-50 The Avenue.

PLAN

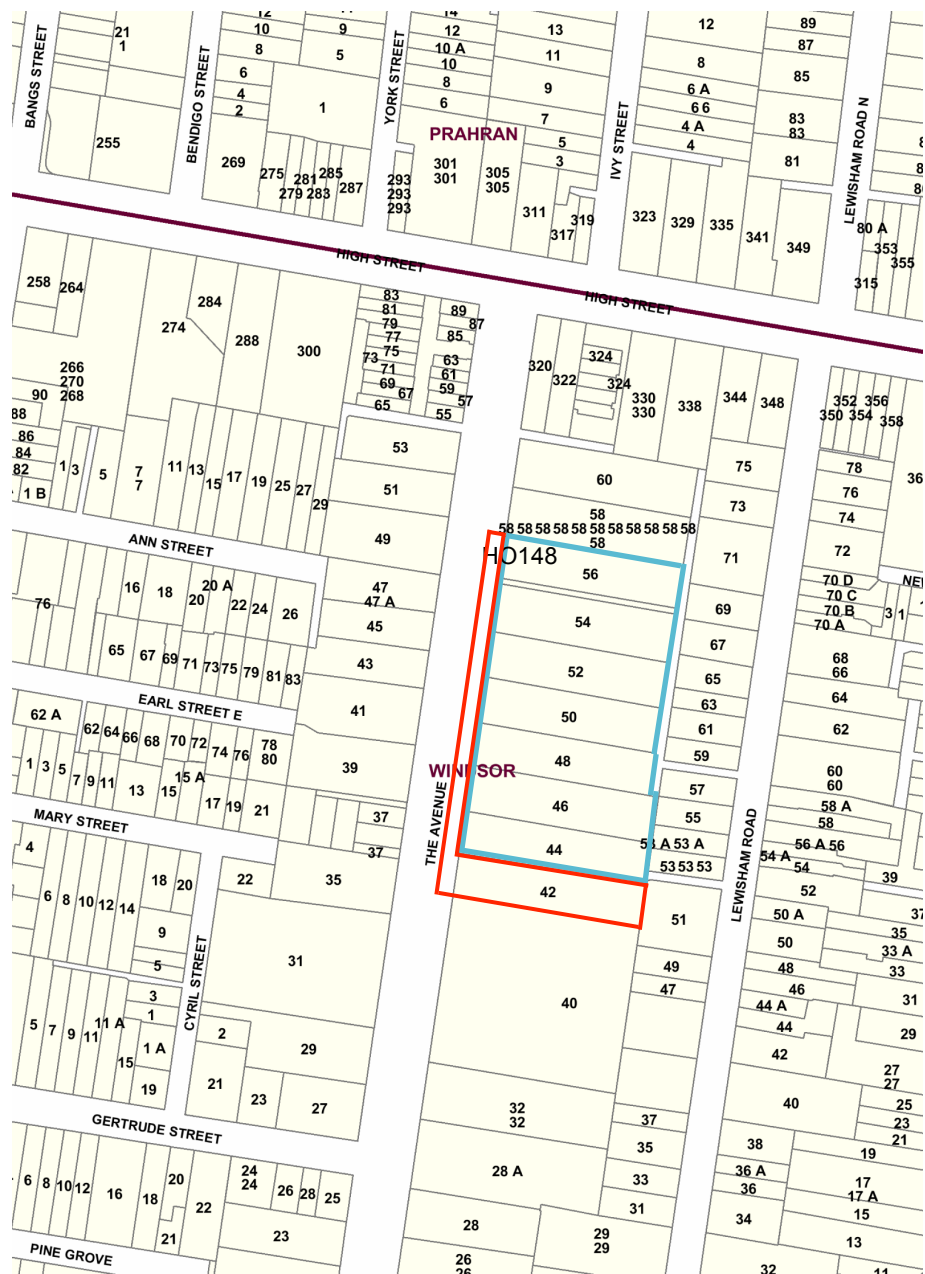


Figure 5 Extent of existing HO area in blue. Proposed extension to HO area in red.

DESCRIPTION

The Prahran Heritage Review (1993) noted,

The section of the Avenue on its east side near High Street still contains a small sequence of single storey (sic) villas with elaborate detailing in their design, typical of the late 1880s. This small group of 1880s survivors provides an example of the former character of The Avenue prior to the major flat and institutional development of recent years.

This situation has not changed substantially during the intervening decades. These dwellings survive in a broad suburban thoroughfare of note for its long stands of plane trees. A tract of these street trees in the median adjacent to the subject sites provides a landscaped setting for the buildings.

The Avenue Precinct comprises a group of eight detached houses of which seven are Victorian villas and the eighth, the former St Matthews vicarage at No 48, is a two-storey dwelling. Buildings throughout the group are very substantial reflecting the wealth and stature of their original occupants.

The earliest buildings in the group (Nos 42, 44 and 46) date from c.1888. They adopt a range of reasonably straightforward architectural forms but are distinguished through their high standards of detailing and generous scales. Nos 50 and 52 date from c.1890 and are likely to be the work of a single developer. They adopt similar asymmetrical forms with rendered exteriors. They are distinguished by decorative quoins and other complex detailing at No 50 and an elegant portico to No 52. To their north No 54 and *Otira* at No 56 are more complex in terms of their detailing and illustrate the rich forms of ornament that became fashionable during the boom period of the later 1880s and early 1890s. The two-storey former manse at No 48 is the youngest and most substantial dwelling in the group. It is an ambitious design anticipating later Edwardian architectural developments despite its 1901 construction date.

Front setbacks are typically free from intrusive structures and often retain formal planting arrangements recalling Victorian garden designs. Vehicle accommodation is generally discreet although front setback areas to Nos 46 and 54 are currently used as parking areas. Early cast iron fences over bluestone bases survive on a number of sites. These contribute in a substantial way to the early character of the area.

HISTORY

The land in the area bounded by High Street, Chapel Street, Dandenong Road and Williams Road was offered for sale in 1850 as four lots, each of around 30 acres.¹ The two western Lots, Nos 56 and 61, along east side of Chapel Street were quickly developed with shops along the Chapel Street frontage, with a nest of streets, that would become known as Pasley Village, to their rear. Development in this

1 Unless noted otherwise, the early history of the area is drawn from, Betty Malone, Discovering Prahran No.4 pps.58-9.

area was further stimulated by the construction of the Windsor Railway Station complex in 1885 and the opening of the cable tram service in 1888.² Lots 55 and 62 to the west of Williams Road developed more slowly and produced streetscapes that were more suburban in character.

The two long, north south roads, Hornby Street and The Avenue, were planned as extensions of roads proposed for St Kilda and were, consequently, known as Nelson Street East and Westbury Street North, respectively. Ann Street, Earl Street East and Mary Street extended east from Hornby Street but were to terminate at the rear fences of allotments in The Avenue. Gertrude Street was, and remains, the only through road.

In the 1850s and 1860s, a handful of houses were constructed between, present day, Hornby Street and Williams Road. Betty Malone makes reference to *Ivy Cottage* and *Yarraville Cottage* around the northern end of, what would become, The Avenue.³ However little other development occurred away from the street frontages.

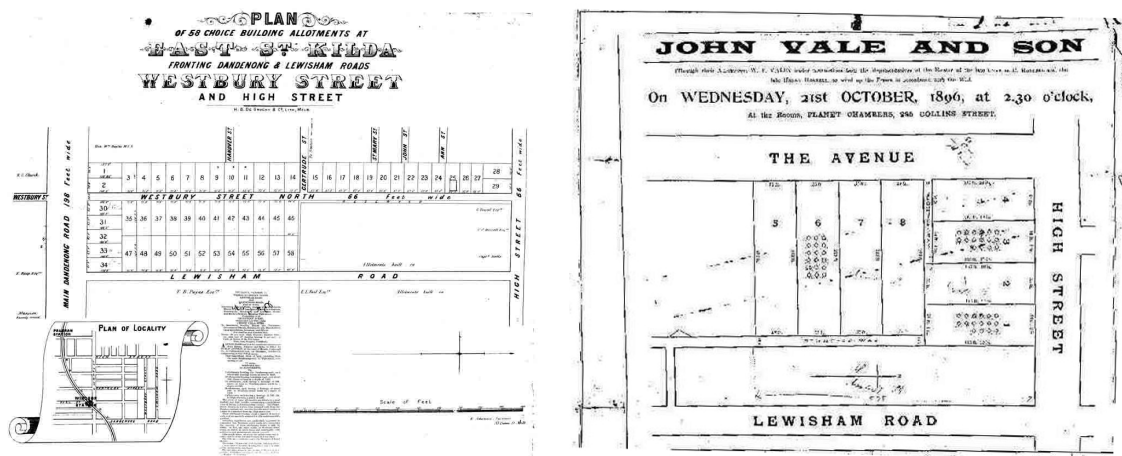


Figure 6 Subdivision Plan, 58 Choice Building allotments at East St Kilda, c.1870? Stonnington History Centre Registration No PH11067

Figure 7 John Vale and Son, Subdivision Plan, October 1896, Stonnington History Centre Registration No PH11069

By 1870, the Avenue had been subdivided and, by the mid-1870s, the Prahran City Council had begun making roads and drainage channels to either side of the street. Blocks were unusually large, often with frontages of 65 feet. The first families to settle in The Avenue lived towards Dandenong Road. The generous allotments, handsome dwellings and the resulting suburban character attracted residents of higher social stature than was the case in Pasley Village a few hundred metres to the west. Residents included squatters retiring to the city, solicitors, accountants, civil servants, merchants, surveyors and insurance agents.

2 Context Pty Ltd, City of Prahran Conservation Review, Vol 3 Urban Conservation Areas, pg.64.
3 Malone, *op cit*, pg 28.

The eight dwellings, numbered 42-56 The Avenue, were constructed during the period 1888-1899.⁴

4 For the purposes of this report, it is assumed that construction occurred in the year prior to first the entry in the Sands & McDougal Directory. Actual construction dates may vary slightly.

Although the Avenue was well-established by the mid 1880s, the eastern side of the street in the vicinity of High Street was only lightly developed. None of the dwellings at Nos 42-56 were listed in the Sands & McDougall Directory of 1888. In 1889, Directories identified three vacant dwellings that would subsequently be known as Nos 42, 44 and 46 The Avenue. In the following year, Samuel Willis was listed as the occupant of No 42 with a solicitor FJ Neave at No 44. No 46 remained vacant.

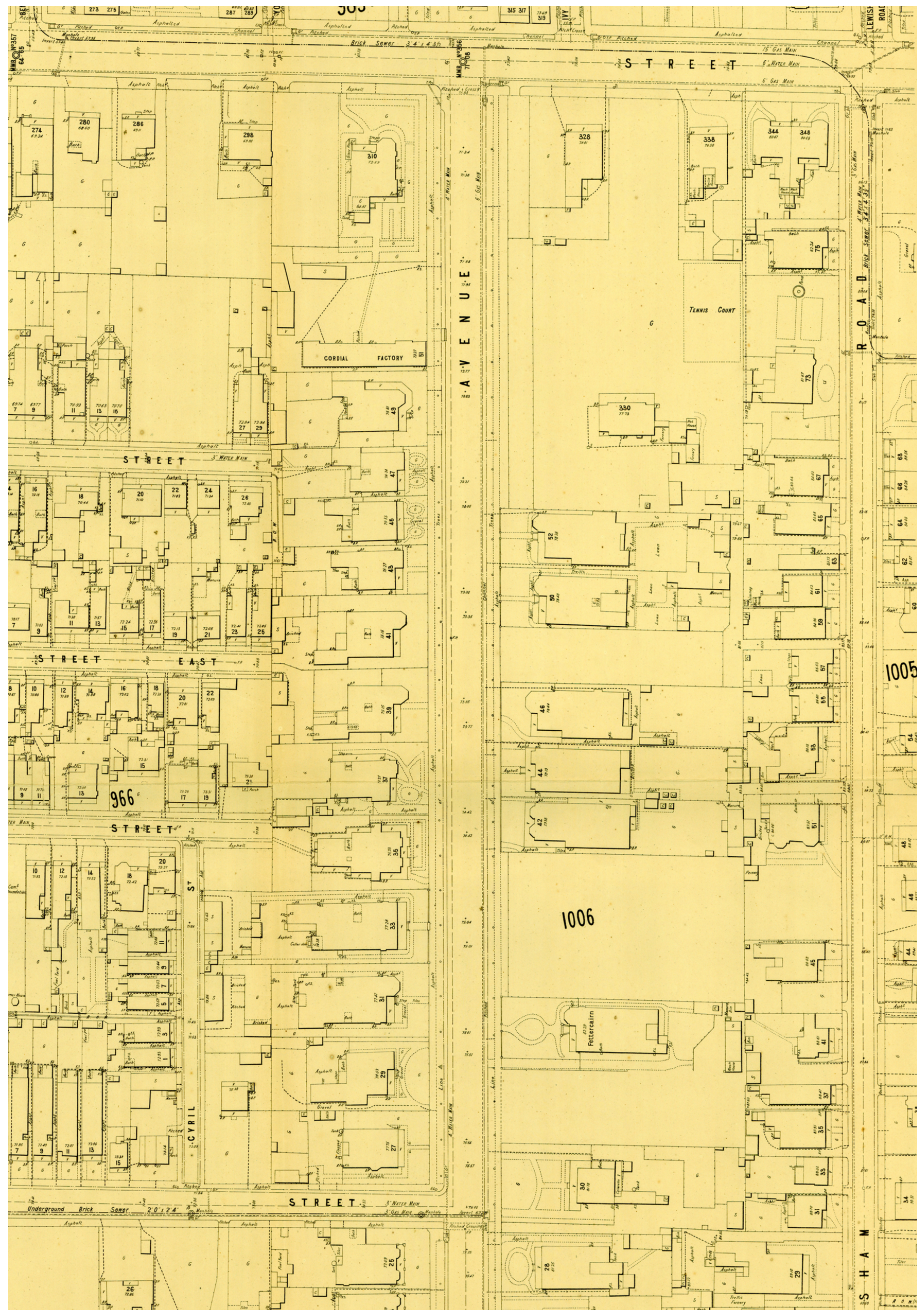


Figure 8 MMBW Detail Plan 966 & 1006, 1897, State Library of Victoria

A little to the north of No 46, two blocks of vacant land, each having a frontage of 53 feet to The Avenue, were owned by William Vanstone. Developer, Henry Cheel bought these two blocks, known today as 50 and 52 The Avenue, in 1890⁵. By the following year Cheel had erected his own ten-roomed brick house on the more southerly site. Cheel may have also constructed the villa at No 52 at the same time.⁶ He quickly sold the property at No 52 to Joseph and Emma Perl. Directories of 1892 identify Henry Cheel and Joseph Perl as occupying un-numbered properties to the north of No 46. These were listed as Nos 50 and 52 respectively in the Directories of the following year. Cheel was a prolific developer understood to have built over 600 houses in Prahran alone. His biography was published in, *Victoria and its Metropolis*, Vol. 2, a directory of prominent Victorians and businesses. In 1893, Cheel sold No. 50 to William S Flint, a gentleman (later a solicitor). However, by 1894, the house was owned by the Mercantile Bank, perhaps indicating that Flint's fortunes had changed during the economic downturn of the early 1890s. In 1906, No 50 was purchased from the bank by Mary Harold, and remained the property of the Harold family until at least 1951.

Until 1895, the land on which Nos 54-56 The Avenue are currently situated formed part of a substantial tract to High Street owned by Charles Horrell. This was subdivided to form eight residential lots addressing High Street and the Avenue which were auctioned in 1896 as part of Charles and Helen Horrell's estate (refer figure 7). Two of these sites were developed almost immediately. Sands & McDougall Directories note Elias Coppel and Mrs Yette Pinkus in residence on sites to the north of No 52 in 1898. Their properties would subsequently be known as Nos 54 and 56 The Avenue. The handsome boom period villa at No 56 was named *Otira*.

The MMBW plan of 1897 (Refer Figure 8) reflects the situation prior to the redevelopment of Horrell's land. It shows The Avenue as it approached its mature state. The western side of the street was more-or-less fully developed. On the eastern side, towards High Street some sites remained undeveloped. The five earliest villas noted above (Nos 42, 44, 46, 50 & 52) had already been constructed within this area.

The final lot in the area, at No 48, remained undeveloped until 1901, when the very substantial two-storey St Matthew's vicarage was constructed. The first occupant was the Rev William T Storrs.

ANALYSIS

Thematic context

As was typically the case in the former City of Prahran, lots were purchased at the Government land sales with a view to subdivision or rapid and profitable resale. The Avenue Precinct is of historical significance for the manner in which it illustrates this aspect of the early development of the Municipality. Large allotments close to the Windsor Railway station and Dandenong Road attracted owners, developers and residents of high social stature. The area retains associations with noted developer

5 David Tuck, *50 The Avenue*, 2003 Stonnington History Centre Registration No PH 10761

6 Tuck, *op cit*, makes reference to a letter from Cheel to the City Surveyor dated 3 March 1891, relating to drainage of two villa residences in The Avenue, Windsor – presumed to be Nos 50 and 52, Stonnington History Centre Registration Document No #740.28.

Henry Cheel and St Matthew's Church and survives as a remnant of one of the Municipality's earliest and most elegant residential streets.

While the subject area was located in the former Municipality of Prahran, development proceeded in a manner that has more in common, in terms of its open and suburban character and polite middle class residential building stock, with suburban Malvern to its east than working-class Prahran to its west. Streetscapes in the Avenue Precinct are the result of a desire for a suburban life in a detached villa in a garden setting. Development of this type came to typify development in the area before WWI.

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

- 3.3.1 *Crown Land sales 1840-1850.*
- 8.2 *Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal.*
- 8.4.1 *Houses as a symbol of wealth status and fashion.*
- 8.7.1 *Creating leafy suburbs.*

St Matthew's vicarage illustrates, albeit in a reasonably modest way,

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

Assessment against HERCON criteria

The following recognised heritage criteria have been used for the assessment of the heritage values of the precinct. These have been broadly adopted by heritage jurisdictions. To varying extents, HO148 meets the following HERCON Criteria:

Criterion A

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

The Precinct is important for its illustration of the subdivision and development of an early parcel of land and its development as a middle class suburb.

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

The Precinct survives as a remnant of an area which once included substantial tracts of similar dwellings. Intact early buildings groupings of this type are uncommon and are becoming increasingly rare as demolition and development impact upon the early fabric and character of these areas. In this particular case, the individual buildings which comprise the HO area are each of high distinction. This is rarely the case.

Criterion C

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).

The Precinct's intact subdivision layout, built form, fabric and detailing each contribute to an understanding of the cultural or history of the area.

Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

The Precinct survives as a representative example of a late Victorian middle class suburban built environment.

Criterion E

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

The Precinct contains a number of handsome and stylistically complementary dwellings which combine to form a Precinct of aesthetic significance.

Criterion F *Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).*

The Precinct retains evidence of late Victorian and Edwardian design and construction practices. Buildings within the group often exhibit high standards of design as reflected in their unusually high building gradings.

While not central to the significance of the dwelling, the building derives some additional interest for its associations with St Matthew's vicarage, illustrating:

Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

Significance

The Prahran Conservation Review provided the following statement of significance for the area:

The Avenue Urban Conservation area has significance as a fine grouping of late Victorian Houses set on large garden allotments and illustrating the architectural qualities and subtle diversity of detailing of this period. The large plane trees along the street, established gardens and remaining examples of palisade fencing are important streetscape attributes.

Further to this, it identified the following as being the key heritage attributes of the Avenue Urban Conservation Area:

- | *The consistent architectural style, form and setback of the detached villas*
- | *The large plane trees on the footpath along the eastern side of the street, complemented by the slightly smaller and mixed aged plantings on the west*
- | *The retention of iron palisade fencing on the majority of the houses*
- | *High degree of intactness to its c.1900s state of development*

In addition to these, previously identified characteristics of the area, the current Study finds the area to be of interest

- | *for its association with, noted developer, Henry Cheel*
- | *for its association with St Matthew's Church*
- | *as an unusual grouping of buildings of high individual significance.*

Other Heritage Overlay areas

A number of similar streetscapes to that found in The Avenue survive throughout the Municipality. These include: Fawkner Street, South Yarra (part Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct, HO131); Donald Street Prahran (currently part of the Chapel Street Precinct, HO126) or Elm Grove, Armadale (part of the Armadale Precinct, HO130). Generally speaking, the buildings within the Avenue Precinct are of a higher level of architectural distinction than those found in these other areas. With the exception of the straightforward, B graded dwelling at No 46 The Avenue, buildings within the Precinct are all graded A2 or higher. Such consistently high levels of individual significance are rarely encountered within Council's Heritage Overlay areas.

ANALYSIS

Significance

With the exception of those minor matter noted above, the previously-assessed significance of HO148 accurately reflects the cultural heritage significance of the place. While the material assembled in this report is more detailed and more expansive than Council's existing citation, it suggests no substantial new aspects of significance in relation to this precinct. It simply provides a clearer and more comprehensive explanation of the heritage values identified previously and would produce a neutral

translation from Council's existing citations to the HERMES database. No change to Council's existing gradings is required.

Existing Boundary/No 42 The Avenue

The current boundary to HO148 does not reflect the boundaries recommended by Council's early Studies. This appears to be an error as discussed below.

The Prahran Character and Conservation Study (1992)

The Avenue Precinct was first identified for a heritage control in The Prahran Character and Conservation Study (1992). That Study recommended a heritage control over eight dwellings at Nos 42-56 The Avenue. The Study prepared a site-specific Building Information Form for No 42 identifying it as an A2 graded building. Unfortunately, the Building and Streetscapes Grading Register produced as part of the same Study noted a C grading against the building. A number of errors of this type are present in the Register.

Council subsequently sought heritage controls on the basis of the citations prepared in the Study.

The Prahran Conservation Review (1993)

The Panel reporting on the exhibited Planning Scheme Amendments L24 and L26 raised a number of concerns. Council subsequently sought an independent review of recommendations made in the *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*. The *Prahran Conservation Review* prepared a new citation for the area. The new citation noted that,

The Avenue Urban Conservation Area comprises a group of eight detached houses of which seven are Victorian asymmetrical villas and the eighth No 48, St Matthews vicarage, is a two-storey early Edwardian (sic) Building.

Elsewhere the revised citation noted, *The 1895 MMBW plan shows a group of five villas already constructed within this area*. The five villas (visible in figure 8 above) included the subject dwelling.

In conclusion, the Review recommended that the Department, *Adopt the UCI Area as exhibited*.

It is clear that both Studies intended that No 42 The Avenue would be included in the proposed Heritage Overlay area.

However, the mapping that accompanied the Prahran Heritage Review recommendation covered only seven detached houses (of which only six were Victorian villas and one was a two-storey Edwardian building). The dwelling at No 42 was omitted from the mapping and consequently was excluded from HO148. This may have arisen as a consequence of the map available to consultants. This incorporated the subject dwelling into the private hospital site to the south rather than listing it as a separate building on a separate site.

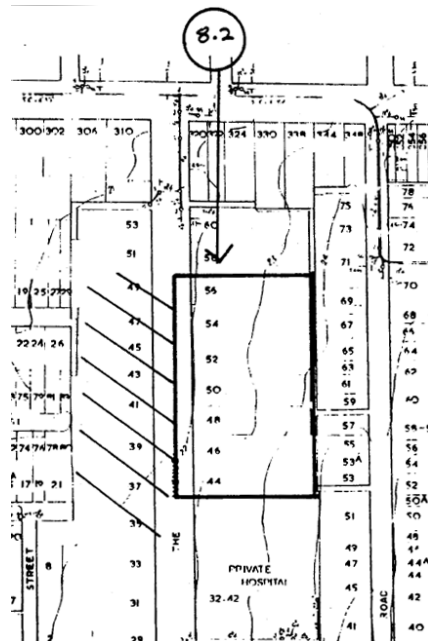
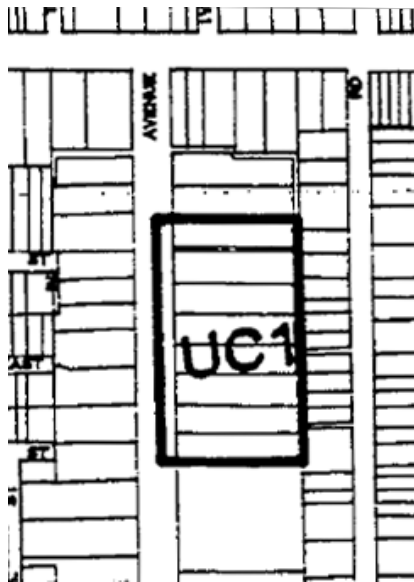


Figure 7 Proposed UC1 Area, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study* (1992), covers eight sites at 42-56 The Avenue.

Figure 8 Proposed Heritage Overlay Area, *Prahran Conservation Review* (1993) endorsed the views of the earlier Study but mapped only seven sites at 44-56 The Avenue.

The dwelling at No 42 The Avenue is a handsome Victorian dwelling. It is one of the eight dwellings identified by the *City of Prahran Character and Conservation Study* for a heritage control. The subsequent *Prahran Heritage Review* endorsed this recommendation. The dwelling reinforces the architectural style, forms, scales and setbacks of the detached villas to the north protected under HO148. It dates from 1888 - the initial period of development of the buildings within HO148. The setting of the subject building is enhanced by plane trees in adjacent sections of The Avenue and by its iron palisade fence, which, despite some alterations, remains legible to its original state. Buildings protected under HO148 are generally graded A2, as is the subject building. As such, it is of comparable significance to other dwellings in the group. Consequently, its inclusion in HO148 would be appropriate and desirable having regard for the identified significance of the precinct.

The subject building would have made a substantial contribution to HO148 and its omission can only be explained as a mapping error.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current boundaries of the Precinct are inconsistent with the recommendation made in the *Prahran Character and Conservation Study* (1992). They do not include the dwelling at No 42 or the plane trees to the street which have identified as contributory elements. The mapping of HO148 should be adjusted to include the dwelling at 42 The Avenue, Windsor and the footpath and median strip adjacent to properties at Nos 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54 and 56 The Avenue, Windsor.

The History, Description, Statement of Significance, gradings and other material provided in this document should be endorsed by Council and uploaded to HERMES for use by Council's Planners.

REFERENCES

Nigel Lewis and Associates, *Prahran Conservation Study*, 1983.
Lewis, Butler et al, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*, 1992
Betty Malone, *Discovering Prahran: Area Four*.
MMBW Detail Plan 966 &1006, 1897, State Library of Victoria
Sands and McDougall, *Postal Directories*, 1884-1902.
David Tuck, *50 The Avenue*, 2003, Stonnington History Centre Registration No PH 10761.

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.

The Avenue (east side)

Street no	Grading	Description
42	A2	Single-storey symmetrical Victorian villa.
44	A2	Single-storey symmetrical Victorian villa.
46	B	Single-storey asymmetrical Victorian villa.
48	A2	Double-storey symmetrical Victorian villa.
50	A2	Single-storey asymmetrical Victorian villa.
52	A2	Single-storey asymmetrical Victorian villa (former vicarage).
54	A2	Single-storey symmetrical Victorian villa.
56	A1	<i>Otira</i> , asymmetrical single-storey Victorian villa.