

'Pirndoega'

226 Punt Road, Prahran

Place type: Residential Buildings (private), House

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme

Architectural style: Victorian Period (1851-1901) Italianate

Locality history

Prahran is both a locality and a former municipality. When first settled the name was given to a much more extensive Parish of Prahran, but the locality of Prahran proper came to be associated with the area centred around Chapel Street. The name 'Prahran' is believed to have been adapted from an Aboriginal word for the Yarra River, *Birrarung*.

Victoria's Surveyor-General, Robert Hoddle, drew up the first plan of the Parish of Prahran in 1839, and the first land sales took place in the 1840s and 1850s (Wilde 1983: vii). The locality of Prahran developed at the western end of the larger Parish of Prahran. Much of it occupied low-lying and flood-prone land on the river bank. This was utilised for grazing stock, and for industry, including brickworks (Wilde 1993: viii).

Settlement intensified through the 1850s, centring around Chapel Street, which was a chief north-south route. Most of the houses built in this early period were simple one- and two-roomed timber (and sometimes brick) cottages, which were occupied by the working class and lower middle class (Wilde 1993: x). Little planning went into the early housing development in Prahran. James Kearney's 1855 plan of Melbourne shows a dispersed settlement across the area with a concentration along Chapel Street, between Commercial Road and High Street, and the adjoining streets (Kearney 1855).

Wealthier settlers were attracted to the larger blocks and elevated ground at Toorak and South Yarra. There were also clusters of substantial homes built in Prahran along the wider

thoroughfares such as Punt Road (with surviving examples at 170 and 174 Punt Road) and in purpose-designed subdivisions with larger allotments, for example Grandview Grove.

Prahran developed as much as a service town as a residential locality. It accommodated a large shopping centre, on Chapel Street and Commercial Road, and was the home not only of shopkeepers and publicans but also of tradespeople, artisans, caterers, outworkers and many others. Prahran also became a centre of light industry in the late nineteenth century, a large component being food production (demonstrated, for example, by the Prahran Jam Factory), and many of the factory workers lived in Prahran.

Together with Windsor, Prahran had a more diverse social and political make-up than other parts of Stonnington and this was reflected in the wide range of housing types. There were both large mansions and more rudimentary working-class cottages, the occupants of the latter serving those in the former. There was also modest housing that sat between the two. The houses of the poor, the small cottages, were often over crowded inside as well, with many having large families occupying a small number of bedrooms. A significant concentration of small workers' cottages in Prahran lies within the block broadly bounded by Williams Road, High Street, Malvern Road and Chatsworth Road. Prahran's significant working-class element encouraged a strong Labor following in the early 1900s, as well as some followers of socialism.

By the 1880s, many of the small and inferior older dwellings were being pulled down and were 'replaced by Victorian terraces and small villas' (Wilde 1993: viii). Many were constructed using the bricks that were available locally. The gradual improvement of Prahran through the twentieth century has seen large numbers of working-class houses removed. In the 1950s entire blocks east of Chapel Street were demolished to make way for high-rise Housing Commission flats.

Place history

Punt Road, historically known as Hoddle Street, was one of the earliest roads to be formed within the Parish of Prahran. The house located at number 226 Punt Road called 'Pirndoega', was constructed in 1891 for accountant William Howard Branston, at which time it was described in rate books as a brick house of 10 rooms with a net annual value of £110 (*Argus* 25 February 1901; RB 1891). Branston owned three allotments of land on the east side of Punt Road between Athol Street and Commercial Road, where he had resided since sometime during the 1870s until 1890 in an 8-roomed timber house known as 'Moreton', at the site of 236 Punt Road [since demolished] (*Melbourne Punch* 7 February 1889). His two other allotments to the south of this timber residence were recorded as vacant land up until 1890 (RB 1890). In 1891, Branston is shown as both the owner and occupier of a newly constructed brick house at 226 Punt Road, while the earlier timber residence had been leased to his brother-in-law John J Whitelaw (*Argus* 30 May 1910; RB 1891).

The MMBW Detail Plan of 1896 shows a large residence situated on a large block in a garden setting and a fence fronting Punt Road. There are separate garden allotments to the north, at what is now 228-234 Punt Road, which had fencing, a pond, a fowl house and other outbuildings. The house was described in a 1994 auction notice as a '...magnificent mansion style brick Victorian residence requiring renovation. Comprising 10 main rooms and retaining beautiful period features of the era' (*Age* 3 December 1994).

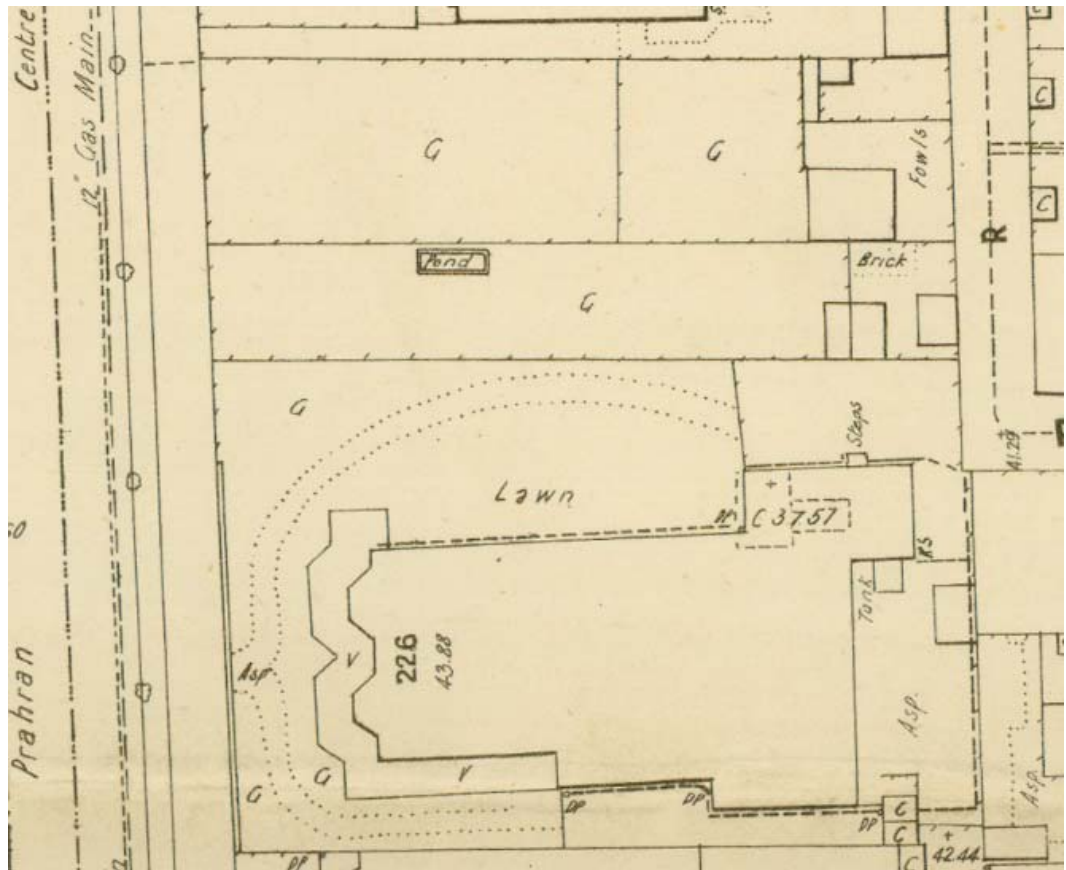


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan no. 957, dated 1896. Note the garden allotments on the north side (source: SLV).

'Pirndoega' was occupied by William Branston up until his death in 1901 (*Argus* 25 February 1901). The house remained under the ownership of Mrs Ann Branston and was leased to various occupants until her own passing nine years later (*Argus* 30 May 1910). The occupants during this time were Dr AVM Anderson, who was secretary of the Melbourne Medical Association, Mrs Matilda Murphy and George HV Thomas (S&Mc; *Argus* 22 Feb 1896).

Following Mrs Branston's death, 'Pirndoega's' occupant is listed in directories as Emannuel Jacobs in 1911. It remained in residential use throughout the subsequent decades (S&Mc). In 1939 the house at 226 Punt Road was registered as the office address of the accountancy firm Robert Duncan Pty Ltd, by its proprietor Ian Byron Duncan (*Age* 26 July 1939). At this time Ian and Madge Duncan were also listed as the occupants of the house, indicating that it was used as a combined residence and office (S&Mc).

By the interwar period, the garden allotments on the north side had been subdivided off and developed with a large house, leaving 'Pirndoega' on the initial house block still with a relatively large side setback on the north side (Pratt c1925-40).



Figure 2. 'Pirndoega' during the interwar period. Note the new house built to the north (left) of it on the former garden allotments (source: Pratt, Charles D (c1925-40) detail of 'Aerial view along Malvern Road, Prahran', *Airspy Collection of Aerial Photographs*, SLV).



Figure 3. Photo of façade and front fence, taken c1992 (source: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)).

Sources

Age, 3 December 1994.

Apperley, Richard, Irving, Robert & Reynolds, Peter 1989, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus & Robertson.

Brown-May, Andrew and Shurlee Swain (eds) 2005, *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*: www.emelbourne.net.au, accessed 26 June 2016.

Barrett, Bernard 1971, *The Civic Frontier: The evolution of an industrial area*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

City of Prahran, Rate Books (RB).

Context Pty Ltd 2006, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, City of Stonnington, Prahran.

Context Pty Ltd 2009, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, prepared for City of Stonnington, Prahran. [citing Davidson, Graeme 1978, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne and Twopeny, R. E. N. 1883 *Town Life in Australia*, London.]

Hubbard, Timothy 'Italianate Style' in Goad, Philip & Willis, Julie (eds.) 2012, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press.

Jordan, Kerry 2003, 'Houses and Status: The Grand Houses of Nineteenth-Century Victoria', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, as cited in Statham, J 2008, 'HO367 Montrose House Heritage Assessment', City of Stonnington].

Kearney, James 1855, *Plan of Melbourne and Suburbs*. Melbourne.

MMBW Detail Plan no. 957, dated 1896 (SLV).

Miles Lewis. *Australian Architecture Index* - record 2799 (1896 S&McD listing only)

National Trust – file only (not cited) and photo (c1992).

Pratt, Charles D (c1925-40) 'Aerial view along Malvern Road, Prahran', Airspy Collection of Aerial Photographs, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

Punch (Melbourne), 7 February 1889. (ref to 'Moreton' in Punt Road)

Sands & McDougall, *Melbourne and Suburban Directories* (S&McD).

Statham, John 2008, 'HO367 Montrose House Heritage Assessment', City of Stonnington [‘The Italianate mode’ quoted and paraphrased at length].

Whitworth, Robert P. 1879, *Bailliere's Victorian Gazetteer and Road Guide*, Baillieres, Melbourne.

Wilde, Sally 1993, *The History of Prahran Volume II, 1925-1890*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

Victorian Places, www.victorianplaces.com.au, accessed 29 July 2016.

Physical description



Figure 4. View of front elevation, looking south-east (source: Context 2016).

The villa formerly known as ‘Pirndoega’ is a substantial single-storey Italianate villa that is highly intact and distinctive for its generous size and refined details. It occupies a wide allotment on the east side of Punt Road, mid-block between Commercial Road and Athol Street in Prahran. The house is set back behind a narrow front garden and retains its original iron palisade fence, posts and gate set on a bluestone plinth.

Constructed in 1891, the polychrome brick building presents a symmetrical façade to Punt Road, with two canted bays to the front and an encircling ogee-profile verandah that returns along the southern elevation. The verandah terminates at a secondary projecting bay to the south elevation adjacent to the main entrance doorway on the south side elevation.

It has a hipped roof clad in terracotta tiles, which are likely to be a later change (i.e. from slate). The chimneys are constructed in dark Hawthorn bricks with cream brick bases and dressings to the heavy cornices. The curved wythes at the tops of the chimneys are also very unusually constructed of cream brick instead of the usual cement. The eaves have elaborate brackets which are closely spaced and set between a single red brick accent, and are continuous along both side elevations. The walls beneath the verandah are of dark Hawthorn brick with dressings of cream brick (which have been overpainted), expressed as wide dressings to the canted bay windows and as quoins to the external building corners. There is a continuous bluestone plinth (overpainted) to the building and as nosing around the intact verandah, laid with decorative tessellated tiles. The windows to the front are full height, segmentally-arched

double-hung sashes. The entrance door is elaborate with a round arch surround with semi-circular glazed highlight.

The verandah is notable for its high quality and non-standard cast-iron patterning to the heavy frieze and brackets, with a range of floral motifs. It is supported on slender fluted columns which have intact bases and Corinthian capitals. At its north-west corner, the verandah continues past the external corner of the building, as if it was designed to return along the north elevation, reaffirming the symmetrical composition of the front as viewed and appreciated from Punt Road.



Figure 5. Detail of unusual brick wythes to the bichrome brick chimneys (source: Context 2016).



Figure 6. Detail of intact cast-iron verandah (source: Context 2016).

An aerial in 2016 shows that the footprint of the house is largely unchanged from its plan in the 1896 MMBW. A number of outbuildings are located at the rear of the property. Unsympathetic changes include the painting of the cream brick dressing of the facade and the brushwood fence that has been set behind the original iron palisade fence.



Figure 7. Detail of intact iron palisade fence with decorative posts and gate (source: Context 2016).

Comparative analysis

As discussed in the Stonnington Thematic Environmental History, section 8.2.2, the suburban house on a garden allotment was an aspiration of many middle-class Victorians:

Davison (1978:145) describes the Victorian cult of the home in the fresh air and tranquillity of the suburbs as a haven from the noise and dirt of the city - the ideal of rus in urbe (country in the city) which, through Victoria's prosperity and the growth of the public transport system, became possible for many working people. For most suburbanites this home was a single-storey detached house surrounded by its own garden. On a visit to Australia in the 1880s, Twopeny (1883:37) noted that this was the almost universal preference of Australians. During the boom of the 1880s many people found their ideal piece of rus in urbe in the Malvern municipality. Here streets of Victorian villas rapidly began to replace market gardens, especially in the vicinity of the railway lines.

The detached house was the typical Victorian house form in the middle-ring suburbs, in areas where the new tram and train lines facilitated travel and allowed lower density development. In this spacious suburban environment, they could be set in large gardens with side setbacks allowing for a return verandah on one or two sides. They were also built in inner suburban areas for better-off residents, but were usually restricted in form with a front verandah only and side walls near the boundaries.

The architectural expression of these small to medium sized houses ranges from quite simple to those lushly embellished on par with much grander houses. In keeping with the dominant style of the Victorian era, most of small to medium detached houses in Stonnington are Italianate in style. The simplest ones have a symmetrical façade with the front door in the centre. Many have added visual interest created by a projecting bay to one side of the façade, and a cast-iron verandah to the other, creating the classic asymmetrical Italianate suburban form. The more pretentious in this group might even adopt a small tower or the suggestion of one.

The Italianate style had its origins in the landscape paintings of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain over a century earlier. These two French artists were enamoured with the landscapes and architecture of rural Italy, depicting it as a vision of Arcadia. Their efforts inspired a broader pursuit of 'the Picturesque' in architecture (Statham, 2008).

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the Italianate style spread widely in Britain fuelled by the works of architects such as John Nash and Charles Barry and through designs promoted in pattern books such as Charles Parker's *Villa Rustica* (1832). In 1845, the style received Royal endorsement when Prince Albert, working with architect Thomas Cubitt, designed 'Osbourne' on the Isle of Wight as a retreat for Queen Victoria and the Royal family. 'Osbourne' with its plain stuccoed expression and tall balustraded tower would become the model for many large residences throughout the Empire including Government House in Melbourne.

The style, which emerged as the preferred expression for Melbourne's grandest mansions of the mid-century, was quickly adapted to suit more modest suburban villas and terraces. As Hubbard (2012:357) notes:

Flexibility and adaptability were the secrets to the success of the Italianate style. It could range from the simplest of buildings to the grandest. It was not a precise style and could accommodate different levels of architectural sophistication. It could be formally symmetrical or informally asymmetrical. While towers were standard, they might be reduced to just a porch. The style was easy to copy and could be used by speculative builders buying stock items for decoration. Most importantly, the Italianate style used the vocabulary of classical architecture freely but sparingly, generally with relatively plain expanses of wall and hipped roofs with bracketed eaves.

As the style evolved to accommodate less substantial residential types, the deliberate asymmetry and rambling form inspired by the Picturesque massing of wings and towers of buildings such as 'Osbourne' became less central to the mode. So much so that the Italianate

terrace forms of the 1880s were not substantially different to their forebears of a generation earlier apart from an appliqué of 'Italian' detailing.

The Italianate house is so common in the Melbourne area that this is the standard image people hold of the 'Victorian house'. Condensed to its key features, they would be a hipped roof with an M-profile (i.e. having a central valley to the rear half, which allows a low ridgeline), bracketed eaves, chimneys with a cornice at the top (a run cement-render moulding), and a timber or iron-framed verandah with cast-iron ornament to all but the grandest houses. Common extras included a faceted (canted) bay used to create an asymmetric composition (or occasionally used symmetrically), and windows that had a round or segmental arched opening, some of which were embellished with run cement-render mouldings or delicate hood moulds.

There were three general types of cladding for Italianate houses. The most modest were clad in timber weatherboards or blocked boards emulating expensive ashlar. The two most common types were finished in cement render or face brick. Rendered houses could obtain a high level of run and cast ornament at an affordable price, leading to some highly embellished examples. All, even the most modest, had ruled render with incised lines to emulate the more expensive stone construction. Face brickwork was also common, usually dark brown Hawthorn bricks with cream brick dressings (bichrome) from the late 1860s, and later in the century with red brick accents as well (polychrome). Some architects and designer-builders created bold patterns with the coloured bricks. As good building stone was not common in Victoria, very few houses were built of stone. Early examples were of bluestone, such as the grand 'Bishopscourt' in East Melbourne.

The development of the former City of Prahran and the western part of the former City of Malvern coincides with the emergence of the Italianate forms of expression in Victoria. Consequently, the City of Stonnington retains a disproportionate number of Melbourne's better examples of the mode. A number of these, typically the grandest and most elaborate mansions or those associated with Victoria's most notable families, have been added to the Victorian Heritage Register. These include: 'Toorak House', 'Greenwich House' and 'Mandeville Hall', in Toorak; 'Stonington' in Malvern; and 'Malvern House' in Glen Iris.

Examples of Italianate houses that are of individual significance in Stonnington's Heritage Overlay (both in individual HOs and HO precincts) can be divided into a number of groups according to the number of dwellings (attached or detached), their size, ornament and level of architectural sophistication.

Generally, 'Pirndoega' can be compared to other medium-sized Italianate houses in the municipality, of which there are a relatively high number that adopt the typical asymmetrical Italianate plan form. Less common in Stonnington are those places that incorporate a pair of projecting bays, presenting a symmetrical façade to the main street frontage. Examples include the more modest houses set on typically narrow suburban allotments, including: 30 Northcote Road, Armadale (in HO130), 83 Caroline Street, South Yarra (in HO355), 42 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148), and 44 The Avenue, Windsor (in HO148). Larger examples set on wider allotments allowed for a return verandah, often to both side elevations; examples include: 6 Horsburgh Grove, Armadale (HO315), 'Lillirie' at 1089 Malvern Road, Armadale (HO273), 294 Williams Road, Toorak (in HO155), and the grand mansion, 'Flete' at 10 Flete Avenue, Armadale (HO38).

In comparison to the examples listed above, 'Pirndoega' is closest in its massing and scale to the villas at 6 Horsburgh Grove, Armadale, and 42 The Avenue, Windsor, sharing a mainly symmetrical composition of two projecting canted bays with a return cast-iron verandah to one side. 42 The Avenue, Windsor, also adopts a side entrance, which is similarly accessed from the return verandah. These examples have slight differences relating to their particular detailing and architectural composition. For example, the villa at 6 Horsburgh Grove is more unusual for its distinctive roof lantern, and the verandah at 42 The Avenue has a more typical straight edge across the façade of the building compared to the encircling verandah at Horsburgh Grove and 'Pirndoega'. 'Pirndoega' compares well to these villas in level of intactness, particularly with 42 The Avenue which also has a roof clad in terracotta tiles, which is likely to

be a later change (i.e. from slate). It also has a greater generosity of scale when compared to the examples listed above, except for the grand and sprawling mansion, 'Flete', in Armadale.



Figure 8. 6 Horsburgh Grove, Armadale, individually significant in HO135 (source: Google Streetview).



Figure 9. 42 The Avenue, Windsor, individually significant in HO148 (source: Google Streetview).

It shares similar bichrome brick patterning with the villas at 30 Northcote Road, Armadale, and 83 Caroline Street, South Yarra, but is generally a grander and more impressive example in its scale and detailing, despite its brickwork being overpainted. The unusual cream brick wythes to the chimneys of 'Pirndoega' are also a distinguishing feature.

In conclusion, 'Pirndoega' at 226 Punt Road, Prahran is a largely intact example of one of the municipality's collection of substantial single-storey Italianate villas. It is distinguished by its generous scale, bichrome brickwork (although partially overpainted) and its refined detailing. Its encircling ogee-profile verandah is highly intact retaining its high-quality and non-standard cast-iron frieze and brackets on slender fluted columns. It retains its highly decorative tessellated floor tiles with bluestone nosing.

Thematic context

This place illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, rev. 2009):

8.2 Middle-class suburbs and the suburban ideal

Assessment against criteria

Assessment of this place was carried out in relation to the HERCON model criteria as set out in the VPP Practice Note 'Applying the Heritage Overlay' (2015).

Statement of significance

What is significant?

The villa formerly known as 'Pirndoega' at 226 Punt Road, Prahran is significant. It was built in 1891 for accountant William Howard Branston and his family.

It comprises a substantial single-storey Italianate villa of bichrome brick with a hipped roof and tall chimneys with heavy cornices and unusual cream brick wythes. It presents a symmetrical façade to Punt Road, comprising two projecting canted bays and an encircling verandah which returns to the main entrance along the south (side) elevation. It is set back behind its original iron palisade fence, posts and gate, set on a bluestone plinth. It is significant to the extent of its nineteenth century external form and fabric.

The twentieth-century garage and sheds are not of significance.

How is it significant?

'Pirndoega' at 226 Punt Road, Prahran is of local architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Architecturally, 'Pirndoega' at 226 Punt Road, Prahran, is a fine representative example of a substantial single-storey Italianate villa built for the middle-class residents of Prahran during the boom years of the 1880s and early 1890s, at a time when Punt Road constituted a prestigious address. It exhibits typical features of this type, including the hipped roof form with tall corniced chimneys, canted projecting bays, segmentally arched double-hung sash windows, and a generous return cast-iron verandah. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, 'Pirndoega' is distinguished by its generous scale, bichrome brickwork (although partially overpainted) and its refined detailing. Its encircling ogee-profile verandah is highly intact retaining its high-quality and non-standard cast-iron frieze and brackets on slender fluted columns. It retains its decorative tessellated tile floor with bluestone nosing. The unusual cream brick chimney wythes are also of note. The iron palisade fence, posts and gate enhances its original presentation. (Criterion E)

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the whole property as defined by the title boundaries.

HO Schedule controls: Fence controls – Iron palisade fence, posts and pedestrian gate.

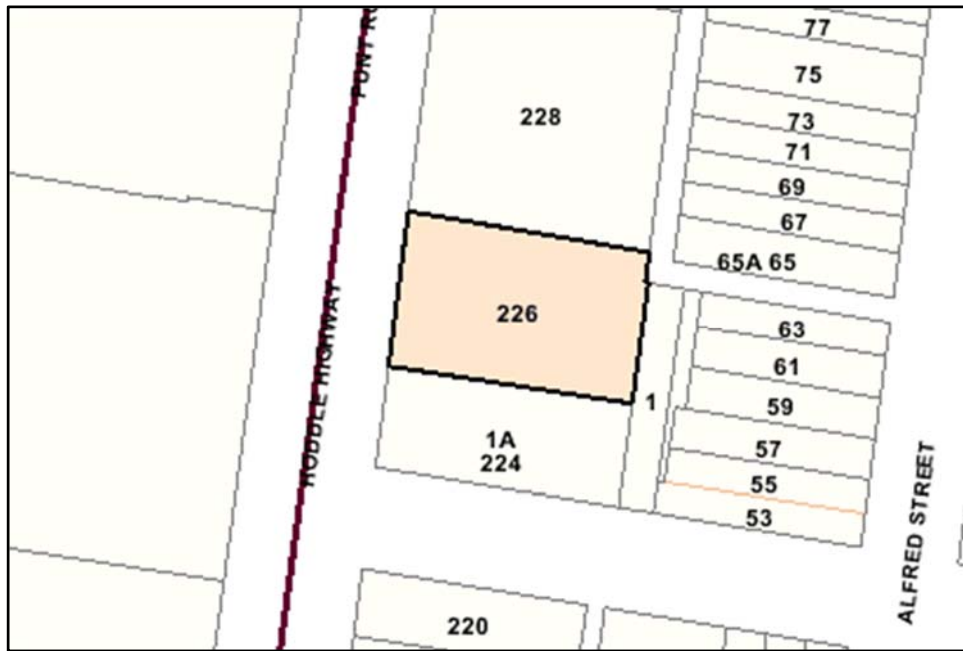


Figure 10. Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 226 Punt Road, Prahran (source: www.land.vic.gov.au).

Recommended grading: A2