

29-31 Phoenix Street, South Yarra

Place type: Residential, duplex

Significance level: Local



Recommended protection: Planning Scheme - Yes

Architectural style: Victorian period (1851-1901) Free Classical

Locality history

South Yarra, situated on the elevated south side of the Yarra River, emerged as a suburb of Melbourne in the 1850s. Before that, from the late 1830s and until the early 1840s, George Langthorne's Anglican Mission for the Aboriginal people was situated near present-day Anderson Street. The Botanical Gardens had been reserved in 1846 and the surrounding land began to be developed for large residential estates in the 1850s.

At the southern end of South Yarra, between Toorak Road and Commercial Road, the land was subdivided with generally smaller allotments. Although a predominantly middle-class suburb, there were also narrow streets of small cottages that accommodated the working class and the lower middle class (including, for example, salesmen and shopkeepers).

South Yarra was accessed from the city via St Kilda Road, and also by a punt across the Yarra. The South Yarra railway station was first opened on Toorak Road in the 1860s, servicing the private Hobsons Bay railway, but was expanded in the 1880s when the station was added to the new Oakleigh line. The strip along Toorak Road and along Chapel Street (bordering with Prahran) developed into a busy shopping and commercial area.

Place history

John Hartley Sallows (c.1830-1895) was born in Middlesex, England. By the 1860s, he was living at the Donnelly's Creek diggings in Gippsland where he had an interest in a gold mine (*Argus* 4 February 1865). He married Sarah Batstone in Carlton in 1867 and two years later, John and Sarah Sallows had purchased an allotment at 15 Phoenix Street (this was an earlier numbering of the current 33 Phoenix Street), South Yarra. This was described in the 1872 rate books as a six-roomed brick house. John Sallows appears in the City of Prahran ratebooks through the 1880s, occupying the same property and is described as an 'engineer'. On his death

in 1895, John Sallows was still living at 33 Phoenix Street. His widow Sarah moved into 31 Phoenix Street in 1898.

Sallows had purchased the adjoining allotment, which now comprises 29-31 Phoenix Street, by 1890. A pair of semi-detached brick residences, of five rooms each, was first rated in late 1890 on the land immediately adjacent to the Sallows' residence. Considering their creative but rather unusual design, it is likely that engineer Sallows designed them. The pair of brick houses is shown in the MMBW Detail Plan No. 954, dated 1895. The twin pair presumably had a standard floor plan with four main rooms, and a rear kitchen. Each house had an outdoor toilet on the rear boundary fence. In 1895, 29 Phoenix Street had the added refinements of a fernery and an aviary (MMBW Detail Plan No 954). A rear outbuilding at 33 Phoenix Street, identified in the City of Prahran Valuation field notebooks as workshops, extended past the line of the property boundary with 31 Phoenix Street, as seen in the MMBW Detail Plan.

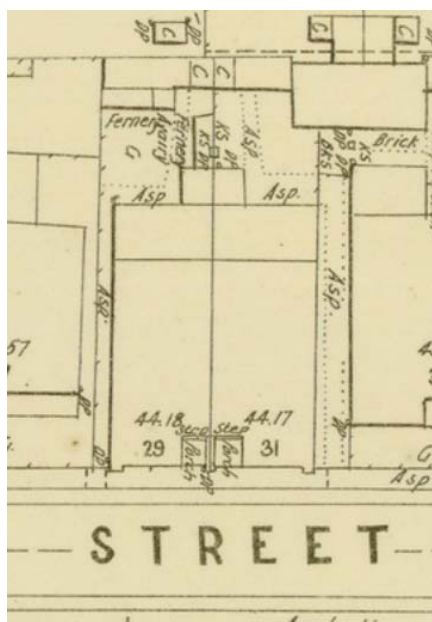


Figure 1. MMBW Detail Plan No 954, dated 1895 (source: SLV).

John Sallows owned 29, 31 and 33 Phoenix Street until his death in 1895, and the three properties appear to have remained on the same title for some time. Members of the Sallows family continued to occupy these addresses into the 1900s. John and Sarah's daughter, Marion Sallows, married railway employee Edward Melen in the early 1890s and they were living at 29 Phoenix Street by 1893 (Ancestry.com). In 1900, the occupants were Harry J White at No. 29 and Sarah Sallows at No. 31. In 1912, No. 31 Phoenix Street was occupied by Sarah Sallows, her son Alfred Sallows and Alfred's wife Lavinia Sallows.

Sources

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

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Macdonald, Elaine 1933, 'South Yarra: A suburb in retrospect', *Argus*, 14 October 1933, p.11.

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MMBW Detail Plan No. 954, City of Prahran, 1895.

Tibbits, George & Goad, Philip 'Terrace Houses' in Goad, Philip & Willis, Julie (eds) 2012, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press.

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Physical description

The semi-detached pair of bichrome brick dwellings at 29-31 Phoenix Street is an unusual and intact example of a late Victorian dwelling, with a transition to the materials popular in the Federation period. While small in size, the pair is distinguished by the abstracted pediment form of front parapets, which can be considered a version of the Federation Free Classical style.

The pair is built to the front property boundary, giving it a very inner urban form, in contrast to most of the other houses in Phoenix Street which are set back behind a modest garden, though all have minimal side setbacks reflecting the small blocks of this subdivision.

The front walls are of pressed red brick with cream brick dressings, both tuckpointed in Flemish bond. The raddling on the red bricks of the parapet has run down over time, tinting some of the cream bricks. The side walls are of lighter red bricks, jointed in a Colonial bond. Each dwelling has a main gable-fronted roof, clad in corrugated metal, over the primary building volume which is built of brick. Each has two red-brick chimneys to the primary volume, all four of which have lost their corbelled tops.

At the rear, each dwelling has an L-shaped timber lean-to containing the kitchen and bathroom. Judging from the 1895 MMBW plan (Detail Plan No. 954), this lean-to section is original, though the bathrooms have been extended westward to incorporate indoor toilets. The kitchen lean-tos share a tall chimney with a red-brick shaft and a bichrome corbelled top with a dog-tooth detail.

The front elevations of the two dwellings are mirror images, with the two recessed entrances at the centre of the composition and identical pediments. The facades have a regular pattern of round-headed arched openings, three to each dwelling. The outer two openings are arched windows with one-over-one double-hung sash windows with bluestone sills (overpainted). Abutting each other at the centre of the composition are the entrance arches which open onto small recessed porches.

The use of the two brick colours is lively and inventive. While red bricks are used for the majority of the wall face, cream bricks are employed to create detail. They are used as the upper part of the building plinth, as voussoirs and keystones to the arched openings, in diamond-shaped diaper patterns inside the porches, in a small diaper pattern below a stringcourse, as a cornice dividing the façade from the parapets, as short piers framing the parapets, and for the tympani of the raking pediments. Special moulded cream bricks are used to create more sophisticated architectural details such as the stringcourse, capitals of engaged pilasters, and as a cornice to the raking pediments. In keeping with the Victorian enthusiasm for ornament, several cast-cement elements have been added to the parapet, including scrolled corbels and chunky acroteria (or a shell design) to the outer edges of the parapet. Unlike the other detailing to the house, these are the sort of elements typically seen on the parapets of Boom-style terrace houses.

Apart from the bichrome brickwork and unusual pedimented parapet form, the third focus of unusual detail is the two entrance porches. Both retain rare timber gates with a curved top rail and infilled with slender timber dowels of two lengths with turned finials. It is similar in its form and detail to timber gates advertised by James Moore & Sons, Timber Merchants of South Melbourne, during the 1890s (National Trust Technical Bulletin: Fences & Gates, 1988:40).



Figure 2. Original timber gate to the entrance porch of No. 29. There is an identical one to No. 31. (source: Context 2016)

As noted above, there is a large diamond-shaped diaper pattern in cream bricks with the blind arches on the walls inside the porches, and both have a timber beaded lining board ceiling laid in contrasting diamond-shaped patterns.



Figure 3. Timber-lined ceiling of the entrance porch of No. 31. The ceiling to No. 29 is identical. (source: Context 2016)

Steps up to each entrance porch and to the front door within are of bluestone. Both retain an original four-panel door with fielded panels and bolection mouldings, typical of the late nineteenth century, and above it is a simple rectangular highlight window.

Comparative analysis

The terraced house form was introduced from Britain and characterises inner suburban development from the 1850s and 1890s in Australia's capital cities. A terrace house is defined as a dwelling with blind boundary walls, designed to fit on a narrow building block. While the most common type of terrace house in Melbourne is the terrace row, of three or more houses sharing party walls, the terrace house was also built in pairs (semi-detached) and even singly where more space was available (Tibbits & Goad 2012:695).

The very earliest terrace houses, in early suburbs such as Fitzroy, followed the British model and did not have a front verandah. As this form was adapted to the hotter Australian climate, timber-framed verandahs were added at ground floor level (even for two and three-storey houses). From the 1860s to the 1890s, a distinctive Australian terrace idiom emerged, embellished with cement decoration and full-height verandahs employing cast-iron posts, balustrades, and decorative brackets and frieze (Tibbits & Goad 2012:695-7).

Almost all Victorian terraces could be described as Italianate in style, though some lean toward the more substantial Renaissance Revival. There are also a very small number of Gothic Revival examples.

The prevalence of attached housing types is very clearly related to the subdivision and settlement patterns of the different suburbs. For example, all terrace rows assessed in the Victorian Houses Heritage Study are located in Windsor. While Windsor had by far the densest nineteenth-century development in Stonnington, inner-suburban South Yarra also had a number of semi-detached terrace house pairs, which was an intermediate density. Further to the east, in Armadale and Malvern, as well as Windsor and South Yarra, we see large single terrace houses on wider blocks with space between them. While not attached, they were often built in rows.

The semi-detached terrace pair at 29-31 Phoenix Street is one of a number of Victorian houses of this type in the medium-density development of South Yarra. Its lack of a front setback, however, is more typical of Victorian terrace housing in inner suburbs such as Fitzroy and Carlton, as is the use of a recessed front porch instead of an attached front verandah. Among other Significant Victorian houses in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, two other examples were identified: the single terrace house at 2 Anchor Place, Prahran (Significant in HO126) and the terrace row at 2-6 Northcote Road, Armadale (Significant in HO400). Both are immediately adjacent to commercial areas so adopt a similar high-density form. Both of these examples are two-storey houses with a recessed arcaded verandah to the ground floor only, have rendered walls and detail, and can be described as typically Italianate in their architectural expression.

As noted in the overview of the terrace house form in Australia, the pair at 29-31 Phoenix Street was constructed at the tail end of the dominance of this form, though semi-detached housing continued to be popular in the early years of the twentieth century with more three-dimensional massing. Indicative of its late date for this house type, the pair is very unusual in not adopting the Italianate style. While the pair does display classically inspired detail, such as the round-arched openings, keystones, pilasters, and abstracted raking pediment form, it does so in an original and creative way, relatively unhindered by academic precedent. While a somewhat naïve design, likely the work of its owner engineer John H Sallows, it is related in some ways to the Free Classical style.

As defined by Apperley et al (1989:104-7), Federation Free Classical style was seen in Australia around 1890 to 1915, and was a continuation of the Victorian Free Classical style (1850s-1890). The style often refers to buildings with a stripped version of classicism, which ignored strict academic rules regarding proportions and the Orders. The style was seen across Australia, used for commercial and institutional buildings as well as houses.

The pedimented parapets of the semi-detached pair in Phoenix Street are quite unlike those of other Significant houses in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay, but in their unusual form can be compared to another terrace-type houses with a distinctive parapet. The most comparable in size and level of architectural pretension is Cavan Villa of 1885 at 37 McIlwrick Street,

Windsor (Significant in HO138). Below parapet level it is a fairly standard single-fronted terrace house with a standard pattern of bichrome brick (Hawthorn browns and creams), while above is a tall ogee-profile parapet of face brick which appears to be an abstracted Boom-style parapet.



Figure 4. 37 McIlwrick Street, Windsor – Significant in HO138 (source: Google Streetview).

Another comparison can be made with retail buildings of the late Victorian and early Edwardian period with abstracted Italianate forms. A similar example is seen in the City of Yarra, where a row of two storey shops at 246-250 Johnston Street, Abbotsford, of c1910, have a similar abstracted triangular pediment and the same use of pressed red brick that characterises this period. Their architectural expression is much simpler, without the extensive cream brick detailing, and their ground-floor shopfronts have all been replaced.

The gates to the recessed front porches are also rare and other surviving examples are not known. There is a high-end version of turned-timber detail in the form of an intricate turned timber balustrade to the pair of grand, architect-designed semi-detached terrace houses at 3-5 Mercer Street, Armadale (HO327) of 1890-91. This pair is a class above in its architectural sophistication, but is also distinguished by fine Jacobean style parapets.

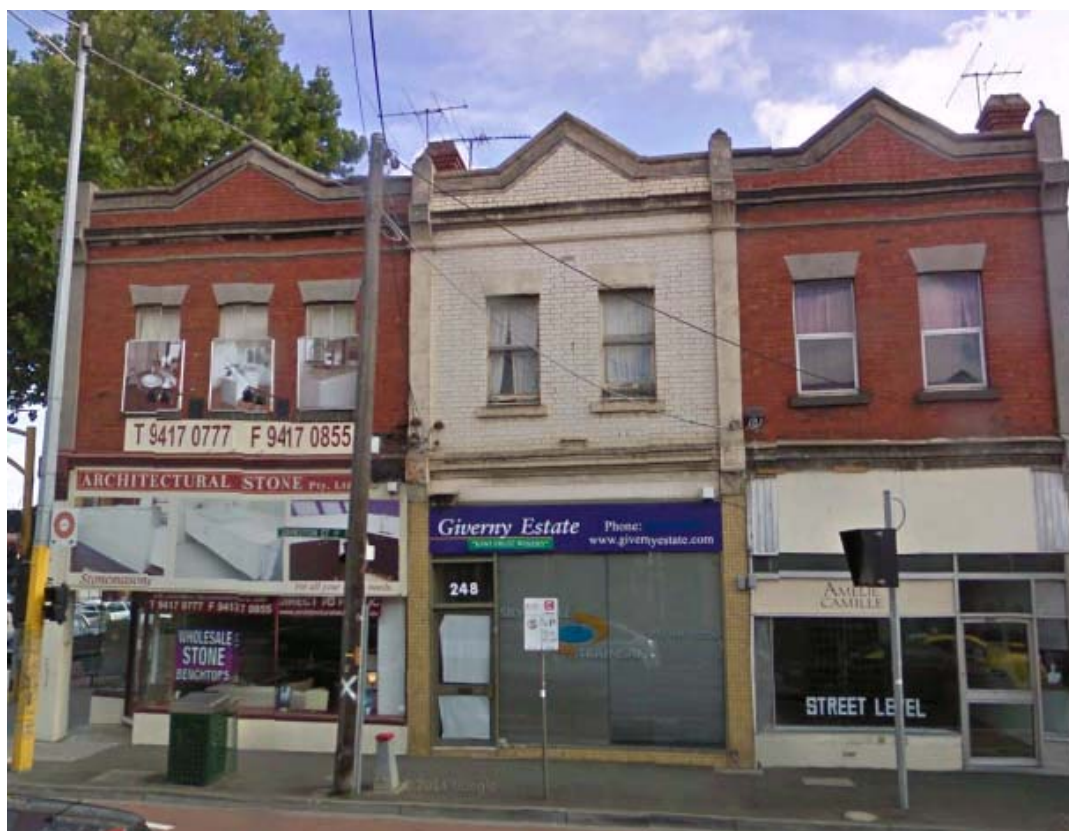


Figure 5. Shops at 246-250 Johnston Street, Abbotsford, with a similar abstracted classical parapet (source: Google Streetview).

In conclusion, the semi-detached terrace pair at 29-31 Phoenix Street uses abstracted classical forms, in a naïve version of the Free Classical style, in a palette of materials typical of the Federation period (particularly the pressed red brick). They are highly unusual among dwellings in the City of Stonnington both for their inner-urban form, built to the front boundary, and even more so for the abstracted pedimented parapet and high level of detail created with plain and special (moulded) cream bricks. The retention of fine-grained detail, such as the timber entrance gates, is also unusual.

Thematic context

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

8.4.2 *Functional, eccentric & theatrical - experimentation & innovation in architecture*

8.5.1 *'Struggletown' - working-class housing in the nineteenth & early twentieth century*

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 semi-detached pair of houses at 29-31 Phoenix Street, South Yarra, is significant. The houses were built for owner John H Sallows in 1890 as rental properties. Sallows was an engineer, and the likely designer of their naïve though creative and lively architectural expression.

The front walls are of pressed red brick with cream brick dressings, both tuckpointed in Flemish bond. The facades have a regular pattern of round-headed arched openings, three to each dwelling; the central openings to recessed entrance porches. Abstracted classical forms, including keystones, engaged pilasters and raking pediments are created mainly with cream bricks, many of them with moulded profiles.

The two dwellings are highly intact, retaining all elements and details of the facades and entrance porches. The only external alteration noted is the shortening of the four front chimneys.

The dwellings are significant to the extent of their 1890 fabric. While the 1890 timber lean-tos at the rear are secondary, utilitarian spaces, the intact corbelled chimney shared by the two kitchens is particularly significant as the only surviving intact chimney.

How is it significant?

The semi-detached pair of houses at 29-31 Phoenix Street is of local aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

Aesthetically, the semi-detached terrace pair is significant for its abstracted classical forms, in a naïve version of the Free Classical style, in a palette of materials typical of the Federation period (particularly the pressed red brick). They are highly unusual among dwellings in the City of Stonnington both for their inner-urban form, built to the front boundary, and even more so for the abstracted pedimented parapet and high level of detail created with cream bricks. The use of the two colours of bricks is lively and inventive, particularly the use of moulded cream bricks to create classical capitals and cornices, combined with a more medieval use of decorative diaper patterns. The retention of fine-grained detail, such as the timber entrance gates and diamond-patterned timber porch ceilings, is also unusual. (Criteria B & E)

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay to the extent of the two properties as defined by their title boundaries.

HO Schedule controls: Fence & outbuilding controls – Gates to entrance porches

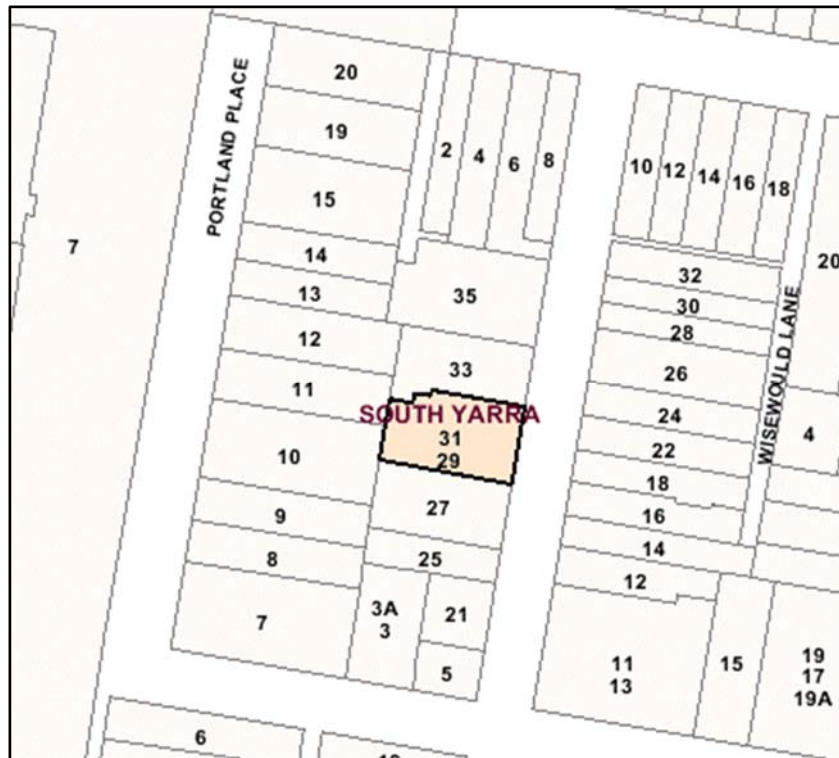


Figure 6: Recommended extent of heritage overlay for 29-31 Phoenix Street, South Yarra (source: www.land.vic.gov.au)

Recommended grading: A2