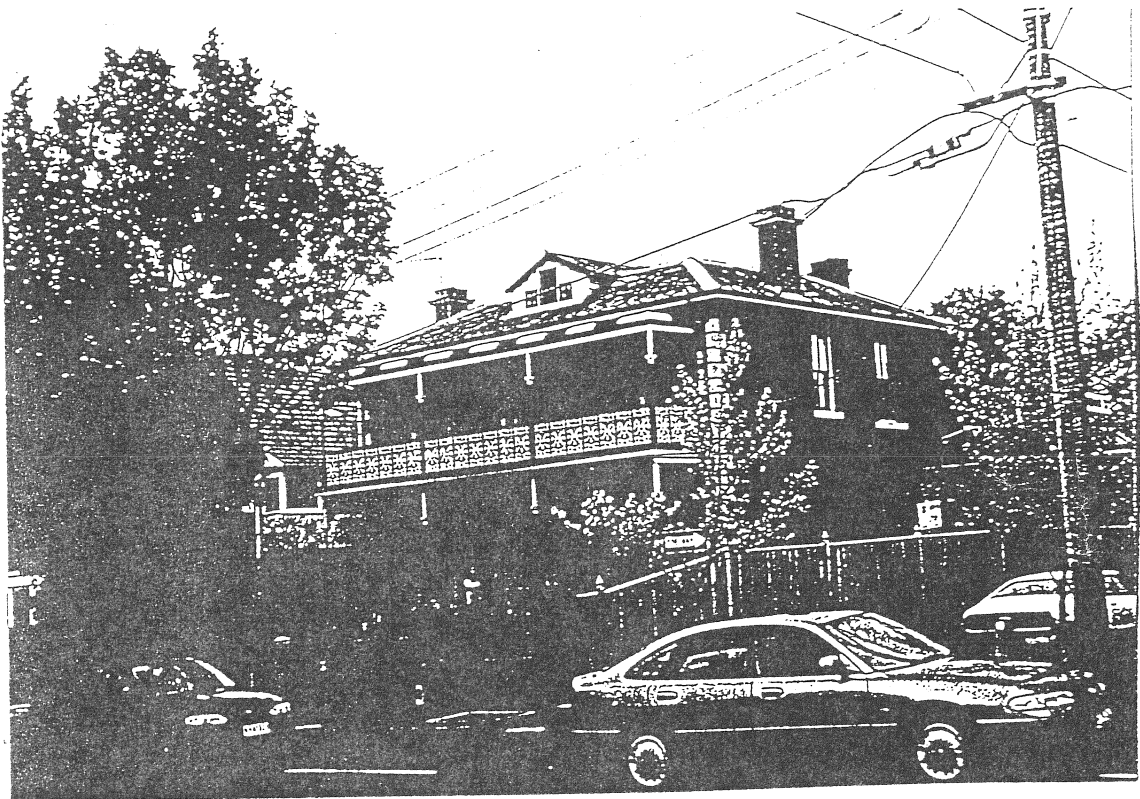


Williams Road Proposed Conservation Area



October 1998

WILLIAMS ROAD PRAHRAN

INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd in association with Di Foster, historian, in support of a proposed amendment to the local planning scheme which will create an urban conservation area centered on Williams Road, Prahran. The report builds on work carried out by Nigel Lewis for the City of Prahran in the *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*, 1992, and Context Pty Ltd in the *City of Prahran Conservation Review*, 1993.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the area be protected as an Urban Conservation Area under the Stonnington Planning Scheme and be nominated to the Register of the National Estate.

EXTENT OF PROPOSED URBAN CONSERVATION AREA

The proposed Urban Conservation Area comprises two unconnected building groups, including the land and buildings described in the attached map (Illustration 1) and schedule (Appendix).

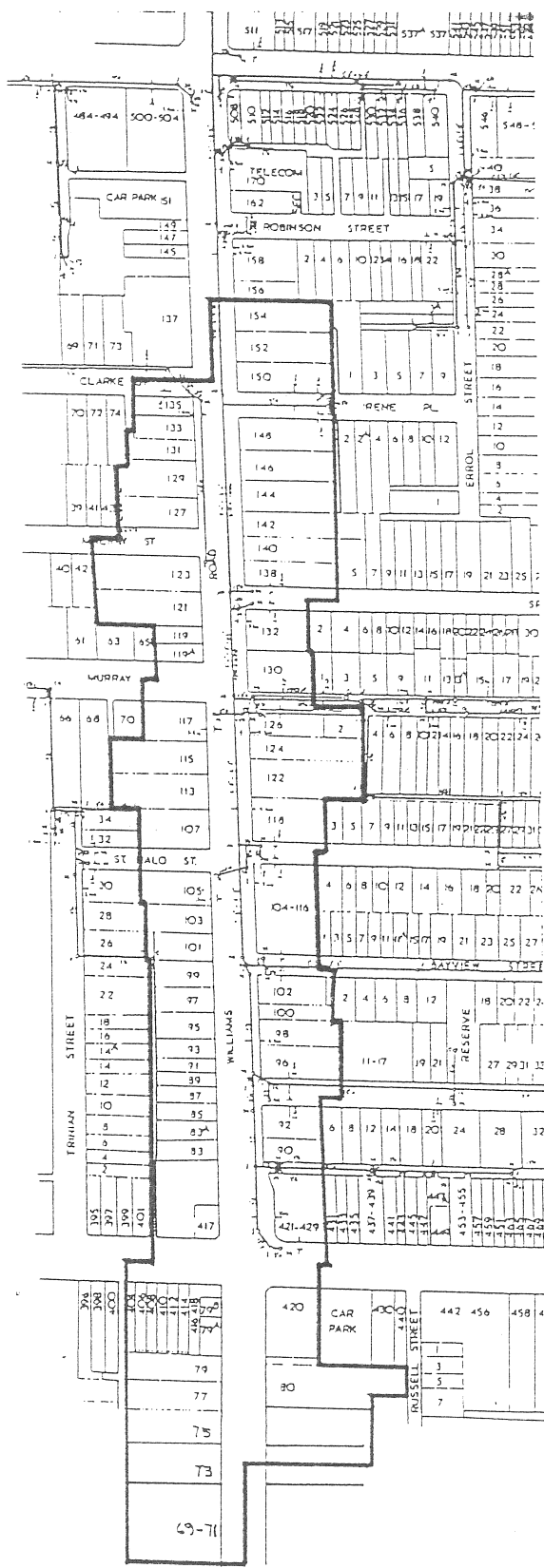


Illustration 1 Proposed Conservation Area, southern section.

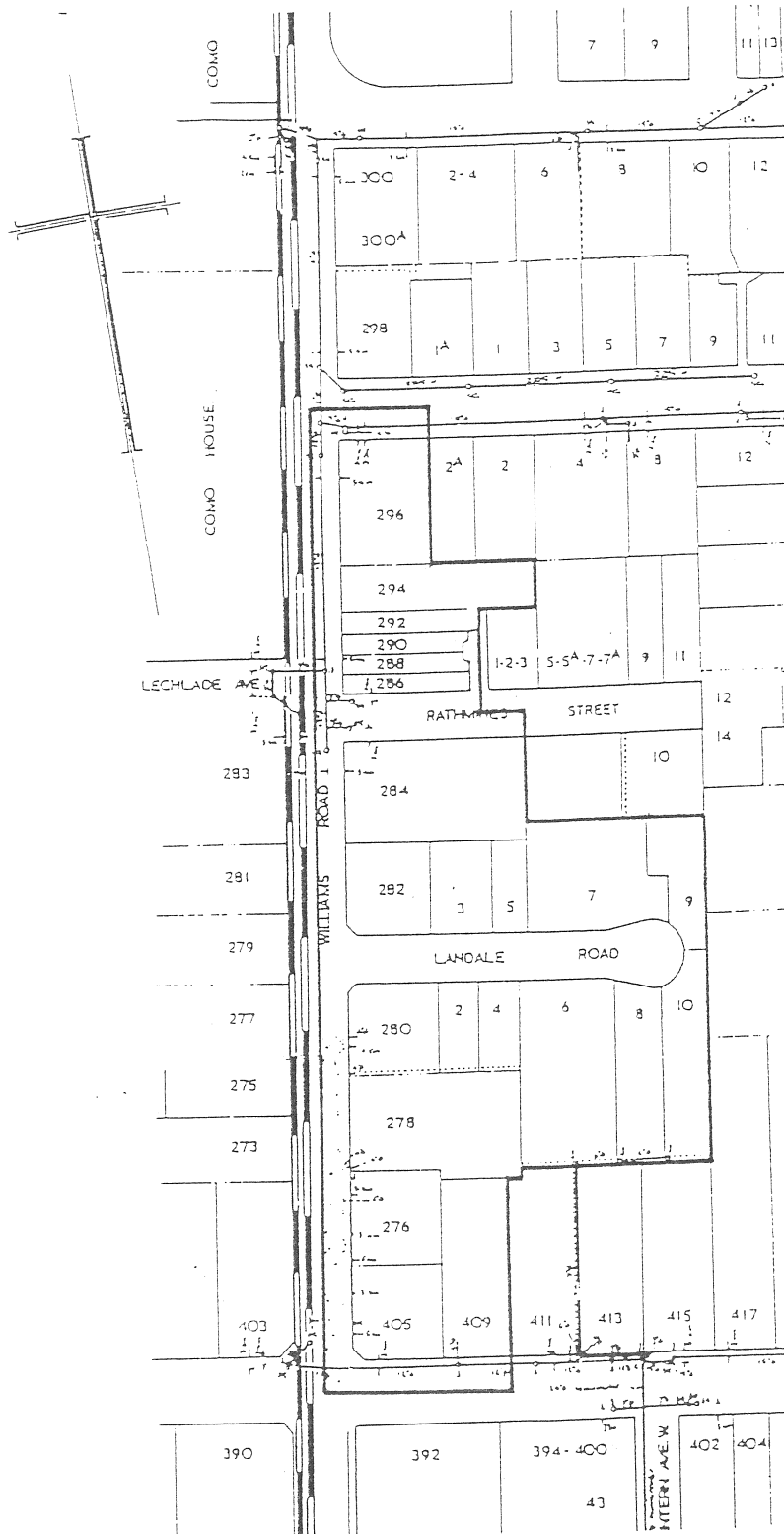


Illustration 2 Proposed Conservation Area, northern section

HISTORY

At the first Crown land sales in June 1840, land to the north of Toorak Road to the Yarra, between Williams Road and Grange Road, was sold as three allotments. Lot 13 from Williams Road to the line of Wallace Avenue, which included 60 acres was sold to Jane Hill for £7 an acre. Lot 13 sold cheaply because of the swamp at the northern end. This marshland has been well drained and part is now the property of the Royal South Yarra Tennis Club.¹

Lots 13 and 14 were soon to form part of a family holding. Jane Hill was the daughter of David Hill, who was one of the first to run animals on this part of Prahran. He had transported his family and possessions from New South Wales and lived for a time in a small hut near the swamp. Jane retained the western half of Lot 13 and sold the eastern half to R. A. Balbirnie.² Both Balbirnie and Jane Hill settled on the river slopes - Jane, who married James Glover, a fellow pastoralist, lived at Mt. Verdant and Balbirnie and his family were close by at his large estate, Balmerino. In the 1850s Balbirnie began subdividing the 103 acres that comprised the Balmerino estate, reserving some of the best blocks for his children.

South of Bruce Street, a grid of streets was set out and blocks were sold along Grange Road, Wallace Avenue, Jackson, Andrew (now Douglas), Washington and George (now Bruce) Streets. Fourteen allotments on Gardiners Creek Road between Grange Road and Wallace Avenue completed this subdivision. Kearney's plan of 1855 shows land in Williams Road was undeveloped.

In 1869 police magistrate, James Blair³, built Greenmount, a fine mansion on six acres of land at the corner of Williams Road and Toorak Road. In 1884, Alexander Landale, a successful pastoralist from the Deniliquin area, purchased Greenmount and used the mansion for his town house.⁴ Landale renamed the house Arcona⁵, which was set well back from both main roads at the north end of the property.

In 1881 land between Bruce Street and Greenmount was subdivided, creating thirty-eight building allotments and forming Rathmines Street.⁶ Ten of the allotments had frontages to Williams Road. In 1889-1890, Royal Terrace, a group of four two storey brick and stucco balcony terraces, were built in Williams Road (286-292) on the north corner of Rathmines Street. The buildings were built as an

1 Betty Malone Prahran section 9, unpublished manuscript.

2 Malone.

3 *Argus*, 24 November, 1869 p.3 & *Building Times*, 17 December, 1869, p. 93. Miles Lewis Architectural Index.

4 Malone.

5 E. M. Robb, *Early Toorak & district*, p.86.

6 Subdivision plan of part of Crown Portion 13, Parish of Prahran at Toorak, 22 October 1881. Prahran Archives.

investment for Daniel McAuslan, custom clerk.⁷ The 1895 plan shows Royal Terrace and two villas to the north, Wentworth and Waratah, between Washington Street and Rathmines Street. Wentworth at 294 Williams Road, was built in 1886 for civil servant, William Rankin Lemon. Solicitor, E.E. Keep, occupied the building 1892-99.⁸ Although building allotments were proposed for both sides of Rathmines Street, the 1895 MMBW plan indicates that the land remained vacant and Aroona retained its original estate.

Following the death of Mrs Landale, Aroona Estate was subdivided in the 1920s, the mansion was demolished, Landale Road was created and Aroona's coachhouse and stables were converted to a house in Rathmines Road. The estate created building allotments in Williams Road, Toorak Road and Landale Road. Architect Arnaud Wright purchased land in Landale Road, including the allotment that was developed as number 8 Landale Road. In Toorak Road, Wright owned the allotment to the west of Pemberley, the home of the Rupert Green family.⁹ Architect Robert Hamilton also purchased land in Landale Road and in 1932 he built houses at numbers 2 and 4.¹⁰ Also in Landale Road on lot 11, a house, 3 Landale Road, was built for Lily Landale. In 1933, at the corner of Toorak and Williams Road, Kings Lynn, a two-storey complex of four apartments, was built to the design of architect P. J. O'Connor.¹¹



Illustration 3 Victorian Terrace, Williams Road

- 7 Royal Terrace 286-292 Williams Road, National Trust Register.
 8 Wentworth, 294 Williams Road. National Trust citation.
 9 City of Prahran rate book, Toorak Ward, 1929-30, nos. 981, 998 & 990.
 10 City of Prahran rate book, Toorak Ward, 1932-3, nos. 997 & 998.
 11 MMBW drainage plan, no. 192209.

The history of the southern precinct under consideration is parallel but distinct. This section of Williams Road forms the boundary between Crown allotments 44 and 45, which sold at the sale of Crown lands in 1849. Lot 45, extending east from Williams Road to about the line of Lorne Road, was purchased by G.A. Robinson, Protector of Aborigines. Lot 44 to the west, was purchased by speculator, Robert A. Balbirnie of Balmerino, Toorak (discussed above).¹²

Robinson, the owner of Tivoli on the banks of the Yarra, returned to England in 1852 and his extensive land holdings in and around Melbourne, including the land at Prahran, were gradually subdivided and sold off. Balbirnie's Paddock was first put up for sale in February, 1851. Two early purchasers were S. Dawborn, who ran the Bluebell Store in Chapel Street and James Moyle, the organ builder, who lived opposite in High Street, Windsor. Trinian Street began as a row of small cottages grouped close to a little Wesleyan chapel and school house. The 1856 ratebook lists the school in Williams Road.¹³

Kearney's map of 1855 shows that both lots 44 and 45 had been subdivided by the mid-1850s and that more than half had been cleared of timber and scrub. The area was laid out in narrow streets and small building allotments. This scattering of dwellings, stores and small farms formed the nucleus for future development between the two local inns, the Mount Erica Hotel and the Bush Inn. The area at the northern end of lot 45 however, remained largely undeveloped and wooded.¹⁴

Land close to High Street was known as Balbirnie's Paddock. Most of the landholders were on small holdings where they grew fruit, vegetables and grain. Closer to Malvern Road was Clarke's Paddock which in 1856 was home to a number of families.¹⁵

Rapid expansion followed the gold rush era and the pattern of small detached weatherboard houses was established in the narrow streets. In the 1870s, when a railway line to Oakleigh was mooted, the vacant lots began to find ready buyers and houses soon lined the little streets. As the main road, Williams Road boasted the largest houses, including several doctors' surgeries. The 1895 MMBW plan shows Williams Road with substantial single and double storey detached houses.

According to local historian Betty Malone, 92 Williams Road was a large brick building with a warehouse and stables behind, occupied by the Todd family. From about 1920 Mr Todd was a lorry-driver for the local industry Rinoldi Macaroni, and the house, which was owned by his employers was rented to him cheaply. The lorry, horses and stores were all housed on the allotment. During the second

12 Betty Malone, sections 7 & 11, unpublished manuscripts, Prahran Archives.

13 Malone.

14 James Kearney. *Map of Melbourne and its suburbs*, 1855.

15 Malone.

World War, the Todd family moved out and the building became a scout hall.¹⁶ Rinoldi Spaghetti factory was founded in 1894, at first in a factory off Williams Road, and later in Aberdeen Street.¹⁷

East Leigh College was situated on the south east corner of Malvern Road and Williams Road where Mrs Elizabeth Tripp operated a small school for girls in the 1860s. In 1895 J.H. Laing, a former State School Inspector, became headmaster of the school which was renamed Prahran College. Laing's daughters, the Misses Janet, Annie, and Margaret Laing, ran Prahran College until the 1930s.¹⁸ The mansion on the corner of Williams Road and Malvern Road has been replaced by commercial development whereas most of the eastern side of Williams Road remains as an area where prominent and imposing Victorian terraces are located, as well as detached single storey villas.¹⁹

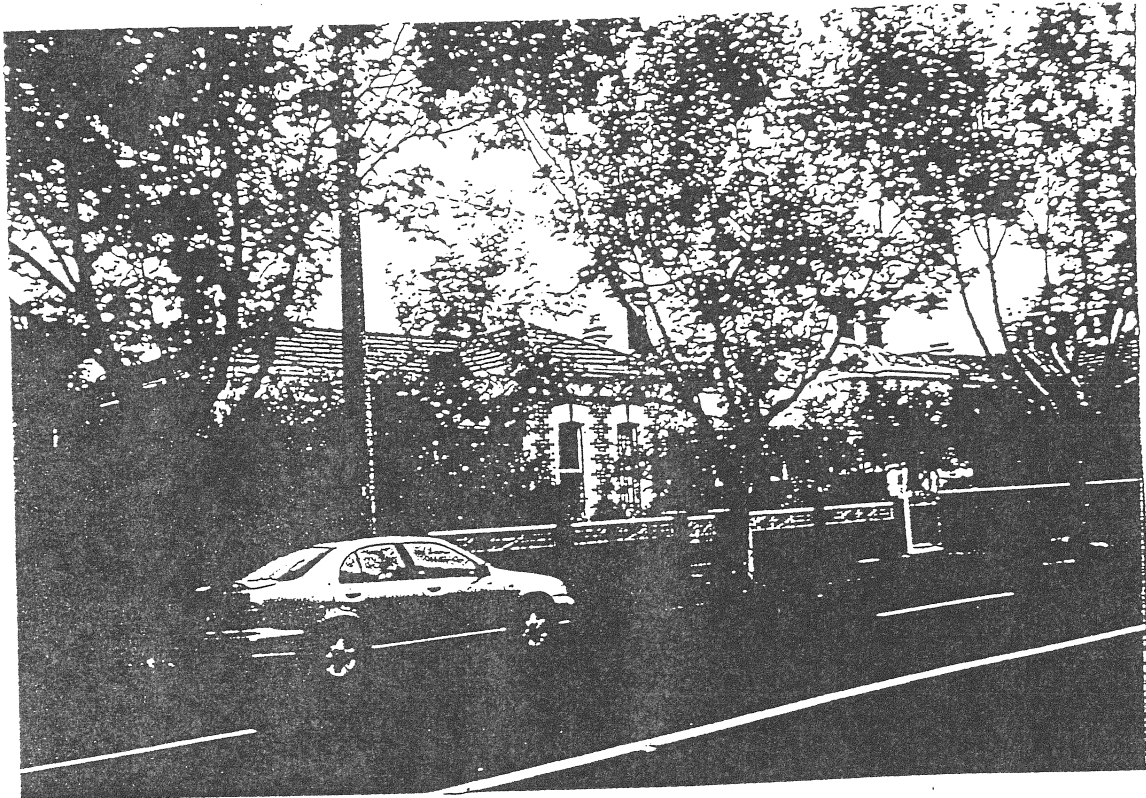


Illustration 4 Houses, Williams Road.

DESCRIPTION

Williams Road springs from the north side of Dandenong Road and is the major thoroughfare between Chapel Street and Orrong Road. It is an important suburban artery, facilitating the movement of traffic between the MacRobertson and Swan Street bridges over the Yarra and the south eastern suburbs. It is

- 16 Context, Pty. Ltd. 'Conservation Review, City of Prahran, vol. 3. 1993, p. 99.
17 Sally Wilde, *The history of Prahran. 1925-1990.* p. 150.
18 Malone.
19 Context Pty. Ltd., p. 99.

subject to high traffic volumes at all times of the day but becomes especially congested during the morning and evening peaks. The area under consideration is predominantly located between and about the busy intersections of Malvern Road and High Street however a second group of buildings located to the north and centred on the intersection of Williams Road and Landale Road is also included.

Williams Road is paved in bitumen with bitumen footpaths and concrete crossovers. The process of road widening has largely eroded the early character of the roadway although efforts have been made to conserve the original bluestone kerbs. In the southern section grass verges no longer exist but Plane trees, set into the footpath alongside timber power poles, provide a dense canopy above this otherwise barren streetscape. The northern section is more hospitable with wider roads and well maintained nature strips which combine with the generous gardens associated with Como House to produce a more spacious streetscape.

The building stock in the area falls broadly into three categories. Remnants of the earliest building stock include the Mount Erica Hotel, a simple two storey building, Chayle, an Italianate mansion, impressive terraces such as those at 131-135 Williams Road (a group unusual for its corner turrets), 100-102 Williams Road and 286-292 Williams Road, and a number of large freestanding two-storey residences such as 78, 80 and 118 Williams Road, which feature elaborate lacework to original verandahs.

Other Victorian building stock tends to be less substantial. Large numbers of assymetrical villas drawing inspiration from Italianate sources are found throughout the area and survive in long unbroken sequences on the east side of Williams Road north of Spring Street and on the west side of Williams Road south of High Street. The consistency of the northern group suggests that they may be the work of a single builder.

The remainder of the residential stock generally comprises later Edwardian and interwar houses. This group includes the notable blocks of interwar flats at 405 and 409 Toorak Road and a number of impressive interwar residences in and around Landale Road.

Houses in Williams Road exist in varying states of repair and integrity. Few visible additions have occurred and modifications typically take the form of new roof and window materials. In the face of increased traffic volumes, residents have tended towards the construction of large brick fences which, tend to mask the early character of the area. This is especially true in the southern section of the proposed conservation area where long, unbroken sections of high walling occurs. In the post war years, a number of new and unsympathetic developments have taken place which also threaten to overwrite the historic character of the area. These predominantly take the form of multi-storey flats such as those

found at 105, 107, 130, 132 Williams Road. This trend continues today with three storey block recently completed at 113 Williams Road. The northern section has suffered less from this type of intrusive development.

ANALYSIS

The two precincts which make up the proposed urban conservation areas represent two groups of fine and typical buildings. While heterogeneous in character and period, with stock dating from the Federation and interwar periods alongside the predominant Victorian buildings, they consistently achieve the standard of a level 2 streetscape, that is, a streetscape of regional or local significance because the character and scale of a particular period or style predominates, even though there may be some gaps, and in some cases the buildings may have a relatively low significance individually. In addition, there are a substantial number of buildings of individual interest. The areas as a whole retain much of their valued character and thus their significance in terms of their development up until the eve of the Second World War, and are representative of the pattern of development in the streets to either side of Williams Road.

Since the areas were last evaluated in 1993 there have been several improvements in amenity, with the demolition of three petrol service stations in or adjacent to the proposed precincts and redevelopment with unit housing of a scale and general character sympathetic to the historic values of the road and a much higher quality than that evident in the 1960s and 1970s building stock.

It is also noteworthy that each precinct intermeshes with another, existing urban conservation area. The northern precinct is contiguous with the Como urban conservation area, which takes in the contributory properties on the west side of Williams Road between Toorak Road and Como. This precinct also includes a higher proportion of post-Federation, interwar houses than the southern precinct, complementing the post-Federation and interwar stock found in the Como estate area. The southern portion intersects with the extant Hawksburn shopping precinct urban conservation area. The relationship with these existing areas not only reinforces the significance of the areas currently proposed, but also explains the reason for not encompassing the already protected properties within the present report.

High fences now seem inevitable and largely consistent within Williams Road, especially for the smaller houses with minimal setbacks from the footpath. This has had some detrimental impact upon the character of the street, but has not been fatal to its overall significance. Several exceptions see large houses retaining their open cast and wrought iron fences, and retention of these into the future is to be encouraged.

The areas along Williams Road which have been left out of the proposed areas are generally less consistent in the retention of pre-World War Two building stock, and are separated from the proposed precincts by groups of unsympathetic postwar flats.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The proposed urban conservation areas to Williams Road are significant in their illustration of the fine building stock which developed in and graced this street in the period up to the Second World War. They include substantial examples of Victorian, Federation and interwar building houses, terraces and flats. While the integrity of the street has suffered in the postwar period, the remaining buildings comprise a fine group and contain an number of buildings of individual significance and character.

REFERENCES

- City of Prahran rate books, Toorak Ward, 1929-36.
- Context, Pty. Ltd. 'Conservation Review, City of Prahran', vol. 3. 1993.
- James Kearney, *Map of Melbourne and its suburbs*, 1855.
- Miles Lewis, *Australian Architectural Index*.
- Nigel Lewis, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study*, 1992
- Betty Malone, Prahran section 9, unpublished manuscript, Prahran Archives.
- National Trust Register, Royal Terrace 286-292 Williams Road.
- National Trust citation Wentworth, 294 Williams Road.
- E. M. Robb, *Early Toorak & district*, 1934.
- Subdivision plan of part of Crown Portion 13, Parish of Prahran at Toorak, 22 October 1881,
Prahran Archives.
- Sally Wilde, *The history of Prahran. 1925-1990*, Melbourne University Press, 1993.

APPENDIX

SCHEDULE OF BUILDINGS, DESCRIPTIONS AND
RECOMMENDED GRADINGS

HIGH STREET

Street No. Grading

North Side

417	—	Double storey retail premises. c. 1990
421	—	Car lot with two storey building.

South Side

404-416	B	Double storey Federation retail premises.
420	A2	Double storey hotel. c. 1860

LANDALE ROAD

Street No. Grading

North Side

1	-	Vacant block.
3	-	Vacant block.
5-7	A2	Double storey interwar villa.
9	C	Double storey villa.

South Side

2-4	A2	Double storey interwar pair. Semi-detached.
6	B	Double storey interwar villa.
8	B	Double storey interwar villa.
10	C	Double storey villa. c. 1975.

TOORAK ROAD

Street No. Grading

North Side

405	A2	Double storey interwar flats.
409	B	Double storey interwar flats.

WILLIAMS ROAD

Street No. Grading

West Side (southern section)

69-71	B	Chayle. Double storey Victorian villa.
73	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
75	B	Single storey Victorian villa.

77	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
79	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
81	B/C	Double storey Federation shop. (418 High Street)

High Street

83	-	Single storey modern villa.
83A	B	Single storey Federation villa.
85	B	Single storey Federation villa.
87-91	B	Three single storey Federation terrace houses.
93	C	Single storey Victorian villa.
95	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
97	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
99	—	Double storey villa. c. 1997.
101	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
103	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
105	—	Two storey flats. c. 1960.

St Malo Street

107	—	Three storey flats.
113	—	Three storey flats.
115	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
117	C	Two storey Victorian villa.

Murray Street

119A/119	B	Single storey interwar villa. Semi detached.
121	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
123	B	Double storey interwar flats.

Mackay Street

127	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
129	C	Single storey Victorian villa.
131-135	A2	Three double storey Victorian terrace houses.

Clarke Street

Ungraded allotments, 137-151 Williams Road

Malvern Road - Existing Conservation Area

167-179	B	Two storey Victorian terrace.
---------	---	-------------------------------

Howitt Street

181	B	Two storey interwar flats.
185	B	Single storey Federation house.
187	B	Two storey Victorian house.
189	B	Two storey Victorian house.

Joy Street

191	B	Two storey interwar flats.
201	A1/A2	Two storey Federation house.
203	B	Two storey interwar flats.
205	B	Two storey interwar flats.
207	A2	Two storey late Federation offices.

Railway Bridge.

WILLIAMS ROAD

Street No. Grading

East Side (southern section)

78	A2	Double storey Victorian villa.
80	A2	Double storey Victorian villa.

High Street

90	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
92	A2	Single storey interwar Hall.
96	A2	Single storey Federation villa.
98	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
100-102	B	Pair of single storey Victorian terrace houses.

Bayview Street

104-116	C	Group of six double storey units. c. 1995.
---------	---	--

Pridham Street

118	A2	Double storey Victorian villa.
122	B	Double storey interwar flats.
124	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
126	B	Single storey Victorian villa.

Wrights Terrace

130	—	Three storey flats.
132	—	Four storey flats.

Spring Street

138	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
140	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
142	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
144	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
146	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
148	B	Single storey Victorian villa.

Irene Place

150	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
152	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
154	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
156-158	—	Three storey modern flats.
162	B	Two storey interwar offices.
164	—	Two storey modern offices.

Malvern Road - Existing Conservation Area

172	—	Modern townhouses.
186	B	Federation maisonettes.
188	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
190	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
192	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
194	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
196	B	Single storey Victorian villa.
200-210	A1	Two storey Victorian terrace.

212	B	Two storey Victorian shop.
214-218	A2	Two storey Victorian terrace.
218A	B	Single storey Victorian shop.

Railway Bridge

220	A2	Two storey Victorian house, 'Graeme'.
222	B	Two storey interwar flats.
222A	B	Single storey Federation house.
222B	B	Single storey Federation house.
222C	B	Single storey Federation house.

WILLIAMS ROAD

Street No. Grading

East Side (northern section)

276	C	The Boynes. Double storey flats.
276A	C	Double storey flats. c. 1965.
278	B	Double storey interwar villa.
280	A1	Kings Lynn. Double storey interwar flats.

Landale Road

282	A2	Vacant block.
284	A2	Park Manor. Double storey interwar flats.

Rathmines Street

286	A2	Double storey Victorian terrace.
288	A2	Double storey Victorian terrace.
290	A2	Double storey Victorian terrace.
292	A2	Double storey Victorian terrace.
294	A2	Single storey Victorian villa.
296	B/C	Single storey Victorian villa, somewhat altered.