
Rockley Urban Conservation Area [Area 5.2]

Extent

The Rockley Urban Conservation Area extends along the eastern side of Rockley Road and includes the head of the Rockley Road cul de sac and the walkway through to Alexandra Avenue and two properties on Alexandra Avenue which are not visible from Rockley Road itself.

History

Little Rockley was one of the four historic gentlemen's houses built on elevated sites overlooking the Yarra River purchased in the early 1840 sale of Prahran land.⁶⁶ Those properties were located on large allotments stretching back from the river to Toorak Road. The other historic houses in this precinct, bounded on the west by Chapel Street and on the east by Williams Road were Tivoli, Bona Vista and Como.⁶⁷

Although subdivision of the Bona Vista and Tivoli Estates began in the 1880s,⁶⁸ subdivision of the Rockley area did not occur until after the turn of the century. The old homestead is shown on an 1895 MMBW drainage plan standing within extensive grounds.

An auction plan dated 11 April 1908 shows the subdivision of the Howey Estate, named after the Howey family who owned the property from the 1840s.⁶⁹ Rockley Road was created as a prestigious residential area with public gardens on either side of the entrance from Toorak Road as a special design feature. Allotments advertised at this time were described as 'grand residential sites' with 'Magnificent Views from the Northern Lots'. Five allotments on either side of Rockley Road at the Toorak Road end had been sold already for public gardens. An area along by the river was already reserved for Alexandra Avenue.⁷⁰

In 1913, a further subdivision of the Rockley area led to demolition of the old homestead and the extension of Rockley Road by a narrow 'road' (now a walkway) connecting it with Alexandra Avenue. The steps which link Rockley Road to Alexandra Avenue today may date from this time.⁷¹ An examination of the later Lodged Plan 8608 might provide further information about this linkage and the extension of Alexandra Avenue in the 1920s.⁷²

Today, Rockley Road retains its impressive park entrance created c1908 and its 1913 linkage with Alexandra Avenue. Residential buildings in the area date from the pre-World War One and inter-war period and include houses in the late Edwardian and Arts and Crafts styles to early modern flats.⁷³

66. George Tibbits, *History of Prahran*, pp. 25, 26

67. James Kearney, *Map of Melbourne and Its Suburbs*, 1855

68. Betty Malone, *From Como House to Como City*, pp. 4, 8

69. Betty Malone, *From Como House to Como City*, p.5

70. The Howey Estate, South Yarra, 11 April 1908. Vale Plan Vol. 8 p.51

71. Lodged Plan 6445. Plan of Subdivision of Part of Crown Portion 9. Parish of Prahran

72. Sally Wilde, *The History of Prahran 1925-1990*, pp. 24-30.

73. Nigel Lewis & Associates, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study 1992*, p.26.

Description

The Rockley Road Urban Conservation Area dates from the subdivision of the Rockley Estate in 1908 being subsequently developed for housing. In recent years the southern end of the street has been redeveloped for flats.

Rockley Urban Conservation Area is a residential locality characterised by the street plantings of large Plane trees which integrate the diverse elements within the streetscape. Much of the street is not proposed as an urban conservation area and primarily comprises flats developed from the 1960s and 70s. A group of inter-war houses remains along the eastern side and northern end of Rockley Road, creating an interesting grouping that reflects the architectural styles and tastes of the period. While few of these houses may be individually significant, they represent the sole remaining section of the development that characterised Rockley Road after its subdivision. The Urban Conservation Area is located on the crest of the hill with the landform sloping gently away to the north, towards the river and to the south, toward Toorak Road.

A public walkway, down a series of concrete steps links the northern end of Rockley Road to Alexandra Avenue, an unusual feature in a Melbourne subdivision, although common along the Sydney Harbour foreshore. While only a small portion of Rockley Road is considered of significance, the Plane trees form an important link between this area and Toorak Road. The entry to Rockley Road from Toorak Road is flanked by two parks associated with the 1908 subdivision and overlain with subsequent plantings more typical of the post second World War period.

The dominant character of Rockley Road is created by the landform and the enclosing avenue of Plane trees. However within the urban conservation area the qualities of the architecture add a new and valuable element. The houses within the urban conservation area are all detached on large allotments. While diverse in style, ranging from buildings influenced by the Arts and Crafts style, later interpretations of Edwardian period, English Domestic Revival styles and early modern architecture, the area serves to illustrate and demonstrate the diversity of architecture that was popular during the early twentieth century period.

Heritage characteristics

The heritage characteristics of the Rockley Urban Conservation Area are:

- the high quality and diverse architectural examples of the inter-war and pre-First World War period which reflect the history of the development and subdivision of the Little Rockley (later Howey) estate
- the enclosing avenue of Planes which links the Toorak Road parkland entry to the significant portion at the northern end of Rockley Road
- the consistent residential character comprising detached houses set on large garden allotments
- the unusual linking of Rockley Road with Alexandra Avenue by means of a pedestrian walkway and the contribution of the gardens that abut this walkway to the character of the walkway

- the overall scale and width of the street, and the position of the urban conservation area on the crest of a hill.

Analysis

The extent of the area to the south appears inappropriate. The strongest grouping is to No. 36 and the area appears to include 28, 30 and 32 as well as flats at 34. Certainly 28 and 30 do not contribute except in overall form and scale. These properties may have been seen by the previous consultants as a small 'buffer'. No 'buffer' is provided on the west side of the street. Both properties on Alexandra Avenue are of no apparent significance but have been included presumably to provide a 'buffer' to the walkway.

By contrast the properties abutting the walkway off Rockley Road are important contributors. The Prahran Character Area included some portions of Rockley Road south and the two parks. Certainly the parks, the trees, and the view south to the library are important elements in the experience of visiting this street. However, extending the UC1 Area to Toorak Road would be inappropriate.

Significance

Rockley Urban Conservation Area has significance for its high quality and diverse pre-World War One and inter-war housing, subdivision design with walkway to Alexandra Avenue and the river, and avenue of large Plane trees which combine to form a coherent precinct. It illustrates the process of the transformation of the early estates along the river into a prestigious residential area. Architecturally, Rockley Urban Conservation Area represents the stylistic developments in the early years of the twentieth century as applied to substantial detached houses.

Sources

The Howey Estate, South Yarra, 11 April 1908. Vale Plan Vol. 8 p.51.

Kearney, James, *Map of Melbourne and Its Suburbs*, 1855.

Nigel Lewis & Associates, *Prahran Character and Conservation Study 1992*, p.26.

Lodged Plan 6445. Plan of Subdivision of Part of Crown Portion 9. Parish of Prahran.

Malone, Betty, *'From Como House to Como City'*, 1989, pp. 4, 5, 8.

Tibbits, George, *History of Prahran*, pp. 25-26.

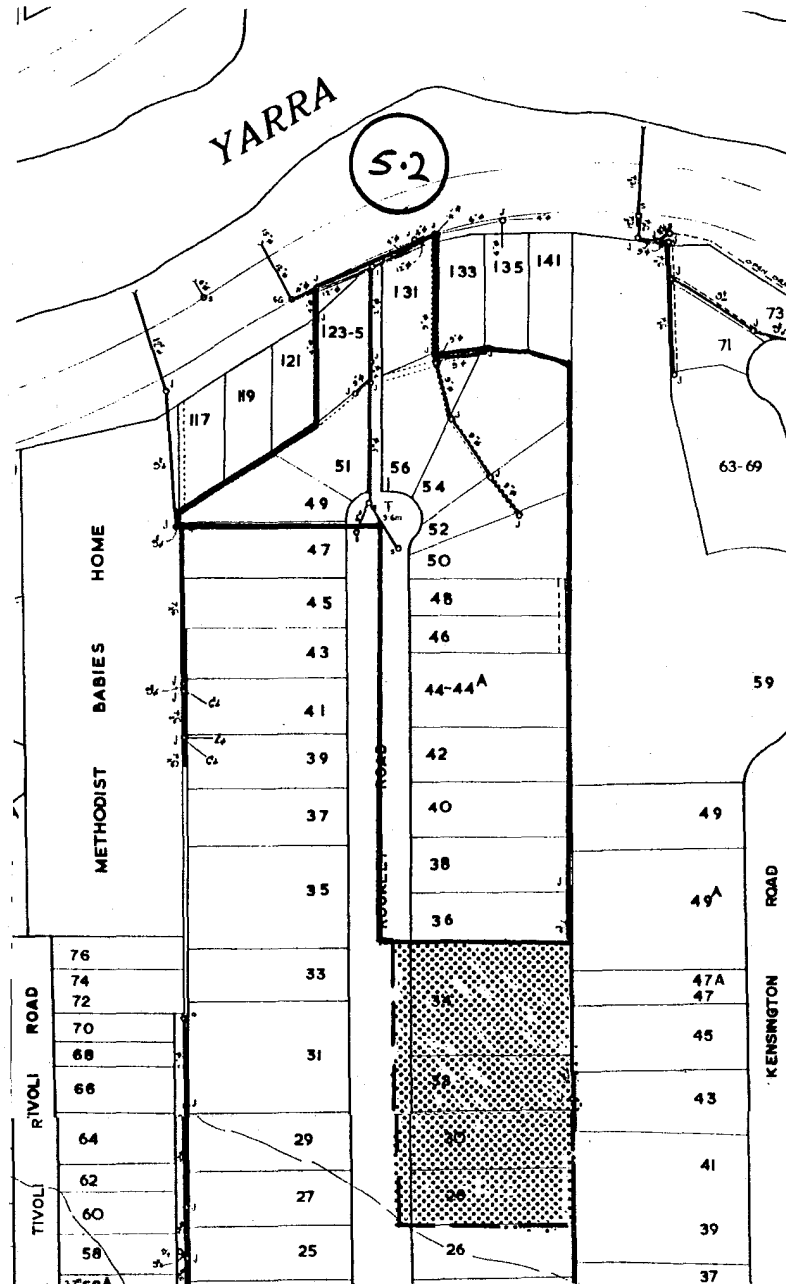
Wilde, Sally, *History of Prahran 1925-1990*, 1993, pp. 24-30.

Recommendations




1. Adopt the UC1 Area as exhibited with the exclusion of the (four) properties south of the southern boundary of no. 36 Rockley Road.

Map

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Legend

-  Recommended UC1 Area
-  Remove from UC1 Area proposed in Amendment L24
-  Possible future extension

NOTE: Where UC1 Area proposed in Am. L24 coincides with the Recommended UC1 Area, only the latter is shown.