WHY IS STONNINGTON SIGNIFICANT?
INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the Statement of Significance for the City of Stonnington, which is based upon the information contained in this history and seeks to describe the principal reasons for the significance of the municipality. It is intended to be:

11.1 Introduction

... a brief, pithy but comprehensive statement of all the ways in which the place is significant. It should not just be a list of every conceivable reason for significance that the assessor can think up, however, it must state clearly and unequivocally the major reasons why the place is important. It must be supported by the presentation of sufficient evidence to justify the assessment judgement (Pearson and Sullivan 1995).

In order to more readily understand the significance of the City of Stonnington as a whole, the thematic historical development has been divided into the following key chronological stages:

- Creation – Aboriginal landscape (pre 1835) – Refer to Figure 10
- Contact and change – Establishing new communities (c.1835–c.1870) – Refer to Figure 11
- Boom and bust – Creating ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ (c.1870–c.1900) – Refer to Figure 12
- A new beginning – Federation and garden suburbs (c.1900–c.1940) – Refer to Figure 13
- Creating a modern city – Motor cars and multi-cultural Melbourne (1940 onwards) – Refer to Figure 14.

The preceding chapters each include a brief assessment of the cultural and natural heritage values associated with specific historic themes in the development of the study area and identify representative places associated with each. The Statement of Significance in this chapter builds upon those assessments and should be read in conjunction with them. In assessing the significance of each stage, this chapter considers:

- What is significant? This identifies and summarises the legacies of each stage, which illustrate the various themes described in detail in the preceding chapters. The ‘legacies’ may be ‘tangible’ (or physical) elements (such as buildings, parks and gardens, monuments, railways etc.) or ‘intangible’ (such as historic events or associations, community identity or associations, etc.). Some of the physical legacies are shown on the associated Figures listed above.

Legacy: We are using the word legacy in this study to mean result, in terms of a consequence or outcome i.e. what is left as a result of the processes described in this thematic environmental history.
Why is it significant? This provides a summary of the reasons why each stage is significant. In accordance with the definition set out above (Pearson and Sullivan 1995), this does not attempt to list every reason, but provides an overview of the key reasons why the City of Stonnington is significant, particularly when compared to other metropolitan areas.

The exception is the Aboriginal landscape where further consultation with appropriate communities and research is required in order to establish the significant values of this stage. Council has prepared an Indigenous History of Stonnington that will further enhance this information.

11.2 What is significant?

Contact and change – Establishing new communities (c1835 –c1870)

This era saw the formation of the non-Aboriginal communities within the City of Stonnington. Settlement occurred within a framework that was to essentially define the pattern of development of the study area over the next 100 years. This framework was defined by three key elements; the landscape, Hoddle’s grid, and the layout of allotments within the grid and the order of land sales. Legacies of this era (Refer Figure 12) are:

- The division of the area along class lines defined by topography with large mansion estates established by the wealthy on the higher ground along the river and to the east, while working class housing occupied the lower, swampy ground in Prahran and Windsor
- The layout of main roads that follows Hoddle’s grid, and the distinctive pattern of minor streets that largely reflects the original shape and orientation of the Crown allotments when they were first sold
- Farm estates in rural areas generally in the eastern parts of the study area
- The emergence of the first shopping centres in Chapel Street, Commercial Road, Toorak Road and Glenferrie Road
- Toorak House, the residence of the Victorian Governor during the mid-nineteenth century
- Foundation churches and community institutions
- The first railway to Brighton via South Yarra, Prahran and Windsor.
Boom and bust – Creating Marvellous Melbourne (c1870–c1900)

The era of ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ saw the city’s rapid development in the wake of the gold rush. Development during this stage built upon the framework established during the previous era and expanded along the rail and cable tram lines, which opened new areas for development. Legacies of this era (Refer Figure 13) are:

» The completion of the railway network (with the exception of the line from Darling to Glen Waverley), which allowed suburban development to extend as far afield as Glen Iris and Malvern East

» The beginnings of the grand shopping districts along Chapel Street, Glenferrie Road and Toorak Road

» Boom-style mansions on large estates in Toorak, Kooyong, Malvern, and Armadale

» Speculative middle and working class housing estates along the new railway and cable tram lines, which heralded the beginning of suburban development

» Grand new civic and community buildings including municipal offices, courts, churches and post offices

» The creation of a free and secular state education system, together with an alternative network of private and Catholic schools

» City beautification in form of the first municipal parks and gardens and street trees

» Buildings and places associated with philanthropic and charitable societies and organisations.

A new beginning – Federation and garden suburbs (c1900–c1940)

After the interruption caused by the 1890s depression, the Federation of Australia ushered in a new period of growth and optimism. Perhaps the most significant event during this period was the Cities of Malvern and Prahran co-operating on a venture that would have a profound effect on development in the study area and beyond – the creation of the Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust. Legacies of this era (Refer Figure 14) are:

» Stonnington, the residence of the Victorian Governor

» The spacious garden suburbs, particularly in the former City of Malvern, which are characterised by detached houses on large allotments that came to define Australian suburban life in the twentieth century

» An extraordinary wealth of domestic architecture that illustrates almost every popular style to emerge in Australia during the twentieth century. As well as representative places, the City of Stonnington contains examples of architecture that are innovative, unusual and often unique. These include some of the earliest and best examples of Modern architecture

» ‘Mansion’ style flats and apartment buildings, including the extraordinary precinct created by Harold Lawson in South Yarra

» One of the most well-developed transport networks of any of Melbourne’s inner-city municipalities, which is notable for the extensive tramway system established by the Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust

» A small, but important manufacturing sector in Prahran and Windsor, which specialised in food and clothing. The latter industry was closely associated with development of the Chapel Street shopping centre

» Great shopping districts in Chapel Street and Glenferrie Road-High Street, which rivalled the Central Business District for custom

» The development of a system of higher education including higher elementary schools and Melbourne High School

» Civic works including road building, the creation of new parks, gardens and tree-lined avenues such as Alexandra Avenue and Dandenong Road that transformed the environment of parts of the study area

» Places for self-help and charitable organisations to assist the poor and disadvantaged.

Why is Stonnington significant?
Creating a modern city – Motor cars and multi-cultural Melbourne (1940 onwards)

By the beginning of the post-war era, suburban development of the City of Stonnington was all but complete, with the last remaining areas of farmland soon to be transformed by suburban development. Legacies of this era (Refer Figure 15) are:

- Chadstone, Melbourne’s first free-standing, suburban shopping centre
- Major improvements to road networks including the building of Queens Way and the Monash Freeway
- Altered routes of the Yarra River and Gardiners Creek
- Increased ethnic and cultural diversity, particularly in areas of Prahran and Windsor, as a result of post-war immigration
- Housing Commission estates, private flat development, and suburban estates such as the Rialto in Malvern East
- Gentrification of many former working class residential areas.

11.3 Why is it significant?

In a metropolitan context, the City of Stonnington is significant as it is one of the few municipalities that provide evidence of all of the key phases in the historic development of Melbourne from soon after first settlement until the post-war period.

Contact and change – Establishing new communities (c1835–1870)

This era is associated with the origins of Melbourne as a town founded by entrepreneurial land speculators and the phase of development associated with the gold rush. The City of Stonnington is significant as the place where many of the people who were wealthy or influential in the early development of Melbourne came to live, including many of the most notorious land speculators and thus provides important evidence of this formative period of the city’s development. The City of Stonnington is also significant as the place that was an important source of produce and building materials for Melbourne at a critical time in its early development.

Because there are so few remnants of this early period of development, anything that remains must be considered to be of primary significance.

Boom and bust – Creating Marvellous Melbourne (c1870 – c1900)

This era, in the wake of the gold rush, was a time when Melbourne experienced an extraordinary period of growth and the City of Stonnington is significant as one of the inner ring of nineteenth century suburbs that illustrate the development of the dynamic wealthy city that gave rise to the term ‘Marvellous Melbourne’.

The City of Stonnington is particularly notable in a metropolitan context because it includes suburbs such as South Yarra, Toorak, Kooyong and Malvern where the wealth and optimism of this era reached its fullest expression in the homes of pastoralists, land speculators and other wealthy residents, as well as in retail, commercial and civic development. The City of Stonnington is also significant as it provides evidence of the class divisions in nineteenth century society, with the mansions of the wealthy standing in stark contrast to the large areas of workers housing, sometimes in the same street.
Figure 10 - Aboriginal Landscape (pre-1835)

Legend:
- Swamp Swamp
- Grassy Woodland
- Heide Rich Woodland Complex
- Riverbank Rich Woodland
- Swamp Woodland
- Floodplain Riverbank Woodland
- Aquatic Heide
- Billabong

Sources: OEH SWAMP Wetland and Wetland Information Prepared by Tony Fairall, 2000
LEGEND

DEVELOPED AREA
MANSION & FARM ESTATES
RURAL FARMLAND

ROAD
RAILWAY
RAILWAY STATION

NOTE: The places shown on the map may be incorrect, but not all of the above existed during this period. Some of these places may no longer exist.
A new beginning – Federation and garden suburbs 
(c1900–c1940)

After the 1890s depression, the Federation era offered new hope and optimism and led to changes in social and economic circumstances. In Melbourne increasing prosperity and improved public transport meant that a suburban home became possible even for working class people. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the study area where Prahran and Malvern Councils came together in a remarkable act of civic co-operation to form the first and most successful of the municipal tramway authorities. The creation of the electric tram network during the first decades of the twentieth century made possible the ideal of suburban living that was realised in housing estates inspired by the garden city movement.

The City of Stonnington is also significant as a place that illustrates the changing ways that Australians lived during the twentieth century from mansions on large estates to shared accommodation and apartments. In a metropolitan (and even national) context, the City of Stonnington is notable as a place where some of the best twentieth century residential architecture was created. The City of Stonnington is also significant as a place that illustrates the changing ways that Australians lived during the twentieth century. It is particularly notable as one of the places where apartment living first gained wide acceptance prior to World War II.

Creating a modern city – Motor cars and multi-cultural Melbourne (1940 onwards)

This City of Stonnington provides evidence of the rapid expansion and transformation of Melbourne in the post-war period as a result of State and Federal Government policies that, among other things, led to increased immigration, expansion of manufacturing and greater use of the motor car. Post-war development also reflects the policy of State Governments over many years to increase densities and the tensions that sometimes result when this conflicts with local community expectations.

The City of Stonnington and, in particular, Prahran and Windsor, was a place where many migrants, particularly those from Greece, settled and created new communities. This influx of settlers breathed new life into the inner city areas of Melbourne and contributed to the renaissance beginning in the 1970s that eventually encouraged young middle class residents to return.

The City of Stonnington is also of interest as an inner city suburb, which demonstrates the rise of community activism associated with the protection and conservation of places associated with both natural and cultural history. Some of the movements, for instance to save Gardiner’s Creek or against high-rise development, have had significant influence upon planning policy at both a local and state level.
11.4 Conclusion

The City of Stonnington has a rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage that illustrates the historic occupation, use, adaptation and development of the land since the arrival of Aboriginal people. This in turn promotes a greater understanding of the history of Victoria and Australia as a whole. This history is demonstrated in the City of Stonnington by a wide range of heritage places including buildings and structures, monuments, trees and landscapes, archaeological sites, and places with spiritual or symbolic meaning. Some of these places have been mentioned in this report, and there are many others besides. All have one thing in common:

These are places that are worth keeping because they enrich our lives – by helping us to understand the past; by contributing to the richness of the present environment; and because we expect them to be of value to future generations. (The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 1999).

These places provide an insight into the complex cultural layering that gives the City of Stonnington a sense of historic continuity as well as a distinctive character. They reveal the way communities in the former Cities of Prahran and Malvern in past years thought about their local area as well as illustrating prevailing economic, social and political circumstances that were important in the development of the study area. In some cases the places and the people, uses and events associated with them had an even greater influence, extending to the whole of Melbourne, Victoria and sometimes Australia.

It is important that all aspects of this cultural layering are recognised and, where appropriate, protected and conserved to ensure that the history of the City of Stonnington as it is ‘written on the landscape’ can continue to be interpreted, understood and celebrated by the community now and in the future.