

35 Larnook Street, Prahran Heritage Citation Report



Figure 1 35 Larnook Street, Prahran.

History and Historical Context

Thematic Context

The following is drawn from the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006).

The End of an Era – Mansion Estates Subdivision in the Early Twentieth Century

After the land boom of the 1880s and subsequent economic crash of the 1890s, an increasing number of mansions in the affluent suburbs of Toorak, Armadale and Malvern were converted to flats or rooming houses, or demolished, and their large gardens subdivided into smaller suburban house lots. The subdivision of the old mansion estates began to increase after World War I when the cost of maintaining these large properties became prohibitive. This process of subdivision created a unique pattern of development which can still be understood and interpreted today. Although new subdivisions imposed new road patterns, in many cases new estates and streets bore the name of the old properties, while the original houses were sometimes retained within a reduced garden.

Creating Australia's most 'designed' suburb

The affluent suburbs of Stonnington are notable for the strong culture of patronage between architects (or designer-builders) and their often wealthy clients that has existed from the earliest times of settlement. Walter Butler, for example, was known as the 'society architect' for his long list of well-heeled clients. This has resulted in a much higher than average ratio of architect- designed buildings. The consequence of this is one of the most extraordinary collections of residential architecture in Australia, which provides an important record that illustrates the development of almost all major architectural styles and movements, since mid-nineteenth century through to the present day.

Place History

The property at 35 Larnook Street was created as part of the subdivision of the Larnook mansion estate. Larnook was built in 1881 for William H Miller, the son of wealthy financier and politician Henry 'Money' Miller.¹ William Miller relocated to Carlie Street, St Kilda and his mansion was rented out in the early 1900s. In 1912 the Larnook estate was subdivided, creating two short east-west streets - Larnook and Vail Streets, whilst retaining the mansion.²

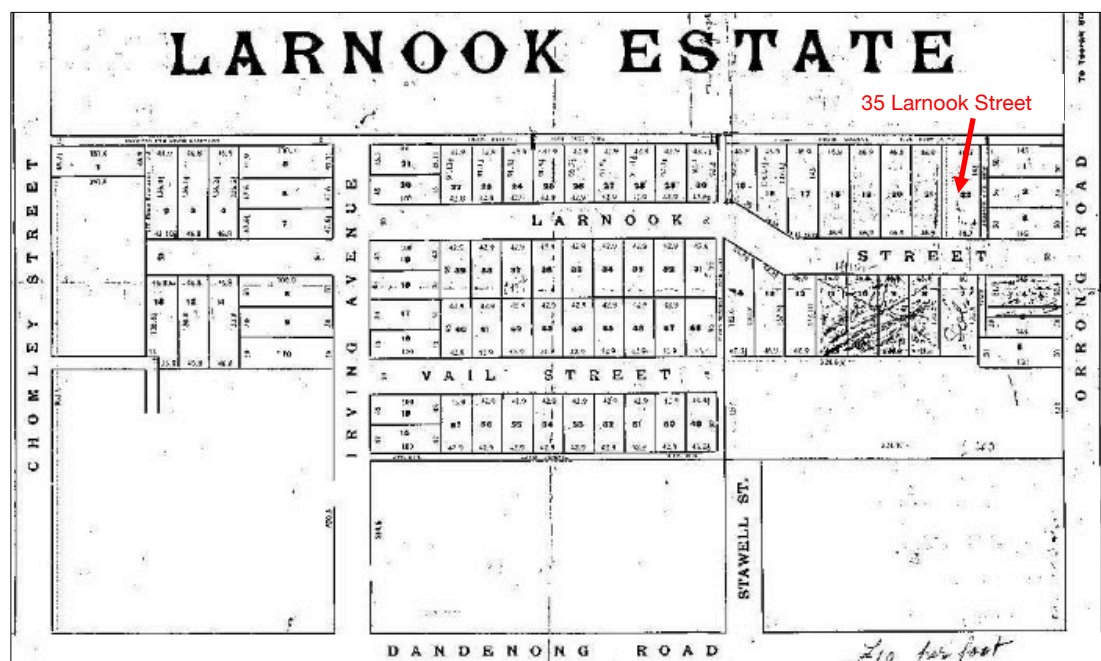


Figure 2 A 1912 plan of subdivision for the Larnook estate. Source: Stonnington Local History Catalogue.

The site at present day 35 Larnook Street formed Lot 22 of the Larnook Estate. It remained vacant until 1959 when an eight-room brick house was built there for Maurice Fast and his wife Stephanie (alternatively spelt Stefania).³ Maurice and Stephanie Fast were Jewish refugees from Poland, who arrived in Australia with their three children in September 1951.⁴

The building permit for the Fast's Larnook Street house was issued by the City of Prahran on 20 October 1958. It was described in the permit as a two storey brick residence 'with carport under' estimated to cost £13,700.⁵ The architect was Bernard Slawik and the builder E K Pretty.⁶ The house was completed in June 1959. The first MMBW Property Sewerage Plan for the house (dated 28 October 1958) indicates that the kitchen was equipped with a garbage disposal unit and a dishwashing machine - a luxury item at that time.⁷

A building permit for additions to the house to the value of \$16,000 was issued to Maurice Fast in October 1967.⁸ The permit is presumed to have been for the conversion of the house into two flats (one on the ground floor, the other occupying the first floor).

¹ Context Pty Ltd, *City of Prahran Conservation Review: Volume 2*, p.91.

² Stonnington Local History Catalogue PH 342.

³ City of Prahran Valuation Cards (Windsor Ward).

⁴ National Archives of Australia, Series Number: K 269; Reel Number: 117.

⁵ Prahran Building Inspection Card, Lot 7 Larnook Street. Reg. No. 3580.

⁶ Prahran Building Inspection Card, Lot 7 Larnook Street. Reg. No. 3580.

⁷ MMBW Property Sewerage Plan No. 305680. South East Water.

⁸ Prahran Building Inspection Card, 35 Larnook Street. Reg. No. 1964.

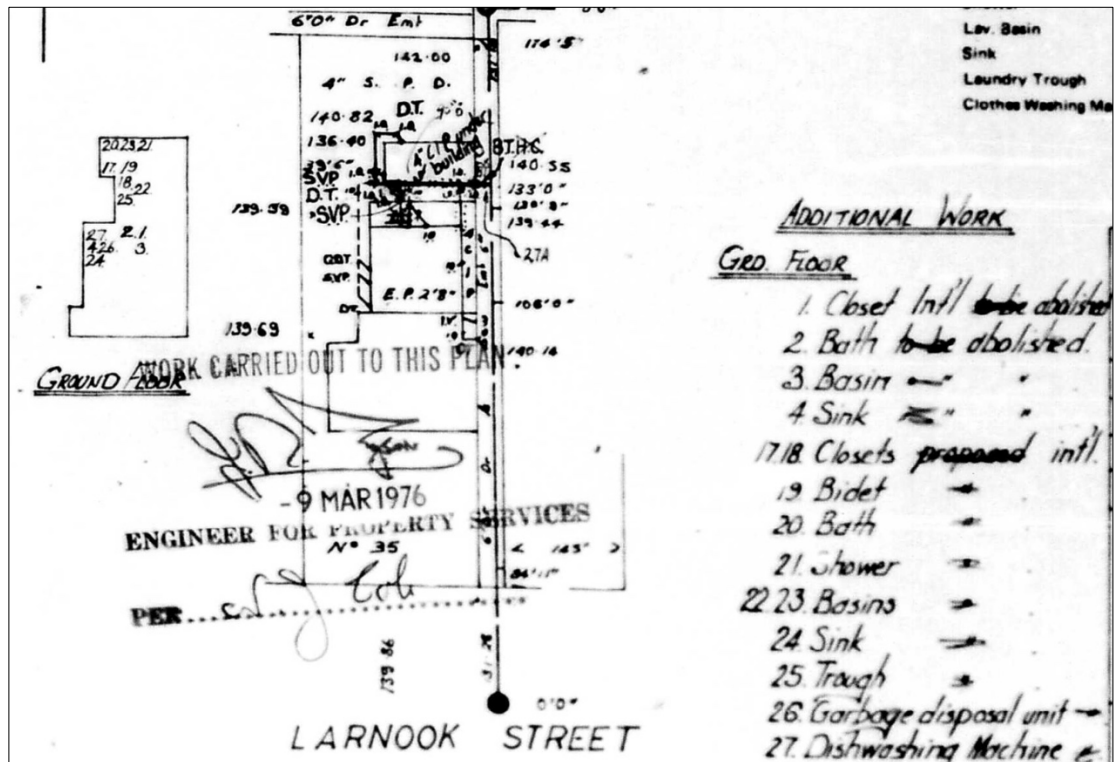


Figure 3 An MMBW Property Sewerage Plan for 35 Larnook Street, dated October 1958. Source: South East Water.

35 Larnook Street was acquired c1975 by Joseph and Edna Roy and Henry and Helen Swirski.⁹ The City of Prahran issued a permit in October 1975 for alterations and additions valued at \$20,000.¹⁰ The building permit plans show a single-storey rear addition with a rooftop sun deck, as well as new kitchen cabinetry and alterations to some window openings on the side elevations. The works were completed in March 1976. A first floor addition was built over the rear wing in 1988.¹¹ A first floor window frame was replaced on the west elevation under the same permit, but no changes were made to the front elevation.

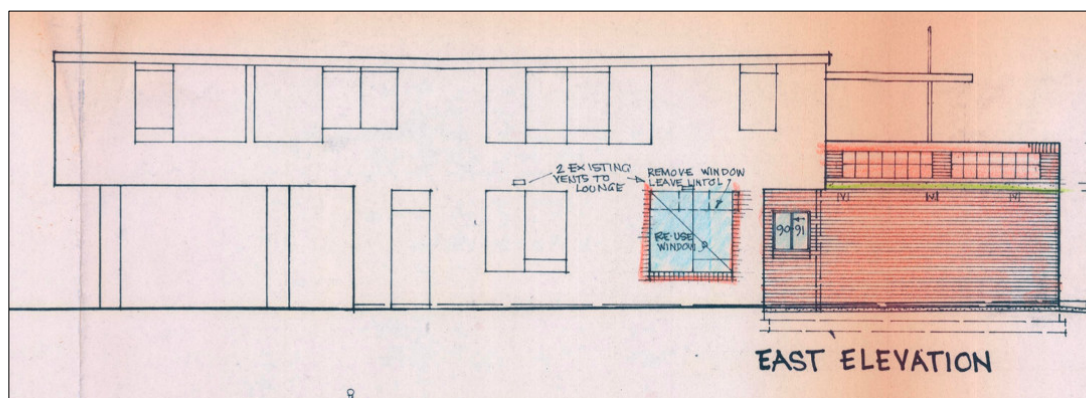


Figure 4 Extract from the 1975 plans showing the east elevation of the rear addition. Source: City of Stonnington

⁹ City of Prahran Valuer's Field Book.

¹⁰ City of Prahran Record of Building Inspections, Permit No. 9590.

¹¹ Stonnington Building File B36600-1922, City of Prahran Building Approval No 5543.

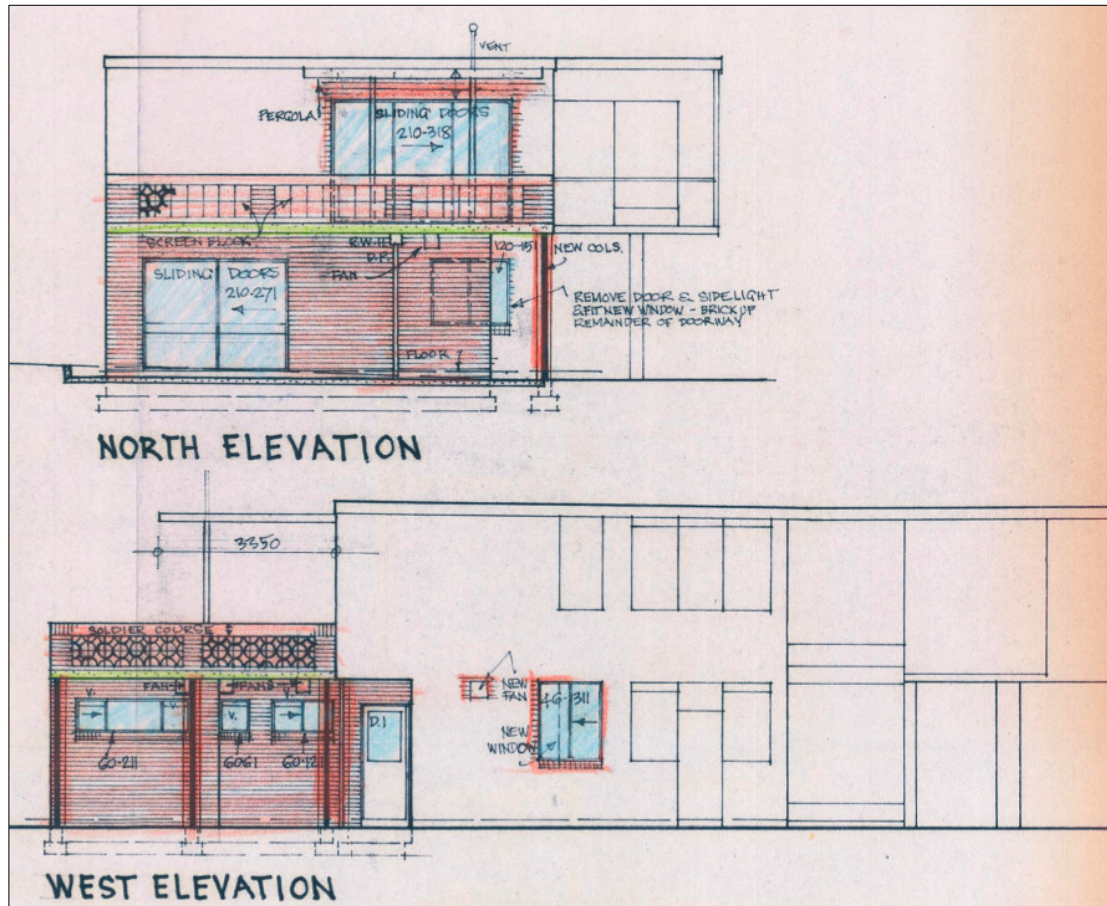


Figure 5 Extract from the 1975 plans showing the north and west elevations of the rear addition. Source: City of Stonnington

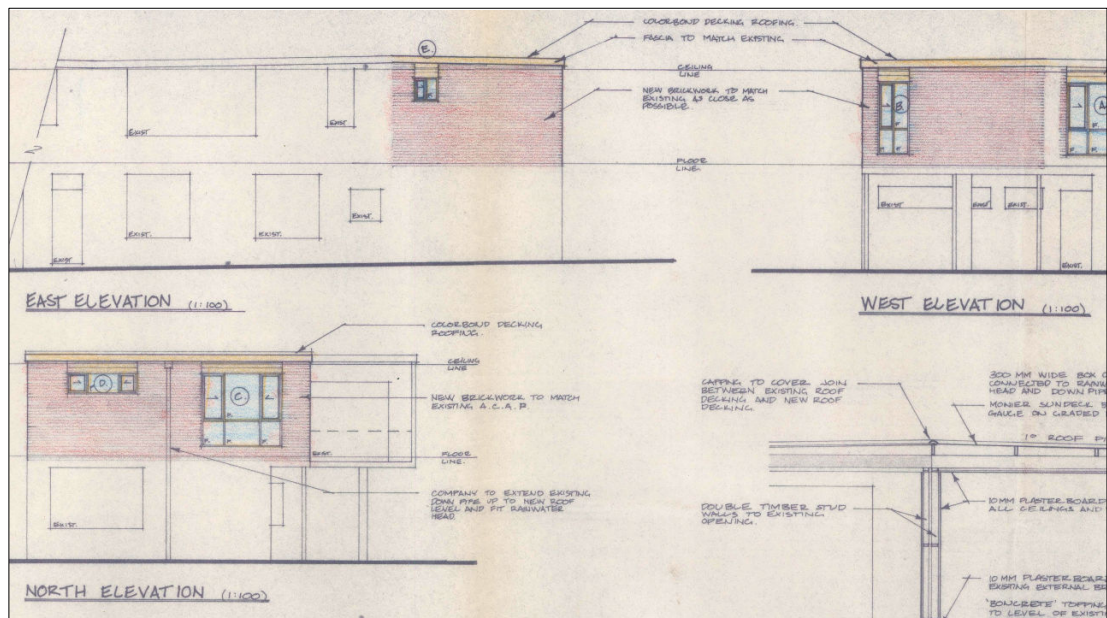


Figure 6 Extract from the 1988 plans showing a first floor addition to the 1975 rear addition. Source: City of Stonnington.

Bernard Slawik

Architect Bernard Slawik (1901-1991) was born in southern Poland and completed his architectural studies at Lviv Polytechnic School (in present day Ukraine) in 1930.¹² In the pre-war years Slawik toured Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria and France, visiting Roman and Renaissance architecture as well as modern houses, hospitals, multi-storey garages and industrial buildings. In Poland he was a consultant architect to a number of insurance companies and specialised in flat and office designs.¹³

In late 1941 Slawik was interned in Jalowska concentration camp where he made a series of small but emotionally powerful pencil drawings. Slawik managed to escape the camp and after the war settled in Sweden with his wife and daughter. The family migrated to Australia in 1948 and then set up home in Melbourne where Slawik found employment in the office of architect and town planner Frank Heath, and from 1950 at the Public Works Department under Chief Architect Percy Everett.¹⁴ Slawik went into private practice in 1953 and around the same time set up his family home at Bambra Road, Caulfield. Also in 1953, a house jointly designed by Slawik and architect Bernard Joyce was awarded a special prize in the Small Homes Service Competition.¹⁵

Slawik's work was mostly private residences, many of which were commissioned by fellow Jewish emigres, typically in the Caulfield area, but also including the affluent suburbs of South Yarra, Toorak, Hawthorn and Kew. Drawings by Slawik depicting the horrors of the concentration camps are held in the Australian War Memorial. The National Gallery of Australia also has a print by Slawik in its collection.



Figure 7 (left) Bernard Slawik & Bernard Joyce's prize-winning design in the 1953 Small Homes Service Competition. Source: Age.

Figure 8 (right) Illustration of Slawik's design for the Baker House, Caulfield. Source: Herald.

Description

The property at 35 Lanrook Street is occupied by a double-storey house in the post-war modernist style. It is set back from the street and sits behind a relatively recent (but sympathetically designed) cream brick fence and metal gates with a geometric pattern reminiscent of the original metal gates and fence railings. The house has cream brick walls and a flat roof with shallow eaves lined with timber boards. The front part of the house is elevated on columns to form open undercroft carparking. The columns, which are faced in mosaic tiles, demonstrate a strong affinity for the European modernist concept of raising buildings on '*pilotis*' (or columns). The modernist influence is also strongly apparent in the street facing first floor window wall with its repetitive modules and opaque blue glass spandrels.

Additions have been made to the rear of the house, as described in the site history, but these have not impacted on the presentation of the largely intact street façade.

¹² Unless otherwise noted, biographical information on Bernard Slawik is drawn from Built Heritage Pty Ltd 'City of Glen Eira Post War and Hidden Gems Heritage Review Stage 2 Citations' (Draft February 2020), p.136.

¹³ *The Argus*, 18 July 1953, p.7.

¹⁴ *The Argus*, 18 July 1953, p.7.

¹⁵ *The Ages*, 26 October 1953, p.6.



Figure 9 The house at 35 Larnook Street, 2013. Note the (presumably original) cream brick front fence with decorative metal railings. Source: Google maps.

Comparative Analysis

There are currently no post war modernist houses listed individually on the Stonnington heritage overlay schedule, notwithstanding seminal examples on the Victorian Heritage Register [eg the Grounds House, 24 Hill Street Toorak (VHR H1963) and the Robin Boyd designed Brett House at 3 Buddle Drive, Toorak (VHR H2396)]. That there is otherwise a dearth of heritage overlay listings for post war modernist houses in Stonnington is not indicative of their low heritage interest in a municipal context as such, but rather this can be seen to be a consequence of past heritage studies having a focus on pre-World War 2 architecture (noting also that there has not yet been a municipal wide study of post-war houses).

It is instructive to compare the house at 35 Larnook Street with the Bernard Slawik designed houses at 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield, and 6 Labassa Street, Caulfield North. Both houses have been recommended for heritage overlay controls in the *Glen Eira Post War and Hidden Gems Heritage Review* (Built Heritage Pty Ltd). 35 Larnook Street has a number of elements in common with 2 Edinburgh Avenue, including the expansive window wall to the street and the use of *pilotis* to create an undercroft. The house at 2 Edinburgh Avenue has a somewhat more dramatic butterfly roof, but 35 Larnook Street is otherwise of comparable design standard. The house at 6 Labassa Grove incorporates some overtly 'featurist' elements, whereas 35 Larnook Street is closer to adopting a purist modernist expression. More generally there has been a growing recognition in recent years of the importance of modernist houses in Melbourne designed by progressive European trained emigre architects, including Bernard Slawik.



Figure 10 (left) 2 Edinburgh Avenue, Caulfield (1962-63). Architect Bernard Slawik.



Figure 11 (right) 6 Labassa Grove, Caulfield North (1963-64). Architect Bernard Slawik.

Thematic Context

The house at 35 Larnook Street, Prahran, illustrates the following themes, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006):

- 8.1.3 - The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century
- 8.4 – Creating Australia’s most ‘designed’ suburb

The house is of some historical interest as evidence of a major phase of development that took place in the twentieth century when many of Toorak’s grand nineteenth century mansion estates were subdivided to create residential enclaves (TEH 8.1.3 The end of an era – mansion estate subdivisions in the twentieth century). The house also contributes to Stonnington’s rich legacy of architect designed housing dating back to the earliest days of settlement (TEH 8.4 – Creating Australia’s most ‘designed’ suburb).

Assessment Against Criteria

Assessment of the place was undertaken in accordance with the HERCON criteria and the processes outlined in the Australian ICOMOS (Burra) Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Significance.

Statement of Significance

Note that the relevant HERCON criteria are shown in brackets.

What is Significant?

The house at 35 Larnook Street, Prahran, is a double-storey post war modernist house with the front wing elevated on columns (or *pilotis*) to form an open undercroft carpark. Completed in 1959, the house was designed by Polish born architect Bernard Slawik for Jewish émigré clients Maurice and Stephanie Fast.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The external form, materials and detailing of the building as originally constructed in 1959.
- The generally high level of integrity of the street façade.
- The domestic garden setting (but not the fabric of the garden).

Modern fabric, including the front fence and rear additions, does not contribute to the significance of the place. While the fence is a modern item of no significance, it is nonetheless compatible with the post war character of the house.

How is it significant?

The house at 35 Larnook Street, Prahran, is of local architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The house is architecturally significant as a fine and largely intact example of a post war modernist residence designed by noted émigré architect Bernard Slawik (Criterion D).

Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion on the Heritage Overlay Schedule of the Stonnington Planning Scheme to the extent of all of the property at 35 Larnook Street, Prahran (Lot 7 LP14760) [refer figure 12 below].

External paint controls, internal alteration controls and tree controls are not recommended.

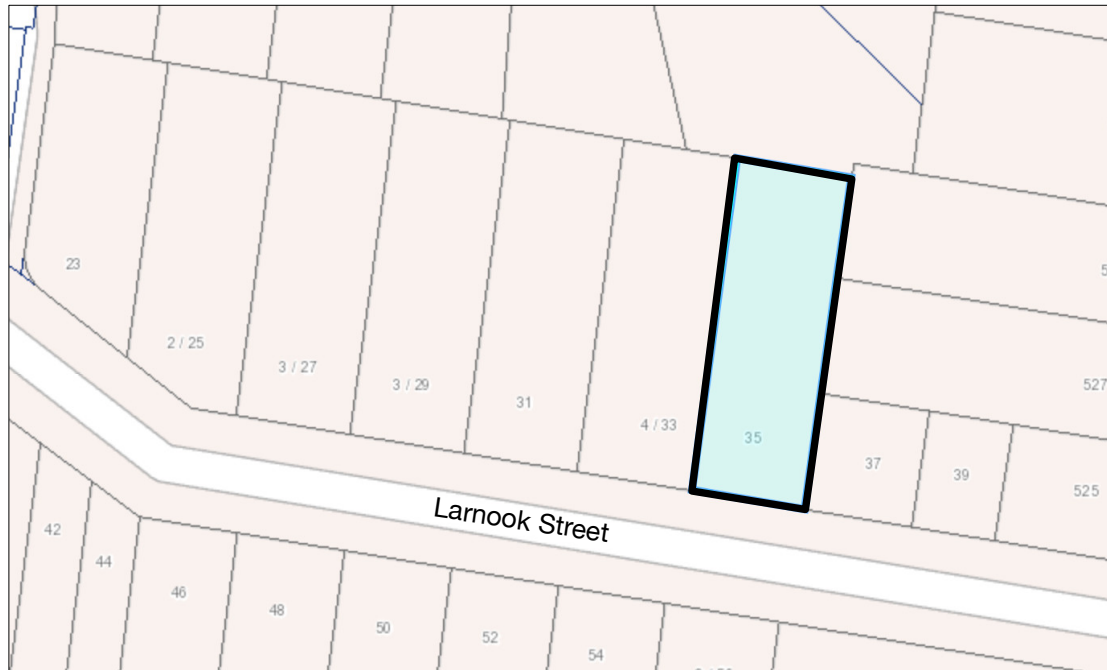


Figure 12 Recommended extent of the heritage overlay for 35 Larnook Street, Prahran.