

# PALERMO ESTATE PRECINCT HO128

Prepared by: Context

Survey Date: June 2020

Place Type: Residential

Architect: -

Significance level: Significant

Builder: various

Extent of overlay: See precinct map

Construction Date: 1876-1919



**HO128 - Palermo Estate Precinct  
SOUTH YARRA**

- GRADING**
- Significant
  - Contributory
  - Non-contributory
  - Precinct boundary



Figure 1. Palermo Estate Precinct. (Source: Context, February 2020)

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The City of Stonnington is the traditional country of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung peoples. They belonged to a larger affiliation of five central Victorian tribes known as the Kulin Nation. Archaeologists believe that Aboriginal people have been in Victoria for more than 30,000 years. Throughout this long history their relationship with the landscape (where and how they lived) has changed according to factors such as climate change, resource availability, and cultural change. It is possible, however, to assume that the land of the Kulin has been occupied for many thousands of years (Context 2006:10).

The study area is identified in *Stonnington's Indigenous History* as one of the important Aboriginal sites in the municipality. The gully near the junction of Toorak Road and Chapel Street was an Aboriginal camp site set in tea-tree scrub which was used by Aboriginal people visiting from Gippsland. Within the study area, sites of importance include the campsite of Derrimut in the banks of the swamp at Yarra Street, now the site of Melbourne High school, alongside the South Yarra Railway Bridge (Clark and Tostanski 2006:32). Derrimut was a Yalukit-willam clan-head who belonged to the Boonwurrung language group. Specific sites in the Yalukit-willam estate personally associated with Derrimut included the south bank of the Yarra River, from the punt at South Yarra to the Yarra wharf, where steamers moored (Clark and Tostanski 2006:6). A member of the Native Police Corp, Beruke's (or Gellibrand's) site of burial is also within the study area, at the former South Yarra Depot site near the south end of Clara Street along the railway. Beruke was buried there on 14 January 1852 (Clark and Tostanski 2006:32).

At the time of the area's first Crown land sales in 1840, South Yarra fell within what was then known as the Parish of Prahran, comprising today's South Yarra and parts of Prahran and Windsor. Crown land sales signalled the end of the area's brief pastoral history, as its situation at Melbourne's eastern fringe and advantageous position alongside the Yarra River made it an attractive location for settlement (Context 2006:30; *Australasian Chronicle* 20 March 1841:4).

Development of the Parish began in the west, gradually moving east as metropolitan Melbourne continued to expand. In 1854 the Prahran Road District, an early form of local government in Victoria, was proclaimed and road boundaries were redefined from those established by Government Surveyor Robert Hoddle in 1837 (Context 2016:1). At this time Toorak Road was known as Gardiners Creek Road, an early east-west route to Dandenong (Context 2006:47). Although Gardiners Creek Road was commonly referred to as Toorak Road from the 1850s, use of the old name continued up until 1898 (Lay 2003:150-1).

The Prahran Road District became the Municipality of Prahran in April of 1855 (*Banner* 26 May 1854:8). Prahran was among the earliest local government authorities created in Melbourne (Cooper 1924:55-84). Prahran was declared a Town in 1870, a City in 1879 and its population almost doubled in the decade to 1891 (Cooper 1935:212). Proximity to the rail services was a major selling point used by estate agents in all parts of Melbourne, and residential subdivisions closest to the stations generally sold first (Context 2016:5).

Development of the study area was stimulated with the construction of bridges over the Yarra River and Gardiners Creek. In 1857, the first bridge leading directly into the Municipality of Prahran was built across the Yarra to link Chapel Street with Church Street, Richmond. Chapel Street became the main thoroughfare for the municipality as soon as the bridge was constructed (Context 2006:53). In 1860 a timber bridge was constructed over Gardiners Creek at Toorak Road (Context 2016:3). Toorak Road also became an increasingly more important thoroughfare with the construction of grand estates overlooking the Yarra River, such as Avoca at 8 Gordon Grove, built c.1848 (HO45) which survives

today. Toorak Road's western end was also the first road in the Parish to be graded and surfaced, after the Governor of Victoria took up residence in Toorak House at 21 St Georges Road, in 1854 (HO99; Malone 1982:10).

South Yarra Railway Station opened in 1860, located on the north side of Toorak Road between Darling and Yarra Streets, which substantially improved access to the area and adjoining localities (Context 2006:46-7). The railway played an essential role for the municipality, encouraging residential and commercial development by allowing people to settle in the area within an easy commute to work in other parts of Melbourne. Public transport also provided an influx of shoppers to South Yarra, stimulating economic activity especially for streets in the station's immediate vicinity. The 1865 municipal rate book shows a dramatic increase in commercial and retail occupation at the Punt Road end of Toorak Road, with development of brick manufacturers, market gardens and other industries focussed in the east to take advantage of the new railway (S&McD).

The introduction of special workingmen's fares in 1882 also encouraged workers to settle in suburbs along rail routes, enabling people to move out from the inner areas where they worked (Priestley 1984:152). The development of large parts of the eastern end of the municipality stalled as a result of the 1890s' economic depression and it was not until the early years of the twentieth century that the promised patronage for the new railway lines eventuated. The current South Yarra Station complex that was altered in 1883, 1915-16 and again in 1918 to accommodate the growth of the railway system (Context 2016:4).

In 1878 the Victorian Government purchased the existing railways that ran through Richmond to South Yarra, Prahran and Windsor, as part of a plan to build a line through Oakleigh to Gippsland. The new Oakleigh line, which was opened in 1879, ran through Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and Hawksburn to join the existing line at South Yarra. The opening of the Oakleigh line coincided with the land boom that saw huge urban growth in Prahran generally, and the route of the line from Gippsland was the subject of considerable political lobbying as land developers sought to have it run through their proposed estates (Context 2006:53).

The new link from South Yarra to Oakleigh, completing the line to Gippsland, was opened in April 1879 (Harrigan 1962) and this would have necessitated the construction of more platforms at South Yarra. Substantial cutting also took place at South Yarra to accommodate the line, where over 50,000 cubic yards [sic] of earth were removed for its construction (*Argus* 9 January 1879:6). The sheer amount of earthworks and engineering that went into installing it demonstrates the importance of the railway network not only to Melbourne, but also to Victoria (Context 2016:7). In the study area, the cutting of land for new railway platform is evidenced by the irregular shape of the block of land on the south side of Palermo Street.

Melbourne's first cable tram commenced between Spencer Street and Richmond in 1885. After the new Princes Bridge was opened in 1888 cable tram routes extended from Swanston Street along St Kilda Road to Windsor and along Toorak Road to South Yarra, turning into Chapel Street towards Prahran. The Toorak Road line was extended to Irving Road in 1889, and the Windsor line was extended to the St Kilda Esplanade in 1891. An engine house for the cable winding machinery was built on the corner of Chapel Street and Toorak Road (Context 2006:68-69).

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 cooperating on a venture that would have a profound effect on the development of Toorak Road and beyond; the creation of the Prahran & Malvern Tramways Trust (Context 2006:171).

Increasing prosperity and improvements to public transport meant that working-class people could afford suburban homes. As was the case when the railway at South Yarra opened, establishment of the Tramways Trust in 1910 brought new patronage to the commercial precinct along Toorak Road (Context 2016:8).

From the mid-nineteenth century, residential development in the study area was also accelerated by the expansion of industries of the municipality. With the natural deposits of alluvial clay in the municipality, brick and tile making became the chief industry of the municipality. From at least the early 1840s, low-lying parts of the municipality were established with small operators, and the northern end of Chapel Street from Toorak Road to the river became the major centre of brick production. Robert 'Daddy' Davis quarried clay from the northeast corner of Chapel Street and Toorak Road for three decades. His brickworks was the forerunner of the Australian Gas Retort and Firebrick Manufactory, later known as the South Yarra Firebrick Company, which continued operations into the 1970s (Context 2006:95).

Another industry that played an important role in the municipality was food production. The Victoria Brewery company was established in 1858 in Chapel Street and lasted nearly two decades. In 1876, the Victorian Jam Company took over and operated from the building for a century. The Jam Factory became Prahran's largest employer, with up to 1000 workers, many of them women, employed in the busy season. The factory was closed in the 1970s, moving closer to suppliers in the Shepparton district and Dandenong Ranges (Context 2006:97).

South Yarra was also one of the centres for clothing factories, knitting mills and milliners from the 1870s well into the second half of the twentieth century. Enterprises ranged from small dressmakers to larger-scale factories. In the 1920s, nearly 20 garment factories were operating in Prahran, which would have provided employment of up to thirty people (Context 2006:98).

Since the 1980s Chapel Street and Toorak Road have continued to develop intensively with many multi-storey commercial and residential premises being located either on the street or set back behind the traditional shops. High-rise developments are also starting to dominate the South Yarra skyline, particularly towards Chapel Street. While individual buildings along Toorak Road have been modified, often quite substantially, the retention of individual buildings and the impression of a traditional shopping street has largely been maintained more towards the south of the intersection.

## **PLACE HISTORY**

The earliest development in the area bounded by Toorak Road, Williams Road, Malvern Road and Chapel Street, was along the east side of Chapel Street. The Independent Chapel on the corner of Chapel Street and Malvern Road gave the first street its name. By the middle 1850s, two small streets, Garden and Wilson, had been formed already running off Chapel Street. Their names appeared on Kearney's 1855 map. Two other small streets off Chapel Street near Toorak Road, Oxford and Palermo Streets, although not named, with associated modest housing, appeared on this map (Nigel Lewis & Associate 1983:55).

An 1856 survey of the Prahran Municipality shows Palermo Street (unnamed) with several houses developed along the northern side of the street ('Melbourne 19 Prahran' 1856, PROV VPRS 8168/ P2 unit 3509). According to the survey, the subject area was generally lightly bushed with swamped area towards Yarra River (Figure 2).



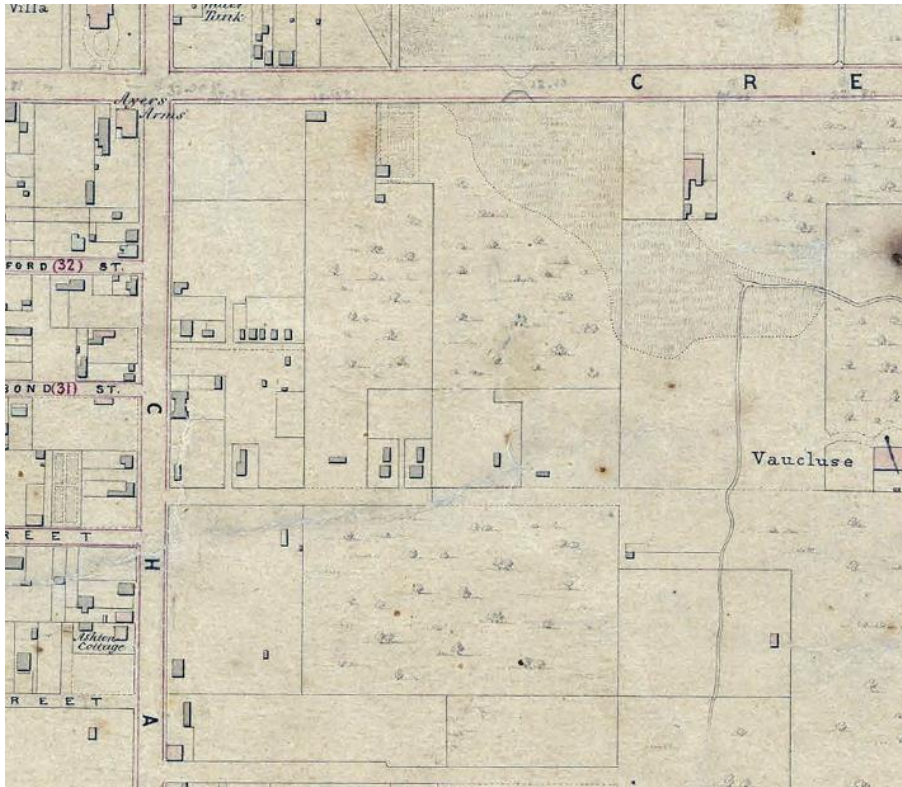


Figure 2. Palermo Street (unnamed) with associated housing, off the eastern side of Chapel Street. (Source: 'Melbourne 19 Prahran' 1856, PROV VPRS 8168/ P2 unit 3509)

In February 1874, tenders were invited for forming Palermo Street and filling in water holes (*Telegraph, St Kilda, Prahran and South Yarra Guardian* 14 February 1874:2).

In October 1874, the first public auction of the Palermo Estate was held. 43 commercial and residential allotments were made available through the first subdivision (*Argus* 2 September 1874:2). The second auction was held in November 1874 for the sale of further 30 allotments, and the third in September 1875 for 32 allotments (*Age* 28 November 1874:2; *Age* 3 September 1875:2).

The Palermo Estate, 19-acre land fronting Chapel Street and Gardiner's Creek Road (today's Toorak Road), was part of the estate of late John Cunningham McLaren who died in 1852 (*South Australian Register* 24 December 1852:4; *Argus* 23 October 1875:2). J. C. McLaren was one of the directors of the firm Flower, McLaren & Co., merchants, and the first inspector of the Union Bank of Australia. McLaren died at his residence 'Tivoli', the former residence of George Augustus Robinson, who had been appointed Chief Protector of the Aborigines (*South Australian Register* 24 December 1852:4). The 1843 house was built of brick and stone with 11 rooms. Many Aboriginal people visited his home and on occasions camped near his private residence (Clark and Tostanski 2006:17).

As the industries of the area expanded, the north-west corner of the block in the vicinity of Chapel Street and Toorak Road became an area of intense development by the 1890s. Detached houses and row houses were shown on an 1895 MMBW drainage plan, particularly along the north-south side of Cunningham Street and along the cross-streets, Oxford and Palermo streets. There was a long row of terrace housing indicated on the north side of Palermo Street west of Cunningham Street. The allotments in this area were more generous than those further south along the many cross-streets off Chapel Street near Malvern Road. A strong concentration of rows of tiny houses on tiny allotments typified this area (Nigel Lewis & Associate 1983:55).

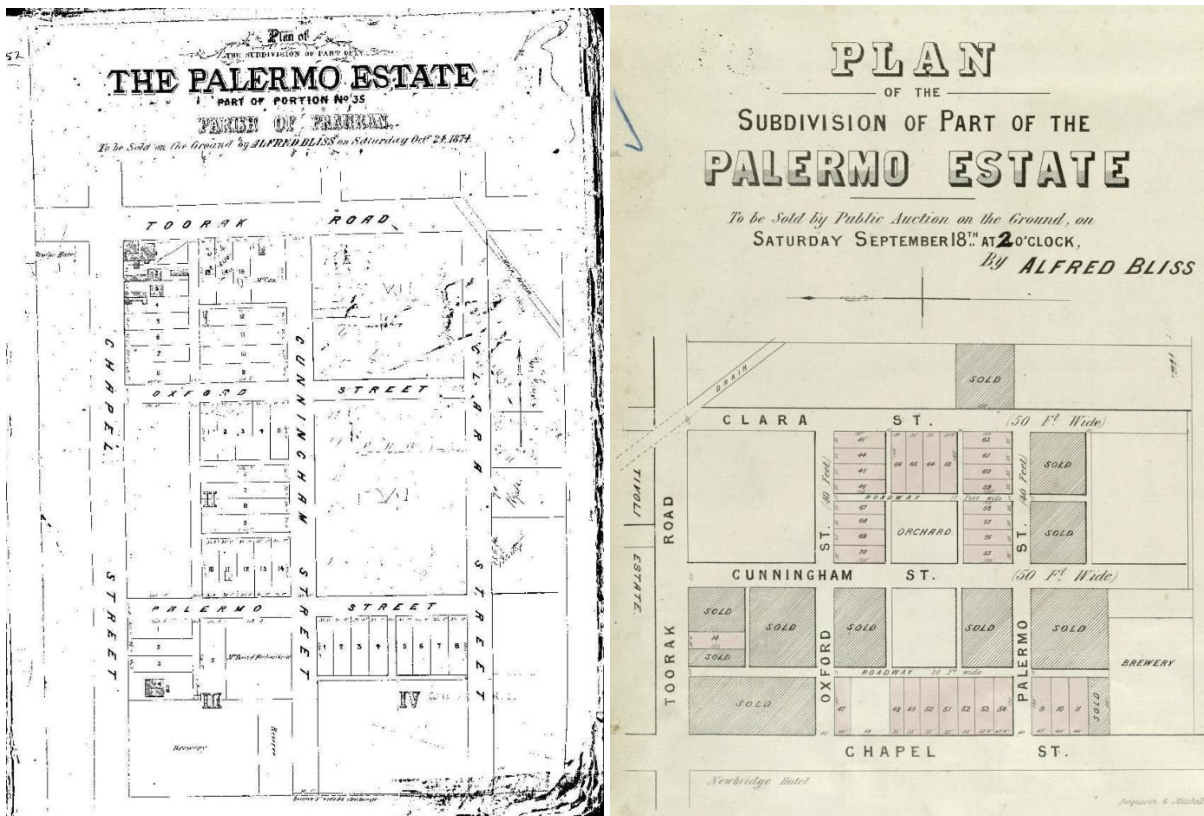


Figure 3. An 1874 subdivision plan for the first sale of the Palermo Estate (left) and an 1875 subdivision plan for the third sale. (Source: 'land subdivision - Palermo Estate', 1874, Stonnington History Centre; 'Palermo Estate', 1875, State Library Victoria)

### Palermo Street

In September 1875 and January 1876, two double-storey iron prefabricated buildings predating the subdivisional sale were auctioned for sale and removal (RB 1873; *Argus* 22 September 1875:2; *Argus* 10 January 1876:2).

On the north side between Chapel and Clara streets, at 19, 21, 23 and 25 Palermo Street, a row of four terraced four-room brick cottages built in 1876 was among the earliest permanent houses built in the subject precinct. The owner of this row was Thomas Ellis, painter, who operated a shop in Chapel Street (S&McD 1874).

On the south side between Chapel and Clara streets, 30 Palermo Street, a five-room timber house, was also built in 1876 for the owner George W. Paterson, civil servant, as his own house (RB 1876-77). 22 and 24 Palermo Street were built shortly after by 1878-79, initially as a pair of terraced six-room brick cottages. The owner Robert Owen, builder, lived at no. 22 until c.1880, when he built a six-room brick cottage with a return verandah at no. 20 as his residence (RB 1877-78, 1878-79, 1879-80; S&McD 1880).

By 1879, four houses were built on the northern side between Forster (formerly Palermo Place) and Cunningham streets. 3 Palermo Street was built in 1879, possibly by the owner George Tomkies, bricklayer, who was living in a timber cottage at 1 Palermo Street (demolished). Around the same time, 5, 7 and 9 Palermo Street, known as 'Beaconsfield Terrace', were built each with six-rooms (S&McD 1879; RB 1879-80). By 1880, 11, 13, 15 and 17 Palermo Street, known as 'Palermo Terrace', was also

completed, built as a row of three five-room terraced brick cottages. John Wright, gentleman, was the owner of the Beaconsfield Terrace and Palermo Terrace (RB 1879-80).

26 and 28 Palermo Street was built in 1884, as a pair of semi-detached five-room brick cottages. The owner was Maria Watts (S&McD 1885; RB 1885).

1 Palermo Street was built in 1891, for the owner Robert J. Linay, replacing a pre-existing timer cottage (RB 1891).

In 1914, six brick houses were erected at 2, 4, 6, 12, 14 and 16 Palermo Street, on the land previously occupied by an 1870s eight-room brick residence and its garden (shown in Figure 4).

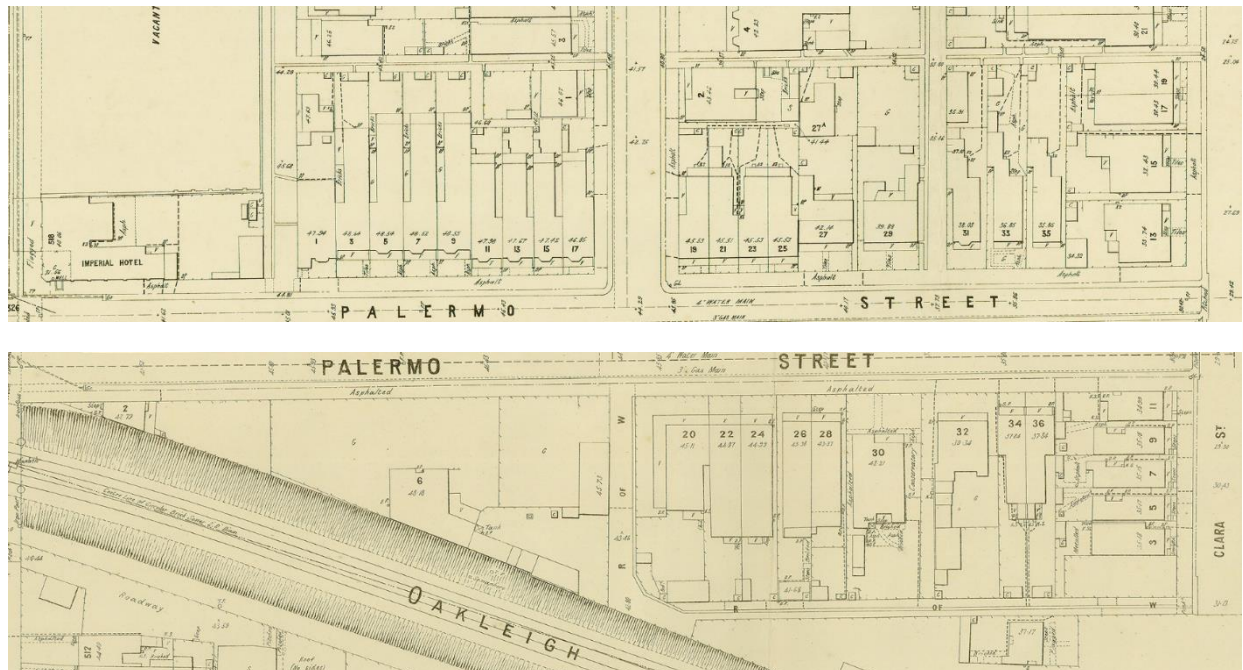


Figure 4. North (upper) and south (lower) sides of Palermo Street between Chapel and Clara streets in 1895. (Source: MMBW Detailed Plan no. 951 (upper) and 952 (lower), 1895)

## Oxford Street

Subdivision of the Palermo and Tivoli Estates in 1882 included allotments in Cunningham and Oxford Streets. Many are shown as already sold on the Estate's auction plan (Nigel Lewis & Associate 1983:55).

No buildings existed in Oxford Street of the east side of Chapel Street until 1881 when timber houses were built on the south side of Oxford Street between Cunningham and Clara streets (nos. 18-28). 12, 14 and 16 Oxford Street, a row of single-fronted five-room brick cottage was built c.1883. Each of the single-fronted cottages developed between 12 and 28 Oxford Street were occupied by owner-occupants (S&McD 1884, 1885).

On the north side, a pair of five-room brick cottages were built at nos. 11 and 13 between 1885 and 1887 (S&McD 1885, 1888).



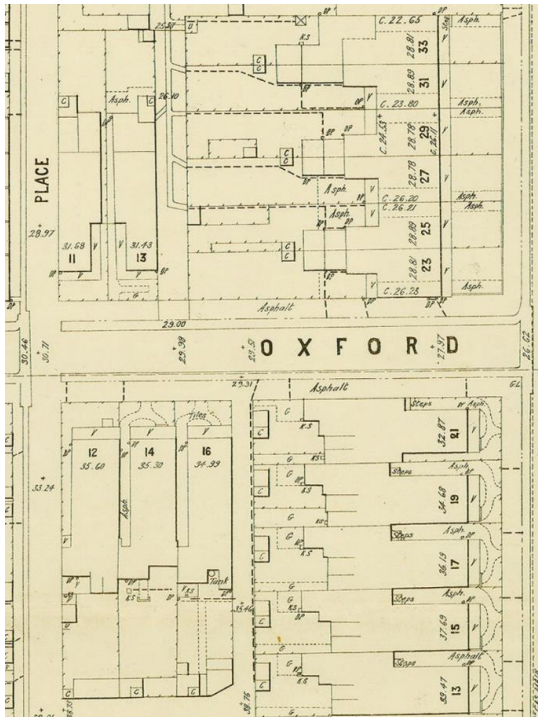


Figure 5. Oxford Street between Forster Street (formerly Palermo Place) and Cunningham Street in 1895. (Source: MMBW Detailed Plan no. 952, 1895)

## Cunningham Street

Like Oxford Street, development of Cunningham Street allotments gradually began in the late 1870s.

In 1877, a row of brick cottages at 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cunningham Street were built for the owner Henry Vincent Smith, piano turner. The two northernmost houses at nos. 31 and 33 were built as seven-room houses, and others had six rooms each. The cottages were originally known as nos. 1 to 6 'Albert Terrace'. H. V. Smith lived at no. 1 Albert Terrace (today's 33 Cunningham Street) until c.1890 (S&McD 1890).

Detached residences at 1 and 11 Cunningham Street were built around the same time (S&McD 1878; RB 1877-78). No. 11, a six-room brick dwelling, was occupied by for the owner-occupant Charles Richardson, civil servant. No. 1, a four-room brick house, was owned by J. T. White (RB 1877-78).

In 1878, 9 Oxford Street, a five-room brick dwelling, was erected (RB 1878-79).

By the mid-1880s, the rest of the street had been almost fully developed. The east side of Cunningham Street was mostly developed with timber houses. 12, 16, 18 and 22 Cunningham Street were built by 1884 and 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 by 1885 (S&McD 1884, 1890; RB 1888). 2, 4, 14, 16 and 18 Cunningham Street had been redeveloped in more recent times.

On the west side, timber cottages at nos. 3 and 5, a brick cottage at no. 7, the row of brick cottages at 13, 15, 17, 19 and 21 Cunningham Street were also built by 1885 (RB 1890). The pair of semi-detached five-room houses at number 24-26 built around the same time (RB 1882, 1884, 1895-85, 1886-87).

A group of brick cottages at numbers 22, 24, 26 and 28 (initially known as numbers 4, 6, 8 and 10) were also built by 1885, for Henry V. Smith (then owner of Albert Terrace), who developed and sold the properties to owner-occupiers by 1886 (RB 1885-86, 1886-87, 1890).



A pair of five-room brick cottages 30 and 32 Cunningham Street (initially known as numbers 2 and 2A) was built for the owner Frederick Nixon on one allotment by 1887.

At 35 and 37 Cunningham Street, a pair of brick houses were built in 1905 (S&McD 1906).

20 Cunningham Street was one of the last houses developed in the street. The two-storey flat was built in 1919 on the land formerly used as a garden of 18 Cunningham Street (S&McD 1918, 1920).

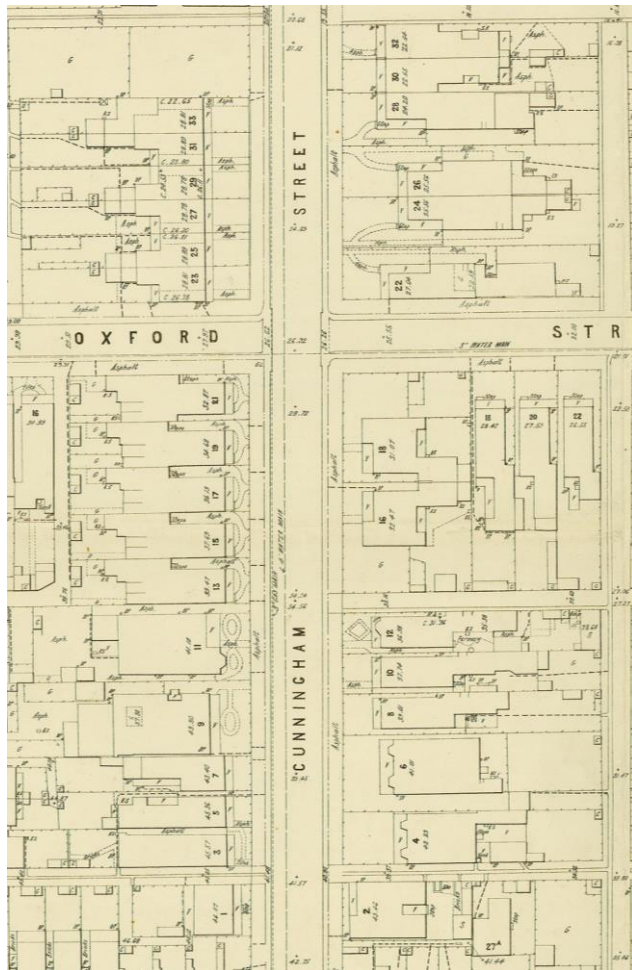


Figure 6. Cunningham Street between Toorak Road and Palermo Street in 1895. (Source: MMBW Detailed Plan no. 952, 1895)

An electrical substation at 14 Foster Street was likely constructed in the 1920s or 1930s during the key expansion period of Melbourne's electricity network.

Today, the Cunningham Street Area retains some of its early Victorian terrace development as well as examples of modest and substantially intact Victorian workers' housing. The historical importance of this Victorian housing is increased by the disappearance of much of the nineteenth century housing in areas to the south. The once intense concentration of such housing in the Chapel Street area near Malvern Road, for example, was consumed by the Housing Commission Estate development in the 1960s (Nigel Lewis & Associate 1983:55).

## DESCRIPTION

The Palermo Estate Precinct is a small pocket of land located behind the commercial development near the south east corner of Toorak Road and Chapel Street, South Yarra. It includes Cunningham Street (1-38 & 2-32), part of Oxford Street (11-13 & 12-16) and part of Palermo Street (1-25 & 2-30). It also includes the interwar substation at 14 Foster Street.

Cunningham Street runs south off Toorak Road and is intersected by Oxford Street and Palermo Street both of which run east off Chapel Street. All three streets are quiet residential streets paved with asphalt and retain bluestone two pitcher channels along Cunningham Street and Oxford Street and bluestone kerbing along Palermo Street. Asphalt footpaths are planted with semi mature street trees. Cunningham Street, Palermo Street and Oxford Street have undergone traffic management treatments which has resulted in the narrowing of the intersection of Cunningham Street with Palermo Street and Oxford Street and the introduction of planter beds and red-brick paved areas that encroach onto the original road alignment along Cunningham and Oxford Streets. This has resulted in both Palermo Street and Oxford Street being no longer accessible by car from Chapel Street.

The precinct comprises a mix of mostly single storey detached and attached brick and timber workers' and middle-income housing dating from the late nineteenth century. The exception being 'Albert Terrace', a row of seven double storey brick terrace houses at 23-33 Cunningham Street and the substantial two-storey Italianate house at 1 Palermo Street.

Displaying characteristic of the Victorian Italianate style, directory and rate book entries show that most of the houses within the precinct were built over a relatively short period of time between 1876 and 1892 with the exception of 2-16 Palermo Street (built in 1914 after the demolition of an earlier single house on a large allotment), the interwar flats at 20 Cunningham Street built in 1919 and the pair of Edwardian houses at 35-37 Cunningham Street built in 1905.

The Victorian Italianate style is characterised by low-pitched hipped roofs, chimneys with a rendered cornice, bracketed eaves (some with raised panels between them), front or return verandahs with slender posts or columns and cast-iron ornament, double-hung sash windows often with sidelights, and four-panelled front doors with raised cricket-bat mouldings. This description can be applied to most of the houses in the precinct.



Figure 7. Typical example of a freestanding single fronted Bichrome brick Italianate cottage. (Source: Google)



Figure 8. Typical example of a freestanding ashlar block fronted timber Italianate cottage. (Source: Google)

## Palermo Street

The distinctive streetscape of Palermo Street is characterised by its numerous rows of attached single storey brick cottages. Built for single owners as investment properties these houses provide cheap, simple accommodation for workers in the area. Included amongst these are the earliest houses in the precinct, the four, brick, attached, single-storey terrace houses at 19-25 Palermo Street. Built in 1876 these modest workers cottages sit under a continuous slate hip roof and retain their original fenestrations, timber framed double-hung sash windows, four panelled timber entry doors and chimneys. No. 19 retains its original cast iron lace work whilst Nos. 21-25 have had theirs replaced with simple timber brackets. Similar terrace rows along Palermo Street include Nos. 20-24 built in 1878-80, Nos. 5-9 built in 1879 and Nos.11-17 built in 1880.



Figure 9. Terrace row at 19-25 Palermo Street, South Yarra are the earliest houses in the precinct, built c.1876. (Source: Google, January 2019)

Exceptions to these terraced rows are the Victorian Italianate pair of houses at nos. 26-28 and the single double-fronted Victorian timber house at no.30. Nos. 26-28 are built to appear as one house with a continuous hip roof and verandah running across their front while no.30 has a hipped bay projecting to one side creating an asymmetrical façade.

1 Palermo street stands out in the streetscape. Built in 1891 the height of this two-storey Italianate house is exaggerated by its narrow allotment and the incorporation of a high mansard roof with iron cresting above the entry porch. Finished in smooth render the principal façade is modulated by the projecting rectangular bay of the entry against the recessed canted bay that rises through both levels. Whilst the wall surfaces are broken up by a moulded minor cornice at first floor level and a deeply moulded cornice at roof level the overall quality of the composition is markedly two dimensional as the side walls are dramatically sheer and unadorned.





Figure 10. 1 Palermo Street, South Yarra, built c.1891. The height of this two storey Italianate house is exaggerated by its narrow allotment and the incorporation of a high mansard roof with iron cresting above the entry porch. (Source: Google)

The last row of houses to be built along Palermo Street are those at nos. 2-18. Built in 1914 on the site of an earlier brick house and its garden, this group of three pairs (nos. 4 & 6, 12 & 14, 16 & 18) and one single house (no. 2) are representative of a transitional style between earlier Federation architecture and the Californian Bungalow of the 1920s. Simply detailed these houses all display similar design characteristics indicating that they were built by a single builder. Constructed of face red brick work (2, 4, 12 & 14 have been overpainted) the pairs of houses are symmetrically planned with projecting gables featuring strap work and rough cast render and small recessed entry porches under the main roof line. The single house at no. 2 is asymmetrically arranged with a timber fretwork verandah across the front. All houses feature simple red brick chimneys and bracketed window hoods over casement windows with overlites to the projecting street gable.



Figure 11. Late Edwardian semidetached houses at 16-18 Palermo Street, South Yarra, built c.1914. (Source: Google)

### Cunningham Street

Along Cunningham Street, the houses tend to be set on larger allotments and are generally freestanding. The most common subtype seen here is a single-fronted timber or brick cottage with either ashlar-look boards emulating more expensive stone (nos. 3,5,8,10,12) or bichromatic brickwork (nos. 13-21 & 24-28), although some of the later brick examples have been overpainted.

Exceptions to this are the pairs of Victorian terrace houses at 24-26 & 30-32 Cunningham Street and the four double-fronted houses at nos. 1, 6, 9 and 11. The double-fronted houses are of two typical types of the Italianate style: those with flat symmetrical facades (nos. 6 & 9) and those with a hipped bay projecting to one side creating an asymmetrical façade (no.11). 1 Cunningham Street is more typical of earlier workers cottages with a transverse gable roof, concave verandah with paired narrow posts and a rear skillion section. Unusually this timber house appears to be built on bluestone footings.



Figure 12. Asymmetrical double fronted Italianate house with canted bay at 11 Cunningham Street, South Yarra, built c.1877 (Source: Google, January 2019).



Figure 13. Symmetrical double fronted Italianate House at 6 Cunningham Street, South Yarra, built c.1885 (Source: Google, January 2019).



Figure 14. 1 Cunningham Street, South Yarra, built, c.1877 (source: Google, January 2019)



'Albert Terrace', built in 1877 at 23-33 Cunningham Street, stands out within the precinct for both its size and refinement in detail. Simply designed, this two-storey brick terrace row displays a restraint in detail that is more commonly associate with earlier Victorian regency architecture. This is evident in the symmetrical arrangement and rhythm of the principal façade, long narrow proportion of the first-floor windows, lack of applied ornamentation, other than a centrally placed pediment with decorative scrolls and the word Albert Terrace embossed, and the understated use of cast iron brackets to the verandah. The face brick walls of the terrace have been overpainted however the chimneys remain unpainted and are bichromatic using a combination of blonde and brown hawthorn bricks. The terrace at No 33 has lost its front verandah and a painted double storey brick party wall erected abutting the extant verandah at No.31.



Figure 15. 'Albert Terrace' built c.1877 at 23-23 Cunningham Street, South Yarra. (Source: Google, January 2019)

Two properties along Cunningham Street reflect a slightly later period of development. These are the single-storey semi-detached pair of Federation Queen Anne houses at Nos. 35-37 built on vacant land next to 'Albert Terrace' in 1905, and the Interwar duplex at no. 20 built in 1919 built on no. 18's northern garden. Nos. 35-37 display a combination of typical Federation Queen Anne features including hipped roofs of terracotta tiles with decorative ridge tiles and finials, walls of red brick, red brick chimneys with strapwork and terracotta chimney pots and verandahs with turned timber posts and a spindle work frieze. The duplex at no. 20 demonstrates key characteristics of the Interwar Arts and Crafts movement. Concerned with the integration of art into everyday life through craftsmanship key characteristics seen here bare walls of rough cast render on a red brick base, rough cast chimneys with slab tops and tall slender terracotta chimney pots, tiled hip roof with deep eaves and exposed rafters and first-floor oriel windows which in this instance overhanging Oxford Street.





Figure 16. Pair of Edwardian houses at 35-37 Cunningham Street, South Yarra, built c.1905 (Source: Context, February 2020).



Figure 17. Interwar Arts & Crafts duplex at 20 Cunningham Street, South Yarra, built c.1919. (Source: Context, February 2020)

### Oxford Street

Included in the precinct is a small group of five single fronted free-standing brick Italianate houses at the western end of Oxford Street towards Chapel Street. These houses demonstrate the key characteristics of the style found throughout the precinct and are the last surviving examples in Oxford street due to the demolition of nos. 18-28. Typical features include low-pitched hipped roofs, chimneys with a rendered cornice, bracketed eaves, front (nos. 12,14 and 16) or return verandahs (no. 11A & 13) with slender posts or columns and cast-iron ornament, double-hung sash windows with sidelights, and four-panelled front doors with raised cricket-bat mouldings.



Figure 18. Single fronted free-standing brick Italianate houses at 12-16 Oxford Street, South Yarra, built c.1883. (Source: Google Jan 2019)

## INTEGRITY

The streetscapes of the precinct have high integrity, with few non-contributory properties among them. With the exception of the few properties built at a later date (2-18 Palermo Street and 20 & 35-37 Cunningham Street), of which all demonstrate high integrity, all houses are clearly recognisable as Victorian Italianate in period and style, though some have undergone changes over time. The most frequent alterations are to front verandahs, ranging from the frequent replacement of verandah posts and loss of cast iron frieze and brackets to the verandahs being totally removed.

Less frequent alterations include the removal of eaves brackets, the replacement of front doors, the overpainting of brickwork, removing or lopping of chimneys, replacement of front windows and modern rear extensions. For the most part these are not visible from the street, so do not impact on the streetscape. Exceptions are at nos. 3, 10, 12, 26 & 28 Cunningham Street, where two-storey rear extensions have been undertaken. These do not generally overwhelm the original house as they are set at least two rooms back from the façade, leaving the main roof line unaltered. Contemporary infill housing in the precinct found at nos. 2, 4, 14-16, 18 & 22 Cunningham street and 18 Palermo Street have all been carefully designed to respect the form, scale and materiality of their neighbours and do not unduly detract from the integrity of the streetscapes.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

As noted in the description, this precinct comprises mostly a mix of single storey detached and attached brick and timber workers' and middle-income housing dating from the late nineteenth century. Displaying characteristic of the Victorian Italianate style, most of the houses within the precinct were built over a relatively short period of time between 1876 and 1892 with the exception of 2-16 Palermo Street (built in 1914 after the demolition of an earlier single house on a large allotment), the federation arts and crafts duplex at 20 Cunningham Street built in 1919 and the pair of houses at 35-37 Cunningham Street built in 1905. There are a number of other precincts in the Stonnington Heritage Overlay which represent this period, both large and small in size. Those of a similar size and/or a comparable housing stock include the following:

HO138 Hornby Street Precinct – this precinct is a residential area of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings developed adjacent to, and incorporating, the Presentation College and Prahran Windsor Primary School. Development in the area largely occurred through the 1870s, predating the land boom, although consolidation of the area to its current arrangement continued into the 1880s and beyond. Housing predominantly comprises small, single-storey cottages constructed of timber or brick with hipped roofs clad in slate or corrugated steel. The precinct is enhanced by the substantial terrace group, Hopetoun Terrace at its intersection of Elm Place and McIlwrick Street. This row of six, two-storey bichromatic brick residences retains cast iron verandahs with tessellated tile aprons and palisade fences. This terrace row forms an important landmark within the local area and is one of a handful of such buildings to survive within the Municipality

HO129 Duke & Hornby Street Precinct – this precinct contains intact Victorian brick and timber cottages, combined with later Edwardian housing, which demonstrates the development sequence of the area. In Hornby Street their development is predominantly Victorian in period, comprising attached terraces to the north and detached timber cottages to the south. North of Mary Street there is a pair of fine Edwardian cottages, one with a dairy (still operating) at the rear. The precinct retains the use of asphalt and bluestone as traditional street construction materials which are important streetscape attributes.

HO131 Fawkner Street/Davis Avenue Precinct – this precinct contains a largely intact collection of fine late nineteenth and early twentieth century modest attached and semi-detached cottages and small

detached villas with narrow side boundaries to their neighbours. The houses within the area are typical rather than outstanding in form, however collectively they represent an important element of the nineteenth century development of South Yarra. Davis Street contains medium-large Plane trees set into the road reserve on both sides of the street. They provide a partial canopy across the street, creating a distinctive character and emphasising the curve of the street.

HO134 Gladstone Street Precinct – Gladstone Street is a narrow street with relatively intact single storey detached and semi-detached brick and timber houses, mainly dating from the late nineteenth century. Most are single fronted however there are a number of larger double-fronted Italianate houses with polychrome brickwork, asymmetrical facades, and verandahs with cast iron friezes. The street itself retains the traditional construction materials of asphalt and bluestone, with bluestone cobbled laneways also remaining at the rear of the dwellings. The tree plantings are recent, with alternating Melaleucas and Callistemons.

HO144 Moore & Hardy Street Precincts – this precinct comprises detached or semidetached cottages built of brick or timber and modest in scale and form. They predominantly date from the late nineteenth century, with some dating from the early years of the twentieth century. In character these two streets are narrow in width and retain bluestone kerb and guttering, asphalt paving and roadway, with no nature strip provided.

HO124 Bowen Street Precinct – this precinct contains a remarkable group of timber nineteenth century workers cottages. The form and consistency of the cottages creates a remarkably cohesive architectural character to the area. The street itself retains an asphalt surface but the footpaths and kerb and guttering have been replaced with concrete. Trees are planted within the footpath and include typical post-war species of Brush Box, Prunus and Melaleuca.

Among the comparative examples, the Palermo Estate Precinct compares most closely to HO129 Duke & Hornby Street Precinct and HO138 Hornby Street Precinct. The housing is similar in size and layout comprising a late Victorian subdivision. It is particularly similar to HO129 Duke & Hornby Street Precinct which developed largely in the 1870s and is anchored by a substantial terrace group. It also bears similarities to HO129 Duke & Hornby Street Precinct which largely contains similar Victorian timber and brick cottages but also contains later Edwardian housing, which demonstrates the development sequence of the area. Compared to all the precincts above the Victorian Italianate style and modest architectural pretension are very similar in the Palermo Estate Precinct. The intactness of the contributory houses in the precincts is very similar, and the streets themselves retain their asphalt surface, bluestone kerbing and guttering and asphalt foot paths with no nature strips.

The precinct is distinguished by its early date of subdivision and development prior to the land boom of the 1880s. An 1856 survey of the Prahran Municipality shows Palermo Street (unnamed) with several houses developed along the northern side of the street. In 1874, tenders were invited for forming Palermo Street and filling in water holes and by October of that year, the first public auction of the Palermo Estate was held. Whilst none of the pre 1874 houses remain, Palermo Street retains the earliest houses of the subdivision and a large number of intact rows of attached single fronted, single storey terrace houses which evidences speculative development common at the time, providing modest cheap workers accommodation. Streetscapes of these terrace rows are becoming increasingly rare within this section of Stonnington due to a significant amount of demolition that occurred in the 1960s for the Housing Commission of Victoria and due to recent development pressures.



## ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

---

✓	<b>CRITERION A</b> Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).
	<b>CRITERION B</b> Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).
	<b>CRITERION C</b> Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).
✓	<b>CRITERION D</b> Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).
✓	<b>CRITERION E</b> Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).
	<b>CRITERION F</b> Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).
	<b>CRITERION G</b> Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).
	<b>CRITERION H</b> Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

---

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT

The Palermo Estate Precinct, South Yarra comprising 1-37 & 2-32 Cunningham Street, 1-25 & 2-30 Palermo Street, 11A-13 & 12-16 Oxford Street and 14 Forster Street South Yarra is significant. These streets were subdivided in 1877 with all houses constructed between 1877 and 1919.

The following properties are Non-contributory to the precinct: 2, 4, 16, 18 & 22 Cunningham Street and 18A Palermo Street. The rest are contributory. The bluestone pitched kerbs, channels and laneways also contribute to the significance.

### HOW IT IS SIGNIFICANT

The Palermo Estate Precinct, South Yarra, is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

### WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

The Palermo Estate Precinct is of historical significance as tangible evidence of the influence of both public transport and employment centres on the construction of housing in South Yarra. Bolstered by the extension of the rail line from South Yarra to Oakleigh in 1879, the introduction of special

workingmen's fares in 1882 and the opening of tramway lines along Toorak Road and Chapel Street in 1888, the area saw a rapid expansion in the development of local industries which in turn saw an acceleration of residential development. Halted by the depression of the 1890s the area saw a second wave of residential development after the establishment of the Tramways Trust in 1910 brought easier access and new employment opportunities. (Criterion A)

The precinct is significant for its illustration of popular residential architectural styles of the Victorian, Edwardian, and interwar periods with a relatively high intactness of buildings.

The precinct is of architectural significance for its collection of Victorian Italianate terrace rows, cottages and houses that, although modestly scaled, illustrate the stylish dwellings that were occupied by trade and service-industry workers of South Yarra during the nineteenth century. The modestly scaled dwellings, which comprise a high proportion of terrace rows and single-fronted houses and some semi-detached dwellings on smaller allotments, provide evidence of the more modest finances of the original occupiers. The predominant style in the late nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century was the Italianate. These houses display characteristic elements such as low-pitched hipped roofs, chimneys with a rendered cornice, bracketed eaves, front verandahs with chamfered posts or Corinthian columns and cast-iron ornament, double-hung sash windows often with sidelights, and four-panelled front doors.

'Albert Terrace', built in 1877 at 23-33 Cunningham Street, stands out within the precinct for both its size and refinement in detail. Simply designed, this two-storey brick terrace row displays a restraint in detail that is more commonly associate with earlier Victorian regency architecture. This is evident in the symmetrical arrangement and rhythm of the principal façade, long narrow proportion of the first-floor widows, lack of applied ornamentation, other than a centrally placed pediment with decorative scrolls and the word Albert Terrace embossed, and the understated use of cast iron brackets to the verandah.

Two properties along Cunningham Street reflect a slightly later period of development. These are the single storey semi-detached pair of Federation Queen Anne houses at Nos. 35-37 built in 1905, and the Interwar duplex at no. 20 built in 1919.

2-18 Palermo Street are representative of a transitional style between earlier Federation architecture and the Californian Bungalow of the 1920s. Simply detailed these houses all display similar design characteristics indicating that they were built by a single builder. (Criterion D)

While most of the houses in the precinct have typical Victorian Italianate forms and details, their rapid construction by a small group of builders has been created by an unusually high level of overall consistency in the streetscapes, as well as a small point of difference. The distinctive streetscape of Palermo Street is characterised by its numerous rows of attached single storey brick cottages. Streetscapes of these terrace rows are becoming increasingly rare within this section of Stonnington due to a significant amount of demolition that occurred in the 1960s for the Housing Commission of Victoria and recent development pressures. The streetscapes themselves are enhanced by the retention of the streets asphalt surface, bluestone kerbing and guttering and asphalt foot paths with no nature strips. (Criterion E)

## **GRADING AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Stonnington Planning Scheme as a precinct.

## PRECINCT GRADINGS SCHEDULE

Name	Number	Street	Grading	Built Date
	1	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
	3	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	5	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	7	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	9	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1878
	11	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
	13	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	15	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	17	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	19	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	21	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
Albert Terrace	23	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
Albert Terrace	25	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
Albert Terrace	27	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
Albert Terrace	29	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
Albert Terrace	31	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
Albert Terrace	33	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1877
	35	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1905
	37	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1905
	2	Cunningham Street	Non-contributory	Contemporary
	4	Cunningham Street	Non-contributory	Contemporary
	6	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	8	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	10	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	12	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1884
	16	Cunningham Street	Non-contributory	Contemporary
	18	Cunningham Street	Non-contributory	Contemporary
	20	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1919
	22	Cunningham Street	Non-contributory	Contemporary
	24	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	26	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	28	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1885
	30	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1887
	32	Cunningham Street	Contributory	c.1887



Name	Number	Street	Grading	Built Date
	14	Forster Street	Contributory	c.1920s-30s
	12	Oxford Street	Contributory	c.1883
	14	Oxford Street	Contributory	c.1883
	16	Oxford Street	Contributory	c.1883
	11	Oxford Street	Contributory	c.1885
	13	Oxford Street	Contributory	c.1885
	2	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	4	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	6	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	12	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	14	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	16	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	18	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1914
	18A	Palermo Street	Non-contributory	Contemporary
	20	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1880
	22	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1978/9
	24	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1878/9
	26	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1884
	28	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1884
	30	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1884
	1	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1891
	3	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1879
Beaconsfield Terrace	5	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1879
Beaconsfield Terrace	7	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1879
Beaconsfield Terrace	9	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1879
Palermo Terrace	11	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1880
Palermo Terrace	13	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1880
Palermo Terrace	15	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1880
Palermo Terrace	17	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1880
	19	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1876
	21	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1876
	23	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1876
	25	Palermo Street	Contributory	c.1876

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the City of Stonnington Planning Scheme:

## STONNINGTON PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

## REFERENCES

*Age*, as cited.

*Argus*, as cited.

*Australasian Chronicle*, as cited.

*Banner*, as cited.

City of Prahran Rate Books 1856-1900, via 'Victoria, Australia, Rate Books, 1855-1963', *Ancestry* <http://ancestry.com.au>.

Clark, Dr. Ian, and Kostanski, Laura 2006, *Stonnington's Indigenous History*, prepared for the city of Stonnington.

Context 2006, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, prepared for City of Stonnington.

Context 2016, 'Review of Toorak Road Precinct HO150', prepared for City of Stonnington.

Cooper, John B. 1924, *The History of Prahran 1836-1924*, Modern Printing, Melbourne.

Fergusson & Mitchell 1875, 'Palermo Estate', State Library Victoria: Vale collection.

Harrigan, Leo J. 1962, *Victorian Railways to '62: Victorian Railways, Public Relations and Betterment Board*.

'Land subdivision – Palermo Estate', 1874, Stonnington History Centre: Prahran Collections.

Lay, Maxwell 2003, *Melbourne Miles: the Story of Melbourne's Roads*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.

Malone, Betty 1983, *Chapel Street Part 1: 1834-1918*, Prahran Historical & Arts Society.

'Melbourne 19 Prahran' 1856, PROV VPRS 8168/ P2 unit 3509.

Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Detailed Plan, as cited.

Nigel Lewis & Associate 1983, *Prahran Conservation Study: Identification of Buildings & Areas of Major Significance*, prepared for the City of Prahran.

Sands & McDougall, *Sands & McDougall's Melbourne and suburban directory*, as cited.

*South Australian Register*, as cited.

*Telegraph, St Kilda, Prahran and South Yarra Guardian*, as cited.