

## Byron Street/Mason Avenue Residential Precinct

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### Existing Designations:

<b>Heritage Council Register:</b>	nil
<b>National Estate Register:</b>	nil
<b>National Trust Register:</b>	nil

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**History:** This part of Elwood was still largely undeveloped in the 1870s. The Vardy Survey map of St Kilda, prepared during 1873, shows several large allotments of vacant land flanking the intersection of Byron Street and Brighton Road and, further along, a solitary detached villa on the east corner of Byron and Tennyson. Closer settlement did not occur until the prosperous Boom period of the 1880s with Byron Street, as an existing and principal thoroughfare, being the first to develop. The portion to the west of Tennyson Street was subdivided during 1885, and ten new villas had been built (five on each side of the street) by early 1886. The portion of Byron Street between Brighton Road and Tennyson Street, meanwhile, evidently began to develop a year or two later, as it was not listed in the Sands & McDougall Directory until 1889. This recorded five new houses on the north side of the street, all but one identified as 'vacant'. The south side of the street, not yet listed in the directory at that time, was subsequently developed from late 1888 with the formation of two small residential estates. The first, gazetted in November 1888, comprised 29 new allotments with frontages to Byron Street, Tennyson Street and newly-formed Moore Street; the second, gazetted in August 1889, consisted of 23 allotments, fronting Brighton Road, Byron Street, and another new street, Cyril Street. A third new street, north of (and parallel to) Byron Street, was also laid out around this time: Moy Street, later renamed Mason Avenue.

Subsequent development of these three new streets was swift; by 1891, Moore Street was completely filled out with thirteen new houses on the east side (of which four were listed as vacant) plus another fourteen houses on the west side (again, with four vacant). Moy Street, meanwhile, had twelve entireties along its south side (five being vacant), its north side as yet unlisted. Construction of new houses in Cyril Street was slightly less intense, with four houses on the east side and five on the west. Byron Street, by contrast, had not undergone comparably intense development, notwithstanding its head start. By 1891, only two more houses had been built on the north side of the street, and three on the south side. The latter comprised the pair of double-storey terraces that still stand at Nos 15-17, and a detached villa (since demolished) on the south-west corner of Moore Street.

The MMBW map of the area, dated 1897, shows that development had, in fact stagnated. By that time, there had been no further construction in Byron Street, Moy Street or Cyril Street, and only one more house on each side of Moore Street. The latter included a general store at No 16, operated by one Joseph Shead, which first appeared in the directory in 1896. This development lag would continue for the next decade or so, with only two more houses being built: one at 23 Moy Street (c.1904) and another at 23 Byron Street (c.1907). During this period, the general store at 16 Moore Street remained operated by its original owner, Joseph Shead, until around 1911. It would subsequently be operated by a succession of grocers including John Allen (1913), Percy Dowker (1915), R Glenwright (1920s), and Mrs L Mitchell (1930s).

Residential development in this part of Elwood did not pick up again until the 1910s. Much of this was concentrated in the hitherto under-developed areas such as Cyril Street, which saw new houses erected at Nos 11, 13 and 15 (c.1912) and, on the east side, Nos 2, 4, 6, 8 and 16 (all c.1917). In Byron Street, the Sands & McDougall Directory listed three new houses on the south side (Nos 9, 11 and 13) in 1913, followed by 'two houses being built' on the north side (Nos 8 and 8a) in 1917, another three houses (Nos 20, 22 and 24) in 1918, and two more on the south side (Nos 19-21) in 1919. The few remaining vacant lots on the south side of Moy Street (which became Mason Avenue around 1917) were also developed during this time, with new houses at No 25 (1915), No 1 (1916), Nos 43-47 (1916) and Nos 15-17 (1917). With the completion of the last two, listed in the 1918 directory as 'two vacant houses', the south side of the street was entirely filled out.

The inter-war development that characterises much of Elwood did not leave much of an imprint on this older and more established part of the suburb, simply because most of the allotments had already been developed by that time. The last few remaining vacant allotments were finally developed during the 1920s and early 1930s, comprising a detached weatherboard house at 7 Cyril Street (first listed as 'vacant' in 1923), and a semi-detached brick duplex at 17a-19a Byron Street (c.1934). Other residents were merely content to update their existing houses, as was the case with Pekina, the Victorian brick villa at 2 Byron Street, which was externally remodelled with a new timber-framed windows and flat-roofed verandah with ubiquitous tapered pillars.

Still others saw the benefit of demolishing their houses and replacing them with multi-unit dwellings, reflecting a trend that was spreading throughout Elwood at the time. During the 1930s, a semi-detached duplex was erected on the site of two adjacent timber cottages at 17-19 Moore Street and, in Cyril Street, a small double-storey block of flats, Christina Court, built on a site originally occupied by another two cottages. Not surprisingly, this trend of removal and redevelopment was to continue into the post-War period. Casualties during the 1960s and '70s included early timber cottages (eg 27-31 Moore Street; 6-8 Cecil Street) and several of the grand brick villas in Byron Street (Nos 6, 16 and 25), which were all razed for new two- and three-storey blocks of flats. Amongst all these new flats, two new detached houses were also built in the post-war period: a faux double-storey terrace house at 35 Mason Avenue, and, at the other end of the architectural spectrum, a particularly fine architect-designed brick townhouse at 9 Byron Street.

Development of this sort within the precinct had abated considerably by the 1980s, and only three new houses have actually been built since then: three double-storey townhouses in Moore Streets (Nos 2a, 18 and 21) and a single-storey house at 25 Mason Avenue.

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**Description:** The precinct comprises the portion of Byron Street between Brighton Road and Tennyson Street, the two narrow dead-end streets (Moore Street and Cyril Street) that extend from its south side, and a parallel but narrower thoroughfare (Mason Street) to the north of Byron Street. The streets themselves are characterised by bluestone kerbing and relatively narrow footpaths, without nature strips. The streets that were laid out in 1888-89 (ie Mason Avenue, Moore Street and Cyril Street) are quite narrow, the last two being dead-ends. Byron Street, the older thoroughfare that pre-dates actual residential development, is considerably wider; a number of bluestone-edged garden beds have been formed in recent years along the edges of the roadway, to enclose angle parking bays.

Predominately developed in the period 1888-93, the precinct exhibits considerable variety, even amongst its late nineteenth century building stock. There are large detached masonry villas, for example, contrasting with rows of humbler working-class timber cottages. The former, restricted to the north side of Byron Street, comprise an intermittent row of five single-storey brick villas (Nos 2, 4, 14, 18, 24). These are (or at least once were) virtually identical, with asymmetrical double-fronted facades, canted bay windows, rendered chimneys with moulded caps, hipped roofs with bracketed eaves, and ornate verandahs. Three are bichromatic brick (eg Nos 14, 18, 24) while two were rendered; one of the latter (No 4) has unfortunately been sandblasted to expose the brick substrate. Roofs are invariably slate (Nos 4, 14, 24), with one in corrugated galvanised steel (No 18) and another (No 2) reclad in terracotta tiles. Verandahs also vary in detailing. Nos 4, 18 and 24 and 18 remain intact, with cast iron columns, lacework friezes and brackets; that at No 4 is particularly fine, having a atypical return verandah with tessellated floor, paired columns, and an ornate frieze enlivened with a dentillated cornice and nailhead mouldings. The verandahs of Nos 2 and 14 were entirely rebuilt during the interwar period, respectively with tapered rendered pillars and squat fluted columns.

There is a cohesive row of double-fronted asymmetrical timber villas at 20-28 Moore Street, somewhat less ostentatious than their masonry counterparts in Byron Street. These are all block-fronted, with hipped roofs variously clad in slate (No 24, 26), corrugated galvanised steel (No 28), Colorbond (No 20) or pressed metal sheet (No 22). Verandahs generally retain plain or stop-chamfered posts, with cast iron lace; one verandah has been altered (No 20) and another entirely removed (No 24). All these houses have original paired windows with timber-framed double-hung sashes and, in the case of Nos 26-28, ripple iron awnings on timber brackets.

The more modest single-fronted Victorian cottages, which proliferate in Moore Street and Mason Avenue, are typically of timber construction, either block-fronted or conventional weatherboard. A few (eg 11 and 13 Mason Avenue) have atypical beaded weatherboard, and there is also a unique row of attached brick cottages at 1-9 Moore Street. Cottages in Moore Street tend to have hipped roofs with bracketed eaves (eg Nos 1-9, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13 and 33 Moore Street), while those in Mason Avenue and Cyril Street invariably have pitched roofs, with a gable front to the street. A number of the gabled houses have a distinctive façade detail, whereby the side eaves partially return across the street frontage to form a bracketed broken stringcourse (eg 13 Mason Avenue, 10 Moore Street, 10 and 15 Cyril Street). There is much variety amongst verandah form: posts may be cast iron (plain or fluted) or timber (plain, turned or stop-chamfered) and roofs may be hipped, skillion, bullnosed or, in the case of the two atypical houses at 11-13 Mason Avenue, with unusual bellcast verandah roofs. Most verandahs are single-fronted; two exceptions with return verandahs exist at 25 Moore Street (a timber house) and 4 Byron Street (in brick). An anomaly amongst the Victorian built fabric in the precinct (and within Elwood in general) is the pair of double-storey rendered brick Boom-style terraced houses on the south side of Byron Street (No 15-17), one of which has been unsympathetically altered by the removal of most of the verandah structure.

Edwardian housing also takes various forms. There are single-fronted timber cottages on the nineteenth century model (eg the identical pair at 2-4 Cyril Street), semi-detached brick pairs (eg 9-11 Cyril Street, 11-13 Byron Street), and fully detached houses in weatherboard (eg 14 Cyril Street) or brick (eg 12 Byron Street). The semi-detached pairs have symmetrical façades about a central party wall flanked by recessed porches, further enlivened by roughcast rendered banding and timber-framed windows with ripple iron awnings. Two similar pairs, albeit altered and far less intact, exist just outside the boundaries of the precinct at Nos 3-5 and 27-29 Byron Street. The Edwardian and early inter-war houses are otherwise broadly characterised by common detailing including asymmetrical hipped or pitched roofs with red terracotta tiles, gable ends with rough-cast and/or half-timbered infill, porches (often to one side) with turned timber posts and fretwork friezes and brackets, and sometimes bay windows, variously curved (10 Byron Street) or rectangular (12 Byron Street).

The few inter-war houses in the precinct tend to be only representative examples of a type and period that is better represented elsewhere in Elwood. They include a number of semi-detached brick dwellings including two bungalow-style pairs with half-timbered gable ends, roughcast render and canted bay windows (20-22 and 19-21 Byron Street), and two Tudor Revival pairs with rendered walls and clinker brick trim (17a-19a Byron Street and 15-17 Moore Street). The relatively few post-war buildings within the precinct include some three-storey blocks of brick apartments, dating from the 1960s and '70s (eg 6, 16 and 25 Byron Street, 6-8 Cyril Street), some contemporaneous double-storey flats (27 and 31 Moore Street), three double-storey townhouses of more recent origin (2a, 18 and 21 Moore Street) and a new single-storey detached house (25 Mason Avenue). None of these are particularly distinguished, although the detached double-storey flat-roofed brick house at 9 Byron Street, with its cantilevered porch roof, vertical fin-like elements and glazed header brick highlights, is a particularly fine piece of contemporary 1960s design, and as such is considered to be a contributory building within the precinct.

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### References:

Lodged Plans No 2244 (dated 22 November 1888) and 2640 (dated 22 August 1889)  
*City of St Kilda Rate Books*. South Ward.  
*Sands & McDougall Directory*

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### Thematic Context:

- ▯ The Mixed Success of Boom Era Subdivision
- ▯ Closer Settlement, 1900-1920

**Comparative Analysis:** The housing within the Byron Street precinct is representative of the type of late Victorian Boom-period development that is ubiquitous across Melbourne's inner suburbs, including many parts of the City of Port Phillip such as St Kilda, East St Kilda, Balaclava, Port Melbourne and South Melbourne. However, it is much less common in Elwood and present-day Ripponlea. Indeed, the MMBW map of the area (c.1897) indicates that dense residential development at that time was largely restricted to the large area bounded by Brighton Road to the east, Moy Street (now Mason Avenue) and Clarke Street to the north, Mitford Street to the west, and Scott Street to the south. This encapsulated rows of detached masonry villas on both sides of Scott Street, Rainsford Street and the north side of Byron Street (east portion), some scattered brick villas on the south side of Tennyson Street, rows of detached timber villas in John Street and Byron Street (west portion), and rows of more modest single-fronted brick and timber cottages in Moy Street, Cyril Street and Moore Street.

Today, what was once the heart of Elwood's late nineteenth century residential development has been much compromised by a century of demolition, unsympathetic renovation and redevelopment. In Byron Street (west), seven of the original ten villas have been demolished and another two virtually remodelled beyond recognition, leaving only a single intact surviving example at No 38. In nearby John Street, a cohesive row of four timber villas remains at No 24-30, along with another single villa at No 10, but five others have disappeared. Similarly in both Scott Street and Rainsford Street, many of the brick villas were replaced by new dwellings or multi-storeyed blocks of flats in the post-war period, leaving only one fully intact house in each street (20 Scott Street and 7 Rainsford) plus several others in much-altered states. Within this former centre for Boom-era development, it is Moore Street, Cecil Street, Byron Street (east) and the south side of Mason Avenue that stand out. Some parts, such as Moore Street, remain as extremely cohesive streetscapes of nineteenth century development while other portions, such as Byron Street (east) and Cyril Street, provide intact remnants of that period with an overlay of subsequent twentieth century development.

There are three comparable areas in Elwood that are (or were once) characterised, albeit to lesser extents, by similar Boom-period residential development. The first, much smaller in scale but equally dense, is Hotham Grove, Ripponlea, which once had a row of eight villas on the north side, another seven on the south, plus three small cottages fronting Bell Street. Most of these, however, have either been demolished or unsympathetically altered, leaving only the cottages at 1-5 Bell Street, a pair of villas at 17-19 Hotham Grove, and another larger villa at No 2, as the most intact surviving evidence – which, unfortunately, do not combine to produce the effect of a cohesive precinct (or even a streetscape) in the same way as Byron Street/Moore Street/Cyril Street/Mason Avenue. Two other examples, larger in scale but sparser, were the two ambitious, if ultimately unsuccessful, speculative estates in the southern part of Elwood, between St Kilda Street, Glenhuntly Road and Ormond Road. In contrast to those mentioned above, these estates never actually developed with dense rows of housing, but simply with a few isolated villas. In any case, no evidence of either estate now survives, with the exception of a pair of much-altered brick villas at 54-46 Spray Street.

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### **Statement of Significance:**

#### *What is Significant?*

The Byron Street Precinct comprises all those properties in Cyril Street, Moore Street, most of the south side of Mason Avenue (Nos 1 to 37) and much of the portion of Byron Street between Brighton Road and Tennyson Street (Nos 9 to 23 on the south side, and Nos 2 to 24 on the north side). Largely developed between 1888 and 1891, the precinct consists overwhelmingly of predominantly single-storeyed late nineteenth century housing of numerous types (grand villas in brick and timber, brick terrace houses, rows of modest timber and brick cottages), supplemented by a small number of Edwardian and inter-war houses (typically duplexes and semi-detached pairs) and post-war buildings (typically multi-storey flats).

#### *How is it Significant?*

The precinct is of historical, architectural and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

### *Why is it Significant?*

Historically, the Byron Street precinct is significant as the most intact, cohesive and varied evidence of Boom-period residential settlement in Elwood. This type of development, ubiquitous in most of Melbourne's inner suburbs, was underrepresented in Elwood in the late nineteenth century, being largely restricted to a densely settled area bounded by Brighton Road, Mason Avenue, Mitford Street, Scott Street. Other Boom-era subdivisions, such as the *Seaside Estate* in the south of Elwood, were far more sparsely settled, and ultimately failed. In any case, what little evidence ever existed of this phase of Elwood's development has subsequently been decimated as a result of subsequent demolition, alteration and redevelopment in the twentieth century, leaving Cyril Street, Moore Street, the south side of Mason Avenue and a portion of Byron Street as the most intact surviving remnant of what, in the late nineteenth century, the heart of residential Elwood. The twentieth century accretions, including Edwardian and inter-war houses and post-war flats, are of interest in their own right, providing important evidence of successive phases in the development of Elwood's built environment.

Architecturally and aesthetically, the precinct is significant for its ability to demonstrate a number of ubiquitous late nineteenth century housing types, including the grand bichromatic brick villas and terraced dwellings of the middle-class, and the humbler timber and cottages of the lower classes. The nineteenth century buildings within the precinct achieve a broad sense of cohesion through their common scale (predominantly single-storeyed) and materials (predominantly timber) while, at the same time, displaying richness and variety in the form and detailing of individual dwellings. The few early twentieth century buildings, including semi-detached duplexes, are contributory elements, being representative examples of eras and styles that are generally better represented elsewhere in Elwood. The post-war buildings are generally generic in style and thus non-contributory, save for a fine architect-designed 1960s house at 9 Byron Street that is of aesthetic interest in its own right.

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**Recommendations:** Buildings and street trees recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the Port Phillip Planning Scheme.

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**Assessment:** Simon Reeves, Heritage Alliance.

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### **Significant**

Byron Street: 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24;

Cyril Street: 2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16;

Mason Street: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37;

Moore Street: 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 33;

### **Contributory**

Byron Street: 2, 9, 17a, 19a, 20, 22;

Cyril Street: 1, 3, 5, 15, 17, 18;

Moore Street: 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23;

### **Non-contributory**

Byron Street: 6, 16;

Cyril Street: 6-8;

Mason Street: 25, 25a, 27;

Moore Street: 2a, 18, 21, 27, 31;



- Significant
- Contributory
- Non-contributory
- Proposed extent of heritage overlay



*Attached row of Victorian brick cottages at No 1-9 Moore Street;*



*Row of detached single-fronted Victorian timber cottages in Mason Avenue*



*Two of the remaining grand Victorian detached brick villas, at 2-4 Byron Street*



*Atypical pair of rendered Victorian double-storey terrace houses at 15-17 Byron Street*



*Typical double-fronted timber villa, one of several in a row in Moore Street*



*Interesting architect-designed detached 1960s house at 9 Byron Street*