

McRae Street Residential Precinct

Existing Designations:

Heritage Council Register:	nil
National Estate Register:	nil
National Trust Register:	nil

History: The new estate is first recorded in the *Sands & McDougall Directory* in 1936, which listed newly completed houses at 31 and 33 John Street (respectively occupied at that time by William Bartley and Mrs Fanny Murray), plus another on the east side of McCrae Street (occupied by one Gavin Greenlees), presumably No 1, being the other half of 31 John Street. That year's directory also had entries for another 'house being built' on each side of McCrae Street. A year later, the directory listed six completed houses in McCrae Street, at Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. By 1938, the estate had entirely filled out, with another four pairs of houses completed at Nos 8-10, 12-14, 7-9 and 11-13.

Electoral rolls record that the original residents of this modest estate included Gavin Greenlees, journalist (No 1), Abraham Frederick Davis, clerk (No 2), Phillip Cohen, musician (No 3), Mark Benjamin, salesman (No 5), Alfred Gardiner, musician (No 7), Henry George, surveyor (No 9), William Cooper, waiter (No 10), Harry Cohen, tailor (No 11), William Newton, manufacturer (No 12), Edwin Smith, manager (No 13) and Thomas O'Dowd, butcher (No 14). Of these original residents, only Davis (No 2), Cohen (No 11), Cooper (relocated from No 10 to No 12), and Smith (No 13) were still living in McCrae Street in the mid-1940s. This remained constant for over a decade; by 1965, however, only Abraham Davis remained.

Description: The subdivision comprises sixteen blocks of land, of which twelve have frontage to McCrae Street, and another four fronting John Street. McCrae Street itself, a short but broad cul-de-sac, has bluestone kerbing with concrete driveway crossovers and footpaths, and narrow nature strips planted with small trees including *eucalyptus* and *melaleuca* species. The sixteen allotments are occupied by eight pairs of semi-detached duplex dwellings, which have been sited to create a repetitious and regular streetscape. Between each pair of dwellings is a pair of driveways that flank a central woven-wire fence and leading back to a pair of attached garages at the rear of the block. Streetscape cohesion is also achieved through equal setbacks, and the continuous use of virtually identical front fences, in the form of brick dwarf walls with squat piers. The houses themselves achieve cohesion through their common scale (ie single-storeyed), their composition (ie double-fronted facades with side porches and attached garages to the rear) and their materials (terracotta tiled roofs, tripartite timber-framed windows, and face brick plinths with textured rendered walls above and tapestry brick trim).

Otherwise, there is variety in the detailing and form of individual residences, although some are simply mirror-reversed. This is the case with Nos 7-9 and 12-14, both of which are expressed as a single residence with an asymmetrical double-fronted façade, and side porches with tapestry brick piers. A Moderne influence has been introduced in the rendered finish, which was raked to create the effect of banded rustication, and, unlike most of the other houses, there is no tapestry brick trim. Nos 8-10 and 11-13 also form a mirror-reversed pair; they have a similar asymmetrical double-fronted composition and side porches with brick piers, but the façade detailing is otherwise entirely different, with clinker bricks window sills, lintels and eaves corbels, evoking the Tudor Revival style. The houses at Nos 3-5 are similar, but with fully rendered side porches, soldier course window lintels, and decorative brick diaperwork. By contrast, the houses at Nos 4-6 are entirely anomalous in their form and detailing. This pair has a symmetrical façade with an elongated bay window across both halves, and, above, a jerkinhead roof that is unique in the precinct. Like the other houses, it has side porches, but they are enlivened in this case by round arches with clinker brick voussoirs, a low parapet, and a fully rendered finish.

The properties flanking the John Street corner are different again; each pair has an almost symmetrical frontage to John Street, about a central party wall. Each half, however, is articulated as a discrete double-fronted asymmetrical dwelling, having a gabled bay to one side with a raked parapet and a canted bay window. The outermost houses in each pair (31 and 33 John Street) have broad gabled front porches with eaves corbels and a Tudor-style arch, edged in clinker brick. The houses on the actual corners (Nos 1 and 2 McCrae Street) have virtually identical double-fronted facades to each street frontage, with the entry porches facing McCrae Street.

References:

Sands & McDougall Directory. Various.

Comparative Analysis: While inter-war residential development characterises much of present-day Elwood, much of this took place along existing streets and subdivisions that had been laid out in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Virtually all of the land in Elwood that could be subdivided had been thus developed by the onset of the Depression, and consequently very few entirely new residential estates were laid out there in the 1930s and early '40s. During this period, the *cul-de-sac* residential estate became popular throughout Melbourne's more affluent suburbs, and Elwood's few new subdivisions from that period are in that form. In a broad sense, McCrae Street can therefore be compared to the few other *cul-de-sac* estates in Elwood, namely Garden Court (1936), Avoca Court and, although somewhat later in date, Southey Court (1943). Other examples in the City of Port Phillip include Eildon Court in St Kilda (1940) and Holroyd Court in East St Kilda (1936). The difference, however, is these estates are invariably in the form of short, curving courts rather than, in the case of McCrae Street, a straight dead-end street. Moreover, their building stock typically comprises multi-storey multi-unit developments, such as double-storey duplexes (eg Holroyd Court) or three- or four-storey blocks of flats, rather than the rows of single-storey semi-detached houses seen in McCrae Street.

Residential subdivisions like McCrae Street, comprising longer dead-end streets lined with single-storey dwellings in a cohesive architectural style, were actually more common, at least in the City of Port Phillip, in the second half of the 1920s. Perhaps the finest example is Los Angeles Court in Elwood's northern extremity. Dating from 1927, this relatively long dead-end street was developed with a series of detached dwellings. Mooltan Avenue in East St Kilda, dating from 1925, is a kinked *cul-de-sac* containing seven detached houses in the Spanish Mission style, creating a cohesive enclave that is quite comparable to McCrae Street. The latter, however, is notably larger in scale (having twice as many houses), and displays even greater cohesion in terms of its regular site planning, with semi-detached houses alternating with paired driveways and attached garages.

Statement of Significance:

What is Significant?

The McCrae Street Precinct includes all properties within a *cul-de-sac* residential subdivision that was laid out in c.1935 and developed within a year or so thence. It consists entirely of pairs of semi-detached single-storey rendered brick dwellings: three pairs along each side of McCrae Street (Nos 3-5, 7-9, 11-13, 4-6, 8-10 and 12-14) plus two other pairs straddling the John Street corners (31 and 33 John Street, forming semi-detached pairs, respectively, with 1 and 2 McCrae Street).

How is it Significant?

The McCrae Street Precinct is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the McCrae Street Precinct is significant as one of a very small number of entirely new residential estates subdivisions that were developed in Elwood during the 1930s. With a long and straight dead-end street at its centre, it represents a distinct contrast to the more ubiquitous form of contemporaneous estates (eg Garden Court, Avoca Court and Southey Court) that comprise multi-storeyed dwellings around a short court.

Aesthetically, the McCrae Street Precinct is significant as a fine streetscape of late inter-war housing. While individual houses vary in detailing, showing the various influences of the Moderne, Tudor Revival and Bungalow idioms, they otherwise exhibit a remarkable consistency of form (double-fronted facades with hipped roofs and side porches) and materials (terracotta tiles, render, tapestry brick) that combines with the carefully regimented estate layout (alternating semi-detached houses with paired driveways and garages) to create an intact and cohesive enclave, enhanced by common front fences, landscaped nature strips, and bluestone kerbing.

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

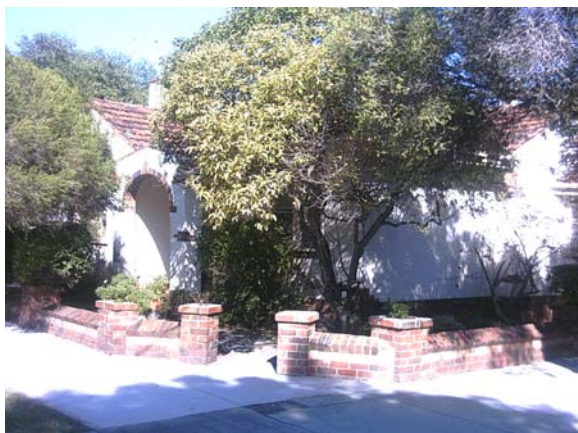
Assessment: Simon Reeves, Heritage Alliance.



General view along west side of McCrae Street; note bluestone kerbing and street trees



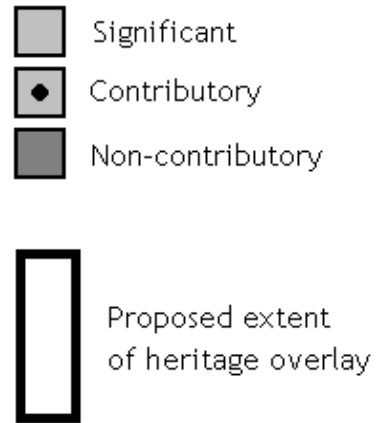
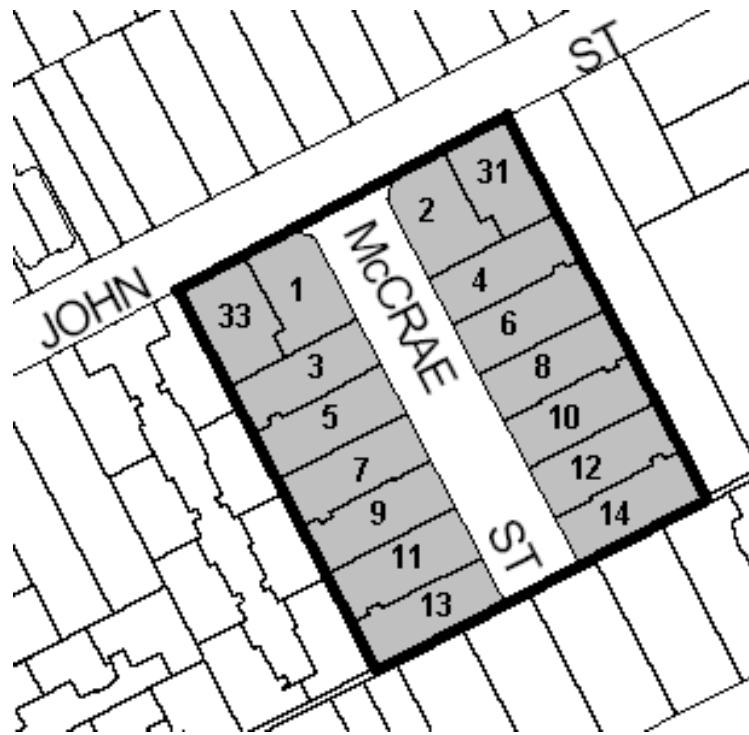
Unique gambrel-roofed house at 4-6 McCrae Street; note canted bay window across both dwellings



Tudor Revival-influenced house on corner of McCrae and John Street; note front fence



Typical pair at 3-5 McCrae Street; note garage and low woven-wire fence



Significant

John Street: 31, 33

McCrae Street: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14