
Bell Street Precinct



Attached houses, 149-55
Mary Street



Edwardian timber villas,
Benson Street



Edwardian houses, Coppin
Street

Location

1-29 & 2-22 BELL STREET, and 1A & 1-11 BENSON STREET, and 170-210 COPPIN STREET, and 139-157 MARY STREET, RICHMOND, YARRA CITY

Municipality

YARRA CITY

Level of significance

Recommended for Heritage Overlay

Heritage Listing

Yarra City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 25, 2015

What is significant?

The Bell Street Precinct, comprising 1-29 & 2-22 Bell Street, 1A & 1-11 Benson Street, 170-210 Coppin Street, and 139-157 Mary Street, Richmond, is significant. The precinct contains timber and red brick dwellings predominantly from the Federation/Edwardian era, some with Queen Anne styling and the later examples demonstrating a transition to Arts & Crafts and bungalow styles. The housing in the precinct was constructed between 1910 and 1920, some of it in rows or groups by a single designer.

Contributory buildings have typically:

- Gable-fronted roofs for single-fronted houses, or high hip roofs with a projecting front gable for double-fronted,
- One storey wall heights,
- Face brick, weatherboard, some ashlar timber boards and roughcast render accents, most with faux half-timbering to the gable,
- Corrugated iron roofing,
- Chimneys of red face brick with corbelled capping course or a cap of roughcast render,
- Post-supported verandah elements facing the street, many with elaborate timber friezes,
- Double or tripartite casement windows with highlights (often of coloured glass or leadlight), many beneath a decorative window hood, and
- Less than 40% of the street wall face comprised with openings such as windows and doors.

The following buildings are Individually Significant and have their own statement of significance:

- 15-21 Bell Street, and
- 204-208 Coppin Street.

The following properties are Not Contributory: 7-13 & 10 Bell Street, 1A Benson Street, 182 Coppin Street, and 143 Mary Street.

How it is significant?

The Bell Street Precinct is of local historical, and architectural/aesthetic significance to the City of Yarra.

Why it is significant?

The precinct provides tangible evidence of the housing boom of the early twentieth century in Richmond, when the expansion of manufacturing led to significant population growth and demand for housing. In particular the precinct illustrates the prevalence of speculatively built developments erected in response to the overwhelming housing need. It illustrates the better class of dwellings erected in this period, seen particularly in the villas along Coppin Street, but also in the rows of finely detailed identical brick cottages built for pawnbroker and financier Elly Lesser on Bell Street and the architect-designed row on Mary Street. The sole use of brick as a building material along Coppin Street demonstrates the effect of the council by-law of 1886 banning timber construction along a number of major streets in Richmond. (Criterion A)

Architecturally, the precinct is representative of the speculative housing estates of the early twentieth century, mainly comprising terraces or rows of duplex and detached houses built either to identical design or with a certain amount of pleasing variety in details and forms. The houses within the precinct demonstrate the principal characteristics of Edwardian-era domestic architecture, particularly the predominance of gable fronts (either to single-fronted cottages or asymmetrical villas), the use of red face brick with render dressings or areas of roughcast render, casement windows often with highlights, the use of bold timber fretwork and shaped timber posts to verandahs, and faux half timbering to gables. (Criterion D)

Aesthetically, a number of the houses display unusual or particularly high quality detail, including the jettied gables and bold arched verandah friezes of Elly Lesser's rows (196-202 Coppin Street, 15-21 Bell Street), the basket-weave fretwork to the villa at 170 Coppin Street, the render detail to 210 Coppin Street, the jerkin-head gables and attic-style form of 204-208 Coppin Street, the brickwork details, window hoods and Tudor-arched verandah friezes of 145-157 Mary Street, and the sinuous incised design of the timber verandah frieze of 139 Mary Street. The consistent rows of houses by a single builder add to the visual cohesion of the precinct. (Criterion E)

Heritage Study/Consultant Yarra - Heritage Gap Study: Review of Central Richmond 2014, Context P/L, 2014;
Yarra - Heritage Gap Study, Graeme Butler & Associates, 2007;

Hermes Number 162821

Property Number

Physical Description 1

This is a residential area comprising timber and red brick dwellings predominantly from the Federation/Edwardian era, some with Queen Anne styling and the later examples demonstrating a transition to Arts & Crafts and bungalow styling. The houses include gable-fronted cottages, asymmetrical villas, and attached pairs and rows. The majority of them were constructed as groups with identical facades or variations on a theme, particularly along Benson and Bell streets. These groups are interspersed with some individual designs and substantial villas, particularly along the prestigious Coppin Street. As a whole, the houses create a very regular streetscape of projecting front gables in a variety of materials and details.

Along Coppin Street are two groups of identical single-fronted Edwardian brick duplexes, all with prominent front gables. At nos. 188-194 are duplexes distinguished by a flared front window hood (also seen on Benson Street asymmetrical villas) and unusually proportioned tripartite casement window (with an unusually short casement below the highlights, also seen at 204-208 Coppin Street). To their south, at nos. 196-202, are duplexes with very prominent verandah fretwork, characteristic of Elly Lesser's developments. Here the front gable is jettied over an arched ladder frieze supported on pairs of turned timber posts. Also typical of his duplexes is the bay window with leadlight highlights above the casements and a pattern of diagonal and horizontal lining boards at the top.

There are a number of large, freestanding asymmetrical brick Federation villas on Coppin Street. Of particular note are nos. 170, 184, 186 and 210. No. 170 has an enormous front gable and very unusual basket-weave fretwork to the verandahs, which is cut to create complex stepped openings. Nos. 184 and 186 are distinguished by their generous front setback, substantial scale and intricate verandah fretwork and overall level of ornament. No. 210 has a particularly high level of ornamentation, including vermiculated render banding and other cast-cement ornament including a scrolled hood mould of the front window and cast flowers to the frieze, fine leadlights to the segmentally arched casements of the front window, and an arched pattern of half-timbering. It is missing its verandah roof and fretwork.

Another group of fine freestanding houses are at nos. 204-208 (Individually Significant, see separate citation). They are late Federation in style with an Arts & Crafts influence and are prominent in the streetscape thanks to their jerkin-head gables and attic-style form.

Bell Street contains another group of duplexes developed by Elly Lesser at nos. 15-21 (Individually Significant, see separate citation). Like his development on Coppin Street, they have prominent jettied gable fronts set over elaborate verandah fretwork and casement bay windows. These houses are distinguished by the incised timber detail to their gables and verandah brackets. Beside them is another row of simpler gable-fronted Edwardian cottages at nos. 23 to 29.

On the west side of Bell Street are freestanding single and double-fronted timber Edwardian houses, as well as two early bungalows in brick (nos. 6 and 22). The asymmetrical timber houses at nos. 16-20 share an unusual design feature - a dado of contrasting cladding below weatherboard walls - as the houses in the Hosie Street Precinct. They appear to be by the same designer/builder. At the north end of the street is a series of asymmetrical double-fronted timber houses with a variety of verandah fretwork details.

Benson Street has a row of three double-fronted Edwardian weatherboard villas at nos. 1-5, with distinctive flared hoods to the front bay windows. Further down is a pair of gable-fronted weatherboard cottages at nos. 7 and 9 (no. 7 is more intact). And a small hipped roof weatherboard cottage with a large rear extension.

Mary Street is dominated by the terrace of single and double-fronted brick Edwardian houses by architects F. & K. Mackay at nos. 145-157. They all have red face brick to the lower part of the walls, with roughcast render above the window transom level. The roof vent in the gable is left in face brick as a decorative accent. The pairs of casement windows sit below three coloured highlights and simple hoods supported on Arts & Crafts timber brackets. Verandah and porch fretwork shows variants of pointed and Tudor arches with a ladder frieze, except for nos. 155-157, where the curved bracket as the window hoods is used for the entry porches. These last two houses had face brick walls and roughcast render in the gable only (NB: the brick at no. 157 has since been rendered).

To the north of Benson Street, there is a single-fronted brick Edwardian house with a similar configuration of face brick walls (over-painted), roughcast render to the gable above a row of decorative moulded bricks, and a tripartite casement window below a timber hood. Beside it is a double-fronted, asymmetrical Edwardian villa with

ashlar boards (no. 139). It is distinguished by the sinuous incised design to its arched verandah frieze, and the only example of decorative gable trusswork in the precinct (others have variants on faux half-timbering).

The level of intactness of the Contributory (and Significant) houses is high as a group. Within the rows of identical houses some have over-painted brick, removal of verandah details, and a few covered in fake brick and with unsympathetic replacement windows.

Not Contributory properties in the precinct include a two-storey apartment house (c.1960s) at 182 Coppin Street, a row of recent two-storey units at 7-13 Bell Street (constructed on the land subdivided off the back of 184 and 186 Coppin Street), a pair of two recent units at the corner of Mary and Benson streets (143 Mary Street and 1 Benson Street), and an extensively altered Edwardian house at 10 Bell Street (walls reclad in brick veneer, window openings enlarged, door and surround removed, chimneys removed, verandah posts and frieze removed, roof reclad in tiles).

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>