

63 ST VINCENT PLACE
Albert Park
Heritage Impact Statement



63 St Vincent Place South
Albert Park

H1291 – St Vincent Place Precinct

October 2025

Prepared by:
Fraser Brown
Quadratum Architecture
5/82 Wirraway Drive
Port Melbourne 3207

for
Sue Michelmore

QUADRATUM 
ARCHITECTURE • CONSERVATION

5/82 Wirraway Drive Port Melbourne 3207
ph 03 9646 7997 m 0457 799 778 ABN 41 151 440 336

1.0 Introduction

This statement forms part of a permit application for alterations to the rear of 63 St Vincent Place south. The modern atrium in the former lightwell is planned to be replaced with a new low pitched roof and relatively minor alterations carried out to improve the livability and facilities within the house to suit the ongoing use of the house as a substantial single residence.

1.1 Victorian Heritage Register

63 St Vincent Place South is included within the St Vincent Place Precinct, H1291, on the Victorian Heritage Register.

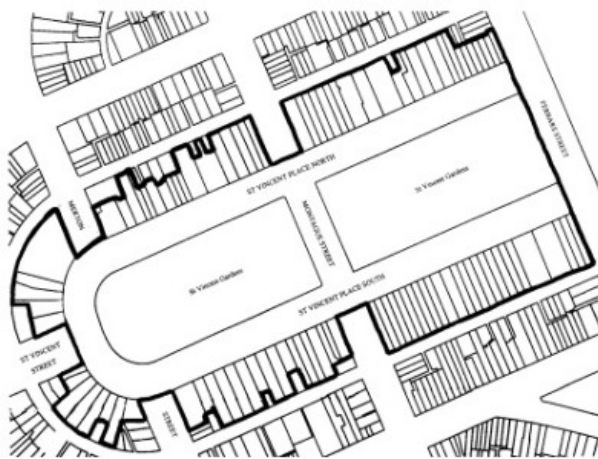


Figure 1 St Vincent Place Precinct, H1291.

Statement of Significance

The following is the Statement of Significance for VHR H1291.

Last updated on - May 12, 1999

What is significant?

The St Vincent Place precinct was first designed in 1854 or 1855, probably by Andrew Clarke, the Surveyor-General of Victoria. The current layout is the work of Clement Hodgkinson, the noted surveyor, engineer and topographer, who adapted the design in 1857 to allow for its intersection by the St Kilda railway. The precinct, which in its original configuration extended from Park Street in the north to Bridport Street in the south, and from Howe Crescent in the east to Nelson Road and Cardigan Street in the west, was designed to emulate similar 'square' developments in London, although on a grander scale. The main streets were named after British naval heroes. The development of the special character of St Vincent Place has been characterised, since the first land sales in the 1860s, by a variety of housing stock which has included quality row and detached houses dominated by Rochester Terrace (Heritage Register Number 813), and by the gardens which, although they have been continuously developed, remain faithful to the initial landscape concept.

How is it significant?

The St Vincent Place Precinct is of aesthetic, historical, architectural and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The St Vincent Place Precinct is aesthetically important for the outstanding quality of its urban landscape. The major elements that reflect this importance are the gardens with their gardenesque style layout and fine collections of mature specimen trees, and the harmonious

relationship of the gardens with the residential buildings facing them around St Vincent Place.

The St Vincent Place Precinct is historically important as the premier 'square' development in Victoria based on similar models in London. It is significant as the largest development of its type in Victoria and for its unusual development as gardens rather than the more usual small park as at, for example Macarthur, Murchison, Lincoln and Argyle Squares in Carlton. The precinct is also historically significant for its associations with Surveyor General Andrew Clarke, and more particularly with Clement Hodgkinson, a prolific and influential surveyor engineer in early Melbourne.

The St Vincent Place Precinct is architecturally important for the consistent quality of its built form and its high degree of intactness from its earliest phase of development, characterised by a mixture of one and two storey terraces and detached houses.

The St Vincent Place Precinct is socially important as a reflection of the aspirations of middle class residents in South Melbourne. Because of the shared outlook on and use of the gardens, the precinct has developed a sense of community cohesion unusual in the Melbourne context. The gardens are also socially important as a focus of community life for the surrounding district with the maintenance of their amenity a priority of municipal government since their inception. The existence of the tennis and bowls clubs in the gardens for over a century is a further manifestation of this social importance.

1.2 Permit Exemptions

H1291 includes a Specific Exemption for “All internal works to buildings.”

1.3 Current Use

63 St Vincent Place South continues to be used as private residence.

1.4 Existing Conditions

63 St Vincent Place is in good cosmetic condition. The roof is non-original corrugated asbestos cement. The former external space on the west side of the rear wing has been enclosed by a steel framed glazed atrium and triple brick wall abutting number 65's wall. The rear brick wall has been altered by the installation of a wide glazed doorway at ground floor level, the brickwork has been painted, and plumbing and air conditioning units have been fitted to the outside of the rear wall.



Figure 2 The north façade of Coolola terrace, 61, 63 and 65 St Vincent Place South. The use of Hawthorn bricks in the façade is significant as both the original owner J. Nicholson and the architect W.S. Law were heavily involved with the Upper Hawthorn Brick Company Limited around the time of construction.



Figure 3 63 St Vincent Place South, the centre terrace, has lost the ground floor bay window. It is unfortunate that the original iron fence did not survive, the existing fence is a modern replacement.



Figure 4 South wall of 63 St Vincent Place South.



Figure 5 *View of rear of 63 St Vincent Place South from Bevan Street.*



Figure 6 *Rear of 61 to 65 St Vincent Place, Bevan Street.*



Figure 7 South elevation of 65 and part of 63 from terrace above 63 St Vincent Place garage.



Figure 8 South elevation of 63 from terrace above 63 St Vincent Place garage.



Figure 9 *South elevation of 63 and 61 from terrace above 63 St Vincent Place garage.*



Figure 10 *View from the south garden of the 1990s glazed atrium and west wall.*



Figure 11 Interior view within the atrium looking north.

2.0 Brief History

Coolola terrace was built for James Nicholson during 1883 and completed in early 1884. The Record, the local newspaper, carried an extensive description, as follows.

““COOLOLA”, ST. VINCENT PLACE SOUTH.

Conspicuous among the many handsome terraces that grace the St. Vincent Gardens, South Melbourne, may be named that which occupies the block of land on the south side of St. Vincent Place, so long looked on by envious eyes, it being the only vacant land within this aristocratic area. On the allotment mentioned there now stands a handsome pile of buildings, erected to order of J. Nicholson, Esq., J P., and known as “Coolola”.

The terrace has a frontage of 66 feet to St. Vincent-place south, and consists of three two-storied fourteen-roomed residences, the façade of which has been carried out in dark blue bricks, enlivened with red and tuckpointed, the cornices, balustrades and other mouldings being worked in cement, the contrast giving a very pleasing effect. We notice also that the architect has given a new style of pallsade, consisting of polished Malmsbury base course, surmounted by fancy cast-iron work, with gates to match. Great relief is given by the verandahs and paths being laid with tiles of a superior quality, manufactured by Mr. T. W. Corkwell, [actually H.A. Cawkwell] of Malvern.

The ground floors provide large halls and two reception rooms, having a special feature in the elevating panelled partitions, which, when raised, throw the two rooms into one spacious apartment. The ceilings of the principal rooms are embellished with enriched alcoves, cornices and centre flowers. Massive marble mantelpieces, with marble fenders, and hearths laid in Minton tiles, show of the rooms to advantage. The second passage leads to breakfast room, kitchen, scullery, pantry and lumber room, each of which the architect has provided with every domestic requirement.

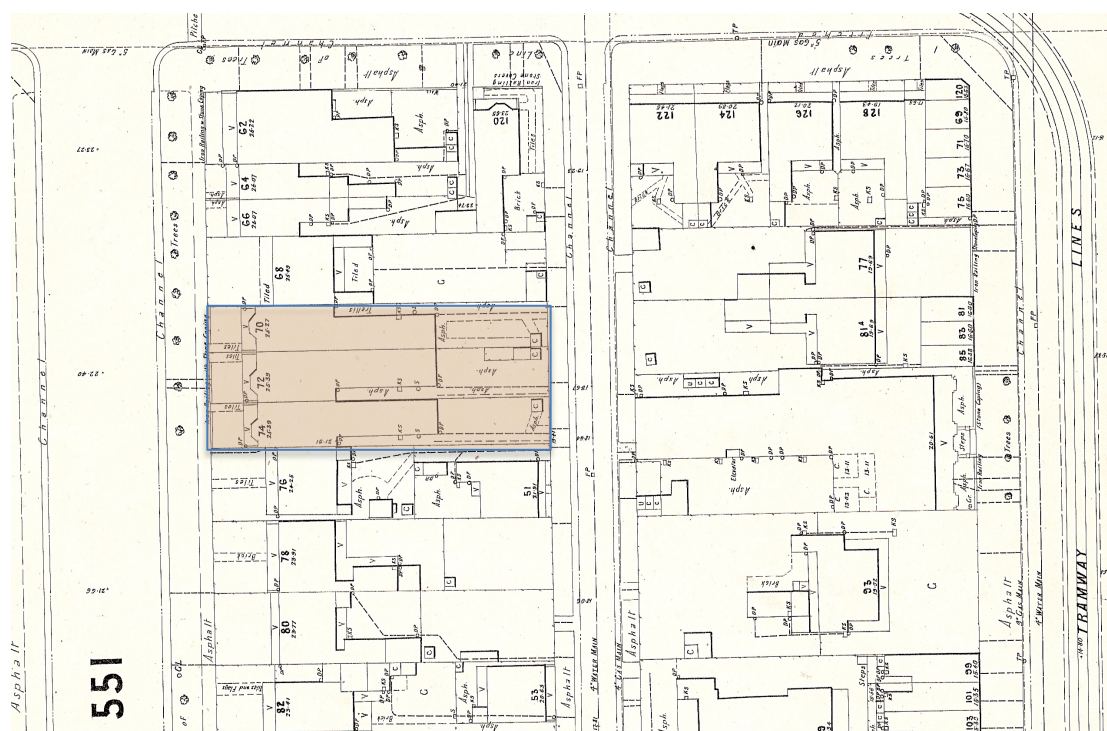
Ascending a fine flight of stairs we enter upon the chamber plan of the back buildings which provides four bedrooms and bathrooms. A servant's staircase has also been provided.

The chamber plan of the main building provides spacious bedrooms, boudoir; ample wardrobes, linen presses, &c., are to be found in these.

The plans for "Coolola" were prepared by Mr. W. S. Law, architect, under whose immediate supervision the whole of the works have been most faithfully carried out by the contractor, Mr. E. Wilson. Electric bells have been fitted throughout the terrace by Mr. Crowe, of South Melbourne.

We understand that the total cost of the terrace and fittings was £5000. The plan and interior fittings of each house is the same as the one we have had the pleasure of visiting, and which is occupied as the residence of the proprietor. Mr. Nicholson's residence has been most artistically furnished in the Elizabethan style, from the famed establishment of Messrs. Cullis Hill and Co., and Messrs. Steinfield and Co."¹

James Nicholson was a partner in the firm Dunlea and Nicholson, importers, wholesale and retail grocers, and wine and spirit merchants in Elizabeth Street. He was also a Justice of the Peace and served as a South Melbourne Councilor. Nicholson married Mary Noonan of Crowlands on 20 February 1871² and had 3 sons and 3 daughters. Nicholson was active in the local community including St Peter and St Paul's Church, the South Melbourne Bowling Club and the Mechanics Institute. He invested widely, including in the Upper Hawthorn Brick Company Limited and was reported as making £25,000 investing in Broken Hill silver in 1888. Nicholson died at the age of 73 in March 1912.³



in Law Street, South Melbourne (presumably he subdivided the land and named the small street) in March 1881.⁴ W.S. Law had an office at 82 Collins Street west.

W.S. Law was reasonably successful and designed a number of substantial buildings in South Melbourne, Hawthorn, Carlton and the city, alongside more modest projects. As examples, Law advertised for tenders for the erection of six storey business premises in Swanston Street for Mr J.T. Buxton and another for five wood cottages in Sandridge Road in the same newspaper.⁵ Contemporary with the construction of Coolola, Law designed a new building for the Bank of Victoria in Clarendon Street (now 295 Clarendon Street) in the flat, somewhat oddly proportioned, pattern book Roman classical style he employed for the majority of his larger building designs, the cement render being decorated with finely rendered classical mouldings and ornamentation. The design of the Albert Park/South Melbourne Coffee Palace (now Biltmore apartments) followed in late 1887. Law designed and built Drummond Terrace (VHR H0872) at 93 to 105 Drummond Street, Carlton, as a speculative development during 1890-91, and 'Benvenuta' (VHR H0409) at 48 Drummond Street, Carlton completed in 1893.

Law made a revealing toast at the 1884 Annual Meeting of the South Melbourne Bowling Club, "Mr. Law gave "Success to the South Melbourne Bowling Club." Though but a young bowler he could bear witness to the healthfulness and pleasantness of the game of bowls. Physically and mentally, he had been improved since joining the club. When it was remembered that gentlemen were brought together on the bowling green who would otherwise not have the opportunity of meeting on terms of equality, the social benefits of the club would be acknowledged. (Cheers.) He was glad to say that the financial position of the club had improved, and that their green was one of the best in Victoria." W.S. Law was not the first architect to have found the South Melbourne Bowling Club a useful place to meet clients. Another local architect, Robert Adamson, during the previous decade was given life membership of the club following his work in designing the club house.

During the time Coolola was being built Law was living in a rented house at 9 Perrin Street, South Melbourne,⁶ with his wife Czarinna Anna (nee Egan). Now renumbered 11 Perrin Street, this is a small single storey brick terrace house built as a rental investment property by the Melbourne Orphan Asylum Corporation following the transfer of the orphanage to Brighton in 1876.

W.S. Law was nominated for election as a Fellow of RVIA at the AGM on 18 July 1893.⁷ He must have left Melbourne shortly afterwards as he established himself as an architect and developer in Cape Town, South Africa, by 1895 and worked there until 1912 when he retired to England.



Figure 13 1920s aerial view of Coolola terrace on St Vincent Place South. Apart from the original slate roof, little is visible of number 63, the centre house in the terrace.

4 The Argus, Tuesday 1 March 1881, p2

5 The Age, Tuesday 3 February 1885, p3

6 The Argus, Saturday 1 December 1883, p1

7 The Argus, Wednesday 19 July 1893, p6

It is likely that Hawthorn brick was selected for the front of Coolola terrace as both James Nicholson and W.S. Law had an interest in the Upper Hawthorn Brick Company, the manufacturer of the classic dark brown Hawthorn bricks. Fritsch, Holzer and Company operated as the Upper Hawthorn Brick Company from 1883 and floated the brickworks as the Upper Hawthorn Brick Company Limited in 1888. Nicholson was chairman of the Company around 1890 and Law was on an advisory committee looking into ways to make the brickworks profitable following the 1890 crash. The Limited company failed before fully paying Fritsch, Holzer for the assets so the brickworks reverted to Fritsch, Holzer and Co.



Figure 14 The front of 63 St Vincent Place during the 1970s. The original iron fence had been lost and replaced with brick walls on 61 and 63. The fence visible on 65 could be original as it would fit the contemporary description. It is also possible that it is balustrade ironwork reused from the enclosed first floor verandah, but the cast iron post adjacent to the gate is not from the balustrade and suggests this is the original fence. This no longer survives, the fences have been 'restored' with a common style iron reproduction palisade fence. The ground floor bay window was replaced with a large glazed doorway by the date of the photograph, and since replaced with multifold glazed doors.

The three houses in Coolola terrace remained in James Nicholson's ownership until his death in 1912, although he had moved to 'Burwood', Linda Crescent, Hawthorn some years earlier. They were later sold individually. The photograph taken during the 1970s, in the State Library of Victoria, shows that changes had been made to the front of the terrace before then, including the replacement of the bay window at number 63 with a large glazed doorway.

The paint has subsequently been removed from the decorative Hawthorn brick façade and a reproduction iron fence installed. The enclosure of the rear open space between the rear wing of 63 and 65 St Vincent Place with a glass roofed steel structure has substantially altered the rear of the house. A garage with a barbeque terrace on top has been built fronting Bevan Street to the rear of the property.

3.0 Proposed Works

J. Kidman Architecture & Design have prepared the accompanying drawings illustrating the proposed alterations to the rear of 63 St Vincent Place South. The rear of the house has previously been extensively altered, including the construction of a steel framed glazed atrium over the original outdoor space between the rear wing of 63 St Vincent Place South and the side of 65 St Vincent Place South. The original slate roof has been replaced with corrugated asbestos cement sheets which are due for replacement.

It is proposed to alter the layout of the ground floor, retaining the existing uses, containing a kitchen, dining and living area, and a new light well designed to bring natural light and ventilation into the heart of the rear wing. The upper level will enable 2 bedrooms to receive light and ventilation from the south elevation to improve the usability these habitable rooms. The current arrangements of bedrooms are substandard for solar and ventilation access. The proposed works will provide a four bedroom home with each bedroom having direct access to light and ventilation, making a positive improvement to the current accommodation. These works are necessary to ensure the status of this dwelling will meet the requirements of a substantial house in the neighbourhood. To achieve these internal design upgrades and outcomes it is necessary for the external alterations to be carried out.

In summary, the proposed works are as follows:-

- Demolish steel and glass atrium and construct a new low pitched roof over the side area at the rear of the main house.
- Demolish a section of roof and internal walls for a lightwell to improve the natural light inside the kitchen and living area, including north light.
- Install three skylights in roof over rear wing to provide light to the bathrooms.
- Remove air conditioning units and plumbing from south wall.
- Demolish ground floor rear wall to allow for the small addition to the south.
- Demolish return nib wall on ground and first floor to allow the rooms to be enlarged.
- Form new window opening in brick wall and install a new window to match the existing larger window in first floor rear wall.
- Brick up small window in rear wall.
- Construct new ground floor wall with large glazed door opening and smaller fixed pane in line with the rear walls of the adjoining houses. The line of the original rear wing continues in the new wall and the new fixed pane window reflects the original outdoor area between the houses.
- Install a new window below new low pitched roof on west side of rear wing, brought forward of the wall line to identify the new addition. The option of a recessed window in this position was found to visually compete more with the original brick wall than the adopted option.

3.1 Design Response

The proposal includes no work to the front of the property or the building, preserving the existing character of the heritage façade in its entirety and is not visible from St Vincent Place or surrounding streets.

Situated between St Vincent Place South and Bevan Street to the rear, the proposal maintains the existing pattern of dual street frontage, preserving pedestrian access to St Vincent Pl S and vehicular crossover access via Bevan St. There is no change to either of the existing St Vincent Pl S and Bevan St frontages.

Where the proposal reconfigures the existing areas at the rear of the building, it provides increased solar access to the southern aspects of the property in the primary living and kitchen areas of the house, as appropriate to contemporary standards of energy efficiency. All new living areas proposed address areas of private open space and are oriented to the light. The scale of the proposed extension brings the rear setback of the property into alignment with the setbacks of its neighbours, developing a consistent shared form between houses commensurate with the terrace house type. The extension is in sympathy with the neighbouring masonry parapets, responding with a palette of masonry construction, domestic scale windows and greenery in front of those south facing first floor windows.

The primary extent of demolition involves altered and non-original or secondary heritage fabric, noting the original rear wing has already undergone substantial change. The current

openings at ground floor comprise works which appear to have been completed in the 1980s and include the affixing of large and unsightly air conditioning condensers above ground and plumbing and sewerage utilities and a glass roof which spans (north/south) the length of the second section.

The architect's design approach has been sensitive to retain the existing form of the hipped roof of the secondary rear section of the property when it would have been a neater contemporary resolution to roof the secondary rear section in one hipped roof incorporating the flat roof section. Instead, the design continues to distinguish between the hipped roof and the proposed flat roof contemporary section, making it clear the delineation between original form and contemporary insertions.

Similarly the design has consciously incorporated and thereby respected the existing first story window by retaining it in the design when the more aesthetic design option would be to remove it and insert a number of uniform windows to bring much needed light and ventilation to the south facing bedrooms at first floor. The southern orientation of the kitchen, living room and bedrooms necessitates the need for extra light sources and solar exposure and the architect's response to these constraints is in this case conservative, particularly when adjudged by a comparison with the contemporary insertions of the rear sections of neighbouring properties in St Vincent Place South (and situated within the VHR extent of registration).

With respect to Bevan Street, several nearby properties with primary frontages onto St Vincent Place South present very contemporary outbuildings to Bevan Street, including 31, 65, 61, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, and numerous others in St Vincent Place North 48, 50, 52 and 78. Almost all rear sections of Victorian buildings have been modernised for obvious reasons. The history of recent development to maintain the grand dwellings fronting onto St Vincent Place is evident, and the Bevan St streetscape is evidence of the stylistically varied, recent and current renovations which have been previously approved by Heritage Victoria.

3.2 Reasonable or Economic use

It is a legitimate and reasonable expectation in terms of the reasonable or economic use of this property that a house in this location should offer a standard of amenity and accommodation to its occupants that is in keeping with contemporary lifestyle expectations.

Overall, the proposal strikes an appropriate balance of outcomes in terms of relatively modest changes to update the dwelling to modern standards and amenity commensurate with a grand home in this fine residential setting.

The proposal been prepared with appropriate regard for potential impacts on the heritage place, including the adjacent streetscape and broader precinct. While these works are relatively substantial internally within the property itself, their location within the site is such that they have no adverse impact on the identified significance of St Vincent Precinct as a whole. The place is significant, inter alia, for its collection of intact dwellings and the '... harmonious relationship of the gardens with the residential buildings facing them around St Vincent Place'.

The proposed works to the rear of the main retained house is confined to the secondary rear section which is lower than the ridgeline and high parapet of the existing front section, and so has no visibility from the public realm.

The proposed modifications to the rear south facing façade includes non-original fabric and openings and are relatively minor in scope. There is no change to the street presentation to Bevan Street, with no works proposed to the existing garage door and masonry wall.

To maintain the status of the "grand or more distinguished" dwellings (refer Statement of Significance), bedrooms and living areas are ideally regularly upgraded to conform to our cultural and social understanding of a "grander or more distinguished" dwelling. These works will enable each bedroom to have its own ventilation which is a design challenge with middle terraces which extend full width and are south facing. The current bedrooms are imperfect with no natural ventilation. This new accommodation will provide a more befitting backdrop to the heritage dwelling at No.63 and our cultural and social understanding of the St Vincent Place Precinct. It also is a continuum of a consistent use – of contemporary works being approved to the rear of the dwelling to conform to our understanding of the cultural and social value of the grander St Vincent Place dwellings.

Should the Executive Director refuse the proposal, this would be unreasonable to the current and future use of the dwelling as a grander and more distinguished house. The use of the Place as a dwelling could continue of course, however it would be detrimental and unreasonable to the Place to have inferior use due to accommodation falling below the cultural and social value identified in the Statement of Significance.

Refusal to issue a permit for upgrading the facilities to bring them to contemporary standards would also affect the reasonable use of this dwelling.

The Place was originally constructed as a private residence but was used as girls college for a period of time and then returned to a private residence. The current application does not propose any change in use but seeks to modernise and restore the amenity and accommodation to a standard commensurate with a grand scale family home befitting of its location. The incorporation of daylighting techniques and increase in natural ventilation and solar light will bring the standard of amenity of this dwelling to meet current standards and provide significant benefits of energy efficiency and reduced energy consumption. These benefits support a strong case for economic use.

The proposal is not excessive and will result in a family home with today's standards of amenity with well-ventilated bedrooms consistent with modern building standards and community expectations and constitutes reasonable use.

The Executive Director may consider under s101(3) including Impacts on adjacent or neighbouring heritage places.

Given that the works are located to the rear of the dwelling of No. 63, not forming relevance or impact to the Statement of Significance, careful consideration has been given to the siting, form, bulk scale, colour, character and materiality of the proposed work which, may be visible from the rear gardens of No. 61 and No. 65. There is no potential for increased overlooking with the use of the planter box and avoids the use of more utilitarian screen techniques. The proposed works will bring the Place in line to the neighbouring terraces of 61 and 65.

4.0 Impacts on heritage significance

As there is a standing Permit Exemption for H1291 – St Vincent Place Precinct excluding all interior works, only the external changes require a Heritage Permit. All the proposed works are at the rear of 63 St Vincent Place and will not be visible from any surrounding streets. The windows inserted in the rear, north, wall of the former Albert Park Coffee Palace on the south side of Bevan Street (also designed by W.S. Law) during the relatively recent conversion of the building into the Biltmore apartments do overlook the rear of Coolola terrace but are not publicly accessible or original features.

The rear of 63 St Vincent Place South has previously been substantially altered, as have the rears of the other two houses in the terrace.

The identified Heritage Significance of the St Vincent Place Precinct relates to the outstanding quality of its urban landscape, being the premier example of a 'square' development planned in the 1850s based on London examples, with a harmonious relationship of the gardens with the residential buildings facing them around St Vincent Place. The architecture is of a consistent quality and highly intact from its earliest phase of development.

The proposed replacement of a previous addition, and alteration of the roof and rear wall of 63 St Vincent Place South will have no impact on the identified significance of the St Vincent Place Precinct.

There will be some loss of original brickwork and a relatively minor change in appearance of the rear of the house. The changes will improve the appearance of the rear of the house when viewed from within the rear yard, and from the immediate neighbours rear yards, as the unsightly air conditioning units and external plumbing will be removed. The ground floor alterations will not be visible from outside the property. It is considered that the proposed alterations will have little or no impact on the significance of Coolola terrace or the subject house.

5.0 Conclusion

The proposed alterations to the rear of 63 St Vincent Place South will substantially improve the livability of the house for many years to come, helping to ensure that the house continues to be used as a single residence as originally intended by James Nicholson, the original owner/developer and the architect W.S. Law. The proposed changes will also improve the appearance of the rear of the house, even though the rear of the house is not readily visible from any surrounding streets. There will be no change to the significant front of Coolola terrace facing the gardens and no impact on the identified significance of the St Vincent Place Precinct. It is recommended that a Heritage Permit be issued for the proposed works.