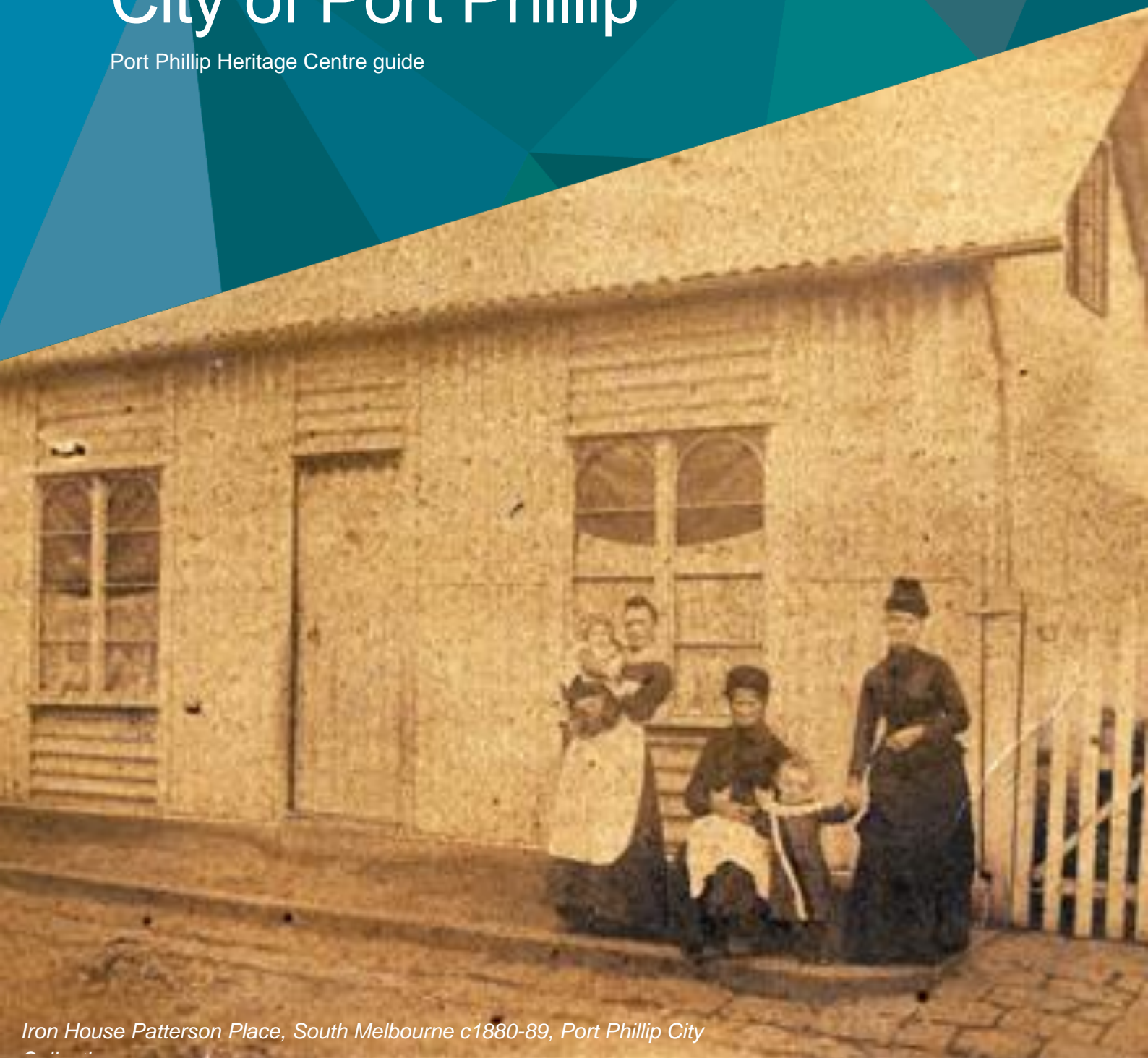# How to Research Your House in the City of Port Phillip

Port Phillip Heritage Centre guide

Iron House Patterson Place, South Melbourne c1880-89, Port Phillip City Collection

Identify what you most want to know

- When was the house built and by whom?
- Who lived at the property and at what time?
- Maps and photographs
- How far back do you want to go? We have the most substantial records from approximately the 1850s-1960s

Things to keep in mind

City of Port Phillip is an amalgamation of three former municipalities; City of South Melbourne, City of Port Melbourne and City of St. Kilda.

South Melbourne was originally called Emerald Hill until 1883, Port Melbourne was originally Sandridge until 1884.
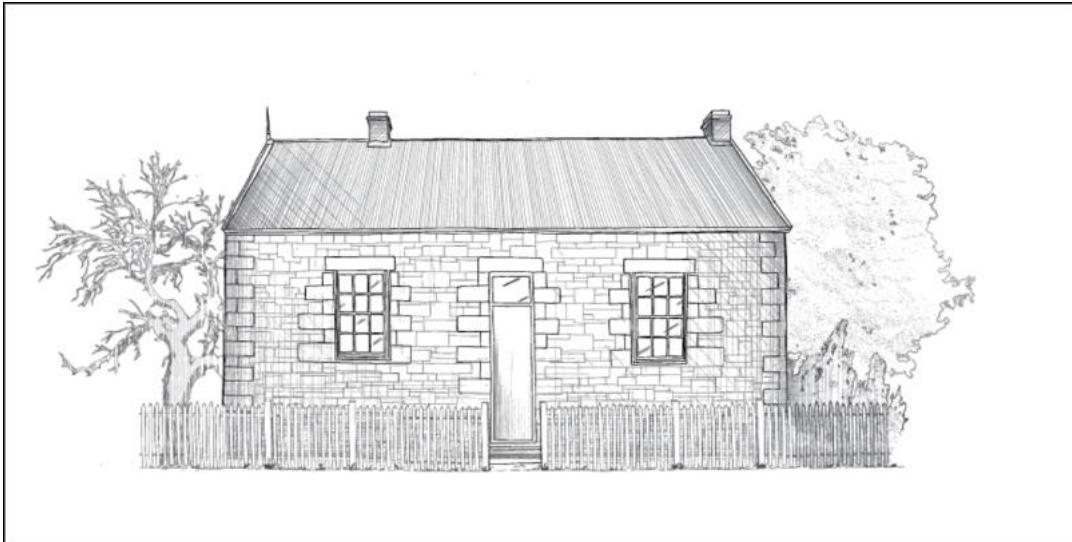
Building permits, planning permits, initial drawings and other information pertaining to the construction of the property can be found by asking council to perform a property file search at the St. Kilda Town Hall or online. This will incur a fee: https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/planning-and-building.

Email filesearch@portphillip.vic.gov.au to check if there are files first.

Getting started

Identifying the architectural style of your house! See the guide below to determine what era your house may be from.

https://victoriancollections.net.au/stories/what-house-is-that

Tribal Media Makers (illustrator), 'Early Victorian House', c.1840-1860, Heritage Victoria Created by Heritage Victoria for the 'What house is that?' Interactive
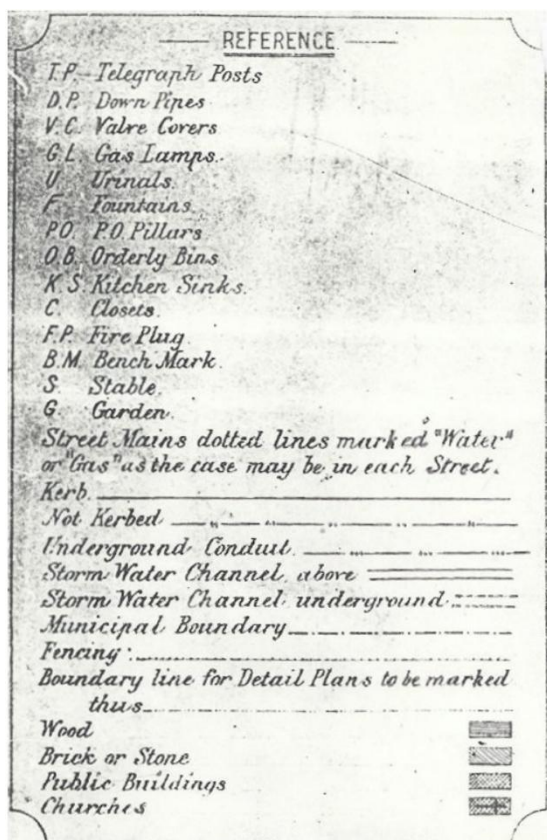
House number changes

If it seems like a 19th century build, the property may be on a Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) map from the late 1890s. These maps were created to plan a new sewerage system in Melbourne from the 1890s to the 1950s. Digitised maps are available through the State Library collection: https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/victorianbuildings/maps.

This is also helpful to see if the house number is different, or if the street name has changed. You can check by looking at the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works maps.

Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works detail plan. no. 531, 532 & 530, South Melbourne, 1895

Download as a TIFF file as use the legends to see the features.

Mahlstedt fire survey maps and Victorian parish maps can also be revealing.

South Melbourne has a number change book documenting the changes from 1900-1901. The new numbers in this book stand today.
https://library.portphillip.vic.gov.au/our-collection/local-history-collection/south-melbourne-number-changes-book/

Rates Records

These can be found on microfilm at our Heritage Centre and are available to search by appointment. We have rates records on film for South Melbourne (formerly known as Emerald Hill), Port Melbourne (formerly known as Sandridge) and St. Kilda. Elwood, Balaclava and East St. Kilda properties are to be found under St. Kilda. Albert Park and Middle Park are under South Melbourne, and Garden City is under Port Melbourne.

We have the following years:

- Emerald Hill/South Melbourne rate books from 1855 to 1938

- St. Kilda rate books from 1857 to 1961

- Sandridge/Port Melbourne rate books from 1860 to 1965

The rate book for each year records the properties by:

- Name of tenant

- Occupation of tenant

- Name of owner

- Address of property

- Number of rooms

- Fabric of dwelling: brick, wood, iron

- Occasionally numbers of people residing in dwelling

- Net annual value of property

Ancestry.com Library Edition is available for free at the Port Phillip Heritage Centre and every library branch, it has digitised versions for these years, and are only searchable by name of resident, not address:

City of Port Melbourne: 1860-1901
City of South Melbourne: 1855-1900
City of St. Kilda: 1859-1900

https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/

Public Record Office Victoria also has some digitised years available:

City of Port Melbourne: 1863-1900
City of South Melbourne: 1855-1931
City of St. Kilda: 1857 - 1900

https://prov.vic.gov.au/

'Google Street View of the 1970s'

Concerned by the destruction of Victoria's building heritage, the Committee for Urban Action photographed the buildings and houses of South Melbourne between 1972 and 1975. These can be found via the State Library Victoria catalogue. If you have an address, you can search using the street name and closest cross street. For example: Committee Urban Action Queen Emerald

Source: *Emerald Street, South Melbourne, from Ferrars Street to Queen Street - south side.* (1970).

SLV's Creative Technologist-in-Residence in 2025, created a tool for browsing the CUA images by location. For properties in South Melbourne, Middle Park and Albert Park this is a useful alternative to searching the catalogue and allows you to click on a map location to see images related to that location.

Ephemera collection

The Ephemera Files contain invitations, programs, promotional materials, newspaper clippings and correspondence. The files are catalogued by subject in the Port Phillip City Collection database and they can be viewed in full at the Port Phillip Heritage Centre.

There is a filing cabinet for the three former municipalities. This collection includes primary and secondary documents. Certain buildings have a file.

Ask Heritage Centre staff for onsite access to the files.

Sands and McDougall Directories

The Sands and Kenny Melbourne directory is a comprehensive listing of city addresses and occupants organised alphabetically by streets across the central city. It is augmented by alphabetical, trade and professional listings, as well as information on leading financial, government, official, ecclesiastical, legal and municipal institutions, and other miscellaneous advertisements, maps and information.

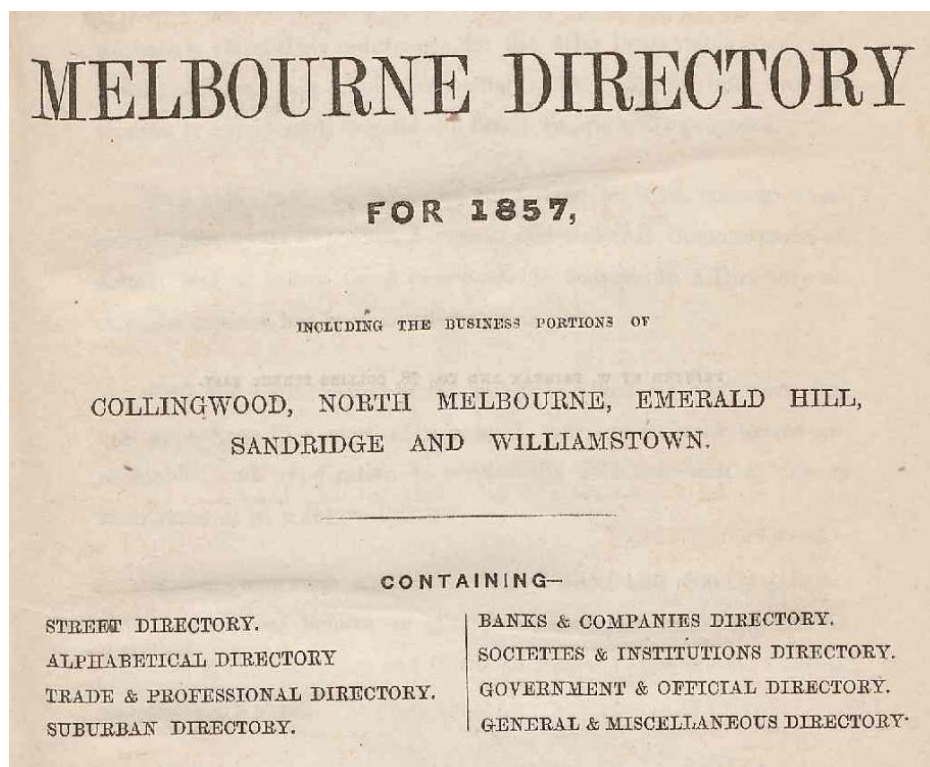At the Heritage Centre we have the complete collection from 1857-1974 on microfiche.

The State Library has an incomplete digitised collection for every 5 years.
https://find.slv.vic.gov.au/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=61SLV_INST:SLV&collectionId=81213035910007636

The University of Melbourne has every year from 1857 to 1880 digitised
https://omeka.cloud.unimelb.edu.au/melbourne-history/items/browse?collection=2&page=1

Sandridge (Port Melbourne), Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) and St Kilda are included in the first 1857 copy.

Port Phillip City Collection

For photographs, search the street name or occupant on the Port Phillip City Collection:
https://copp.melbourne.axiell.com/imu/

Other Avenues

Search for the property address in the Port Phillip Heritage Review. Each entry usually has extensive citations, can be helpful for both old and new historically significant properties.
https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/about-the-council/strategies-policies-and-plans/port-phillip-heritage-review

Trove (Archive for the National Library of Australia) has an excellent collection of digitised Australian newspapers and magazines, including local publications, starting from way back in the 19th century. Searching for an address can retrieve family notices from the occupants, advertisements if the building or occupants ran a business, real estate notices, and more.
https://trove.nla.gov.au/

Local History Collection

These books and other titles in our collection can be useful in researching buildings or building styles:

South Melbourne: A History, Susan Priestley, 1995

A History of Port Melbourne, Nancy U'ren & Noel Turnbull, 1983

The History of St. Kilda, Volume One, 1840 to 1930, John Butler Cooper, 1931

The History of St. Kilda, Volume Two, 1840 to 1930, John Butler Cooper, 1931

The Show Goes on: The History of St. Kilda, Volume Three, 1930 to 1983, Anne Longmire, 1989

St. Kilda 1841-1900: Movers, Shakers and Monkey Makers, Carmel McKenzie, 2023

House Names of South Melbourne, Talbot Hill, 1988

Australian Houses of the 20s and 30s, Peter Cuffley, 198

A Place of Sensuous Resort: Buildings of St. Kilda and Their People, Richard Peterson, 2004

Middle Park: From Swamp to Suburb, The Middle Park History Group, Series 2, 2014

Demolished Buildings Port Melbourne Photographs 1981-1991, City of Port Melbourne Building Department