Central CBD, The Civic Spine.
Home to Many of Melbourne’s most loved lanes, many of which, including the most iconic such as Degraves Street, Centre Place, and Block Place are mostly protected by Heritage Overlays, but many of them such as Presgraves Place are only considered ‘Class 3’, the lowest designation for laneways in Melbourne, despite extensive heritage and cultural significance.

No doubt many members of the public would be shocked to learn how much of the heritage fabric of iconic lanes such as Drewery Lane, Heape Court and Mcllop street remains without effective protection. Indeed, Gills Court and other lanes behind Swanston St have no protection whatsoever. The recent destruction seen in Caledonian lane when Lonsdale House, (the original home of the now International St Jerome’s Music Festival) was demolished, shows that even the most popular and iconic of laneways are still in dire need of properly considered heritage protection.
1. Zeverboom Lane, Heape Court and Mitchell Lane. (All Class 3)

Behind Elizabeth Street’s Industrial Edwardian streetscape are some of Melbourne’s most interesting lanes. North of Lt Lonsdale St, Zeverboom Lane lacks original paving but is marked by historic brick buildings, including the side of 1930’s Phillip Shirts workshop (D-graded), a design with charming painted signs and long defunct telephone numbers. Moving back across Lt. Lonsdale Street, Heape Court presents as a winding ‘T’-shaped lane, fully paved with bluestone and characterised by one of the cities greatest lanescapes. In the same precinct, behind a Victorian workshop and Edwardian garage (now ‘100 Pound Bend’ cafe, which uses the historic workshop as a cinema) can be found one of Melbourne’s oldest and most significant Gold Rush era buildings, now on the Victorian Heritage Register.

With its bluestone and brick, Mitchell Lane, separated from Heape Court by a narrow building, contrasts with the orderly Streamline facade of Mitchell House.
2. Hardware Street North (Class 1)
The section of Hardware Street north of Lonsdale Street contains much less historic fabric than its southern cousin, but is just as lively. Postmodern paving and street furniture line the lane. A large Victorian era warehouse on one side (being assessed for heritage protection in the C186 Amendment) and an Edwardian warehouse on the opposite side contribute immense historic character. Two inter-war workshops on the north-west corner may lack individual significance but are likewise essential to the character of the lane.
3. Knox Lane and McIntire Alley (Class 3)

This short sequence of lanes once formed part of a large network of low-rise industrial landscapes was largely demolished and subsumed within the development of Melbourne Central. The remaining assets are still of high value, however, despite their length. Running between Melbourne Central’s Swanston Street entrance and Lt. Lonsdale Street, the lane is paved in bluestone, and surrounded on both sides by brick and bluestone Church buildings. One of these is already heritage listed and the other likely to gain protection in Amendment C186.
4. Drewery Lane and Sniders Alley
These lanes form a fascinating network with intact bluestone guttering. Drewery lane runs north to south and contains two heritage listed seven storey factories converted into apartments making it an impressive lanescape. Two small feeder lanes and Sniders Alley run off the lane and are rich in heritage structures, including a smaller D-Graded Edwardian workshop in Sniders Alley, home to laneway bar Sister Bellas. All these lanes terminate at the blank side facade of the Melbourne Central Shopping Centre, a reminder of the way many smaller lanes have disappeared into poorly planned larger developments over the years.
5. Caledonian Lane (Class 3)
While Caledonian lane has recently lost much of it’s historic character with the destruction of Lonsdale House, and an equally atmospheric heritage brick building behind it, to make way for a loading bay, it still retains character from the backs of Victorian shops which run through to Swanstons Street’s currently un-protected streetscape. Some of the buildings along Swanston Street are aesthetically unassuming but the same can’t be said about any of their gritty laneway facades, which together make a pleasing Victorian lanescape.
6. Louden Place, Albion Alley (Class 3)

These are two unassuming lanes with hidden character. Louden Place contains the rear of a building on the Victorian Heritage Register as well as another two historic structures along Swanston Street currently afforded no protection. The late night restaurants facing Swanston Street can also be accessed from Louden Place, giving it life after dark, as well as providing additional valuable business hours access.

Albion Alley (next page) also appears to have little to recommend it, being predominantly utilized as a loading bay for the adjacent hotel. However once the casual walker gets past all the luggage containers, one is rewarded by the ‘discovery’ of a row of historic bricked up warehouses, which once afforded actively laneway frontages. Reopening some of these bricked off doors would in turn bring people visitor back to the lane once again.
7. Mason Lane and Rainbow Alley (Class 3)
Two lanes primarily influenced by Swanston street. Mason Lane is defined by a number of character filled facades, only two of which have any kind of heritage protection. Tucked into the walls of the 1980’s shopping arcade opposite, rustic old stones hint at the laneway’s evocative past. Across Swanston Street with it’s imposing vista of the Town Hall, Rainbow Alley (next page) discreetly winds past an outdoor cafe and human scale chess set to reveal vistas of historic Victorian era chimneys and brickwork from Swanston Street buildings.
8. Gills Alley (Class 3)

Home to Gills Diner housed in a D-graded but historic and intact building, Gills Alley is a rustic stone lanescap. It once ran through to Bourke Street next to the Saracens Head Hotel (early Victorian, but un-graded). A metal barrier has blocked the lane in recent decades, but an opportunity to re-establish an historic through lane may be possible. The other side of the lane is dominated by blank walls from the Galleria Shopping Centre, which subsumed another laneway back in the 1970s.
9, Equitable Place (Class 1)

Another classic Melbourne laneway, busy with restaurants and shops. Holes punched through the rears of heritage buildings facing Elizabeth Street offer a demonstration what can be done to reactivate blank laneway walls. While three buildings facing the lane have local council heritage overlays, current policy may leave only the main street facades are fully protected. Another Inter-war building on the corner, with classical motifs at ground floor, has no protection whatsoever.
10. McKillip Street (Class 2)

McKillop Street is a wonderful Melbourne laneway with wide paving and street furniture. The more historic buildings along the lane are protected, but the significant Art Deco buildings facing the lane at its corners have no such protection. This lane connects visually with Hardware lane to the north.
11. Staughton Lane and Flinders Court. (Class 3)

These two lanes run parallel to Elizabeth Street. Staughton Alley is lined in bluestone paving. Its lanescape envelope is formed by local council listed heritage buildings on either side. As with other lanes, this protection may not be as stringent when it comes the building’s rear facades which front onto lanes.

Flinders Court (next page) runs in a T shape from Elizabeth St connecting Flinders St and Flinders Lane. An early Victorian era stone warehouse (C-graded) lies hidden in the lane. It once houses a shop but is now unused. A tattoo parlour and alternative clothes store is hidden in a basement in the laneway, while four out of the five heritage rears fronting the lane are completely unprotected. The remaining structure (or at least it’s street facade) is currently under assessment in the C186 Amendment. These buildings should in the future be included in the central retail heritage precinct, along with a number on the Swanston St lanes.