

FORMER ABORIGINAL CHURCH OF CHRIST



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Diagram 2393

Location

258 GORE STREET FITZROY, YARRA CITY

Municipality

YARRA CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2393

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO334

VHR Registration

October 17, 2019

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 7, 2021

What is significant?

The place known as the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy including the land and the church building (exteriors and interiors).

How is it significant?

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is of historical and social significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion G

Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Why is it significant?

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is historically significant as the Aboriginal Church established by Pastor (later Sir) Douglas Nicholls, footballer, activist, pastor, and governor of South Australia. It played an important role in the emergence of social service organisations and the development of the twentieth century Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria and was a place of worship, community assistance, support and activism. Leaders of the

twentieth century Aboriginal rights movement, and many Aboriginal organisations emerged from this place. [Criterion A]

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is socially significant and resonates with the Victorian Aboriginal community as a place where families and individuals with shared experiences came together for support and assistance. It has become a symbol of the emergence of the Aboriginal rights movement in the twentieth century. [Criterion G]

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is significant for its association with its founder Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls. Pastor Doug made a strong and influential contribution to the Aboriginal rights movement and social justice for Aboriginal people. Pastor Doug attracted a large congregation and galvanised the Aboriginal community in the fight for human rights. Together with his wife Gladys, he created a place of community and strength from which contemporary Aboriginal services and organisations evolved. [Criterion H]

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

It should be noted that Permit Exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.38 of the Heritage Act). Permit Exemptions can also be applied for and granted after registration (under s.92 of the Heritage Act).

Under s.38 of the *Heritage Act 2017* the Executive Director may include in his recommendation categories of works or activities which may be carried out in relation to the place or object without the need for a permit under Part 5 of the Act. The Executive Director must not make a recommendation for any categories of works or activities if he considers that the works or activities may harm the cultural heritage significance of the place or object. The following permit exemptions are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the Former Aboriginal Church.

General Condition 1

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

General Condition 2

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

General Condition 3

All works should ideally be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

General Condition 4

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

General Condition 5

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authority, where applicable.

Specific Permit Exemptions

Building Exterior

- . Patching, repair and maintenance which replaces like with like.
- . Replacement or upgrading of air conditioning systems, water and sewerage systems, security systems, ducting, wiring, antennae, aerials etc.
- . Removal of redundant external services such as hot water services and wiring.
- . Installation or repair of damp-proofing.
- . Painting of previously painted surfaces.
- . Replacement of roof sheeting on a like for like basis.
- . Removal or replacement of post-1950s doors and windows.

Building Interior

Completion of works which comply with City of Yarra Planning Permit PLN13/0056. A permit is required for any works which are not included in the endorsed plans.

Theme

2. Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes 7. Governing Victorians 8. Building community life

Construction dates

1862,

Heritage Act Categories

Registered place,

Other Names

GREEK CHURCH OF NAZARENE, GORE STREET CHURCH, DOUG NICHOLLS CHURCH, ABORIGINAL CHURCH, BIBLE CHRISTIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL,

Hermes Number 1709

Property Number

History

The traditional land owners The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ, like all places in Victoria, is located on land traditionally owned by Aboriginal people. Prior to the establishment and development of Melbourne, Aboriginal people lived on and cared for the land. Colonisation and the subsequent appropriation of land resulted in the dispersal and death of thousands of Aboriginal people across Victoria. In the mid nineteenth century, most of those who survived were moved to government or mission run stations and reserves. The enforcement of the Aborigines Protection Act, informally known as the 'Half Caste Act' in 1886 meant that those who were not of full Aboriginal parentage were no longer permitted to stay on the stations, but were expected to assimilate into the broader society. This broke up families and those who had been removed from the stations were not permitted to return, even to visit family. During the 1920s, the few people remaining on stations or reserves were moved to Lake Tyers. Others ended up in Melbourne, and in Fitzroy in particular. Fitzroy in the 1930s and 40s The Aboriginal population in Fitzroy further increased with the declaration of World War II when men enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and were posted around Melbourne. Their families moved to be close to them, and also to work in war related industries. Many came from Cummeragunja including William Cooper and Doug Nicholls. By the 1950s, Fitzroy supported a community of more than 300 Aboriginal people and was not only the largest Aboriginal community in Victoria, but also the social and political hub of Aboriginal Melbourne, much like Redfern in Sydney. From the early 1940s, the church at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy run by Pastor Doug Nicholls and his wife Gladys was an important meeting place. The building at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy In 1859, the Bible Christian Church constructed a church at 278 Gore Street, Fitzroy (City of Yarra Heritage Overlay HO334) at the northern end of the block in which the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is located. By 1865, the Bible Christian Church owned the property at the southern end of the block. On 30th September 1871 the newly constructed Bible Christian Schoolroom opened on this site. It was this building which became the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ. It was initially used as a church hall, a school and in the late 1890s, a Templars Lodge. By 1920 it was being used as a Church of Christ Sunday School and in the late 1920s, an Infants Room was added to the rear of the building. In 1943, Doug Nicholls leased the hall at 258 Gore Street from the Church of Christ. It is possible that he initially leased the Former Infants Room at the rear of the building, and later leased the entire building. Together with his wife Gladys, he established the Church of Christ Aboriginal Mission, also known as the Aboriginal Church of Christ. Aboriginal people living in Melbourne and those visiting from the country gravitated to Pastor Doug's church. They gathered on Sundays to hear the gospel preached, followed by gatherings on Sunday night. There was also a youth club, and Gladys taught Sunday school, undertook fundraising, managed the finances and was committed to working towards the rights of women. She became Secretary of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Council and was the Victorian State President in the 1970s. Both Doug and Gladys also provided welfare support and became strong campaigners for Aboriginal rights and justice. 258 Gore Street became the focal point of this work, and a community hub for Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal political and welfare groups and organisations emerged from the people who met at Pastor Doug's church. It has been described as 'the place where the contemporary or modern Aboriginal movement all started.' Churches of Christ The Churches of Christ emerged from an early nineteenth century movement with origins in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Most of the churches in Victoria emerged from the United Kingdom movement. The Churches of Christ Federal Aborigines Mission Board Incorporated (FAB) was established in 1942. FAB purchased the church hall at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy in the 1950s to further advance the ministry of Doug Nicholls, and in later years, Aboriginal churches with Aboriginal pastors were established in most states of Australia. In 2013, Indigenous Ministry Australia was established within the mission and the overseas aid arm of Churches of Christ, Global Mission Partners (GMP) continues today. Sir?Douglas Ralph?Nicholls?(1906-1988) Doug Nicholls, a Yorta Yorta, Baraparapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Jupagalk and Wergaia man, was born on 9 December 1906 at Cummeragunja Aboriginal Station, on the Murray River in New South Wales. At the age of fourteen, under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act (1909), he had to leave and find work, and took a job with dredging teams on the Murray River. He was a gifted sportsman and played Australian rules football, trying out unsuccessfully for Carlton in 1927 before signing with the Northcote Victorian Football Association team. He competed for five seasons and was named 'best and fairest' twice and played in three grand finals. He was also a professional runner and a boxer with Jimmy

Sharman's travelling boxing show. In 1932 Nicholls joined the Fitzroy Victorian Football League team where he played fifty-four games over six seasons. In the same year, William Cooper, Nicholls' great-uncle who had also grown up at Cummeragunja founded the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL). Nicholls acknowledged that 'William was the contact that brought me back to our people. Everything comes back to William Cooper . he fired me to follow through'. Nicholls was a foundation member of the AAL and spoke at the National Day of Mourning speech in Sydney on 26 January 1938. In 1941, he enlisted with the Second AIF twenty-ninth Battalion but was discharged the following year to assist police with the Aboriginal community living in Fitzroy. Following his mother's death in the early 1930s, Nicholls had begun attending the Northcote Church of Christ, where they had worshipped together. By the 1930s, he had become a strong advocate for his people within the Churches of Christ ministry in Victoria. During a trip across the Nullarbor with the Fitzroy football team in 1935, Nicholls was so concerned for the people living there that he approached the Perth office of the Churches of Christ, leading to the establishment of church services, education and medical assistance at the Norseman Reserve, Western Australia. Nicholls began holding religious services and providing support from a house in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, (probably from the home of Alice and John (Jack) Connolly at 234 Gertrude Street). In 1942, Nicholls' brother Howard died, and Nicholls married his widow, Gladys. In 1945, Nicholls was ordained as a Church of Christ pastor and together Doug and Gladys ran religious services and welfare work from 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy (the Former Aboriginal Church). Pastor Nicholls initiated and was involved in many protests and campaigns including the impact of the Woomera rocket range on the people of the Warburton Ranges and initiating 'Aboriginal Sunday' in 1943 when prominent singers, footballers and others were invited to the church on the Sunday before Australia Day. This evolved into the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week. He was also involved in the formation of, and a field officer for the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League. Pastor Doug Nicholls was appointed MBE in 1957, OBE in 1968 and knighted in 1972. He was appointed Governor of South Australia in 1976, but due to ill health he relinquished his governorship on 30 April 1977 after hosting Queen Elizabeth during her royal tour. Sir Nicholls died on 4 June 1988 and was given a state funeral and buried in tribal ground at Cummeragunja cemetery. KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (1999) Remembering Aboriginal Fitzroy: an interview with Alick Jackomos City of Yarra (n.d.) Fitzroy Aboriginal Walking Trail Context (2008) City of Darebin Heritage Study Murray, Gary (2007) Biographies: Pastor Sir Douglas Ralph Nicholls and Gladys Naby Muriel Bux Nicholls. Thorpe Clark, Mavis, (1972) Pastor Doug: The Story of Sir Douglas Nicholls, Aboriginal Leader, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne. Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (2019) Submission in support of the nomination of 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy to the VHR. Yarra Council (2004) Snapshots of Aboriginal Fitzroy Produced by Bunj Consultants in consultation with the City of Yarra and the Aboriginal Cultural Signage Reference Group. Online sources: <https://www.amnesty.org.au/sir-doug-nicholls/> (short film, Sir Pastor Douglas Nicholls by Dickson Films) <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/nicholls-sir-douglas-ralph-doug-14920> <https://www.gmp.org.au/about-us/more-about-ima/the-beginnings-of-churches-of-christ-indigenous-ministry> https://indigenoustrights.net.au/people/pagination/doug_nicholls <https://walkingmaps.com.au/walk/183> (Fitzroy Aboriginal Heritage Walking Trail) <https://www.facebook.com/pastorsirdougnicholls/photos> (Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls Facebook page - various photos)

Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion What is significant?

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Criterion A]

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Criterion G]

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is significant for its association with its founder Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls. Pastor Doug made a strong and influential contribution to the Aboriginal rights movement and social justice for Aboriginal people. Pastor Doug attracted a large congregation and galvanised the Aboriginal community in the fight for human rights. Together with his wife Gladys, he created a place of community and strength from which contemporary Aboriginal services and organisations evolved. [

Criterion H]

Extent of Registration

Heritage Act 2017

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by adding a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2393

Category: Registered Place

Place: Former Aboriginal Church of Christ

Location: 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy

Municipality: Yarra City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2393 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 687539

17 October 2019

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

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/>