

ST MICHAEL AND ST JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH



Church of St Michael & St John



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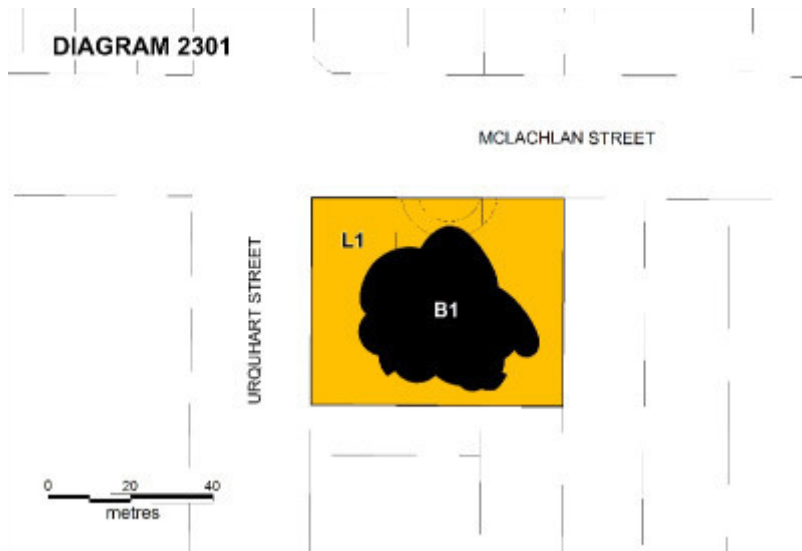
Church of St Michael & St John



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st michael & st john plan.jpg

Location

9 MCLACHLAN STREET HORSHAM, HORSHAM RURAL CITY

Municipality

HORSHAM RURAL CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2301

VHR Registration

June 14, 2012

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Church of St Michael and St John was built in 1987 by and for the Roman Catholic community of Horsham, in western Victoria.

The Church of St Michael and St John was designed by the Melbourne architect Gregory Burgess (1945-) and built by the Horsham builders Plazzer Brothers. The design team was Gregory Burgess, David Mayes, Des Cullen, Charles Salter, Peter Weiss, Francesco Timpano and Bill DeBrun. Burgess is one of Australia's most distinguished and original architects, who is known for his strong sense of spirit of place and community. The building, with its symbolic program and references to the local vernacular, was a marked departure from the abstract modernist forms of the post-World War II period. Burgess noted that the church was 'a modest but enthusiastic and loving work created by an unusually cooperative team of parishioners, artists, tradesmen, engineers and architects'. In 1987 the church was awarded the RAIA (VIC) Architecture Medal for most outstanding work across all categories and the Victoria Brick Manufacturers Institute Inaugural 'Excellence in Clay Brick Architecture' Award.

The Church of St Michael and St John is a brick building with a complex design and a plan based on the geometry of two overlapping circles. The domestic treatment of the north side of the building, with its small scale, verandah with blue columns, and polychrome brickwork, metamorphoses at the apse end into monumental folded masses of polychrome brick which conceal the roof and enclose the curved spaces off the nave. The organic quality of the building is demonstrated in the undulating walls, oozing mortar, and handmade quality, particularly evident in the detailing of the doors, the altar furniture, brickwork and stained glass. The light-flooded narthex and nave are clad with square tiles of a similar colour to the exterior. The sanctuary furniture, the altar, lectern and chair of casuarina timber, was designed by Burgess. The Stations of the Cross were designed by the artist Pip Stokes, Burgess's wife, and depict twelve moments from the Gospel of St John.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Barengi Gadjin people.

How is it significant?

The Church of St Michael and St John is of architectural significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Church of St Michael and St John is architecturally significant as one of Victoria's most expressionistic and original church buildings of the second half of the twentieth century. It is a highly individual design which, with its complex religious symbolism and contextual references, demonstrates the move away from the abstractions of modernism which had dominated architectural thinking from World War II up to the 1970s. The Church is architecturally significant as a major work of the internationally-renowned architect Gregory Burgess, who is known for his culturally sensitive designs and his participatory design approach. In 1987 Burgess was awarded the RAIA (Vic) Architecture Medal for the church, and in 2004 he received the RAIA's Gold Medal, the Australian architecture professions' highest accolade, for his body of work.

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:

General Conditions: 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 Conditions: 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 Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: A Conservation Management Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Theme

8. Building community life 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates	1987,
Architect/Designer	Burgess, Gregory,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	ST MICHAEL'S AND ST JOHN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, Church of St Michael and St John,
Hermes Number	45385
Property Number	

History

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

As noted by Philip Goad *Melbourne Architecture* (1999, p 212), with the rise of Postmodern theory in the 1980s the idea of architecture as a bearer of meaning became popular again, in opposition to the abstraction of modernism which had been dominant in architecture during the previous decades. Buildings were increasingly adorned with symbols, and ideas of reference and context were explored. Many progressive architects such as Greg Burgess and Edmond & Corrigan explored brick polychromy, which had been characteristic of Melbourne in

the 1870s and 1880s and were often part of the suburban vernacular. They adopted the earlier tradition of layering, veneers, expressive composition and complex ideas of representation, and demonstrated a respect for the local, as well as idiosyncratically assimilating overseas trends.

The architect: Gregory Burgess (1945-)

Burgess's Life Fellowship Citation from the RAI A reads:

Gregory Burgess is recognised as an architect of great distinction having developed a formidable body of built work and theoretical writings over nearly 3 decades. He has an enviable reputation both locally and internationally as an architect of great integrity and sensitivity.

His architecture is highly original, having embraced an almost primal sense of spirit of place and community. His office is unconventional in that it operates in a way reminiscent of the traditional atelier, in which a small number of highly talented people work together to produce outstanding results. He has also been a generous mentor to students, young graduates and emerging professionals as well as a great role model for the wider community.

Gregory Burgess has produced an astonishing volume of works for cultural organisations, religious bodies, galleries, local government, health facilities, education, exhibition design, urban planning / design and low and medium density housing, in both the public and private sectors. Much of that work has been recognised by awards from RAI A and other professional bodies in Australia; he was also the recipient of the CAA Robert Matthew Award in 1997 and the RAI A Gold Medal in 2004.

He has involved himself in teaching from 1980 to the present. His work has been widely exhibited and been the subject of publication in reviews and journals around the world. He has also participated in Government and Community forum, involved with Art and Design, Municipal Associations and is a Director of the Sophia Mundi Rudolph Steiner School at Abbotsford, Victoria.

Gregory Burgess is a consummate professional of great distinction, who has made an enduring contribution to the built form of the National Estate, that has set a very high standard in both interpretation and realisation of original building design.

From RAI A citation 2004:

Greg Burgess was born in Newcastle in 1945 and completed a Bachelor of Architecture at the University of Melbourne in 1970. He worked and travelled in London and Denmark before opening his own practice, Gregory Burgess Architects, in Melbourne in 1972.

Burgess is known internationally for his culturally sensitive designs, and work with and for indigenous Australians. Key projects completed with local communities include: the Uluru Kata-Tjuta Cultural Centre (1990-95) in the Northern Territory, designed in collaboration with the Mutitjulu community in the World Heritage listed Uluru National Park; and, the Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre (1990) in the Grampians, a collaborative design for five Aboriginal communities.

In 2004 Burgess won the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medal for Architecture, the Australian architectural profession's highest accolade, which recognises distinguished service by architects who have designed or executed buildings of high merit or who have produced works of distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture. The RAI jury found that "his designs for houses, schools, community buildings for health and cultural interpretation, exhibitions, ecclesiastical and institutional buildings, and most importantly his work in designing innovative buildings with and for indigenous Australians are all rich with messages about nature, materials, and the fundamentals of dwelling, human interaction and public space".

Burgess is recognised as an architect of great distinction throughout the world. Peter Davey, the editor of *Architectural Review* (UK), wrote that Burgess was one of a select group of architects worldwide who are "trying to find ways in which human values can be expressed against the alienating and normative forces of the global economy" and "who tend the flame of hope and carry the lamp of truth in a world that seems increasingly to have no values other than profit and the market in its grossest form".

Mr Burgess' work has been published internationally since 1985. Among his best-known projects are: Melbourne's Catholic Theological College; the Box Hill Community Arts Centre, the Eltham Library (1994), Horsham Catholic Church of St Michael and St John (1987), and refurbishment of the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (2001-2), which is one of five Australian buildings listed on the international register of Significant 20th Century Buildings. He has been the recipient of numerous awards including the internationally prestigious Robert Mathew Award for outstanding contributions to the development of architecture in the British Commonwealth in 1997. Other key awards include the Sir Zelman Cowan National Architecture Award, the Victorian Architecture Medal, and the Kenneth F. Brown Asia Pacific Culture and Architectural Design Award for outstanding examples of contemporary architecture that reflect and enhance their Asia Pacific context (in both 1995 and 1998). He was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Architecture from the University of Melbourne in 2005.

Other works:

Victoria: Endeavour Hills School (1983), Northcote Community Health Centre (1985), Twelve Apostles Visitor Amenity Building (1999), Victorian Space Science Centre (2005), Footscray Community Arts Centre, Churchill Island Visitor Centre, Phillip Island Nature Park, the World of the Platypus at Healesville Sanctuary (1994), Mansfield Tourist Centre (2006), Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre in King Street (2003).

New South Wales: the Ballina Cultural Centre and Surf Lifesaving Club (in progress) and the Kangia Steiner School in Murwillumbah.

Queensland: Australian Rainforest Conservation Society Headquarters in Brisbane (in progress) and the Samford Valley Steiner School.

Tasmania: the Cultural Learning Centre for Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc at Risdon Cove, near Hobart (1990s).

ACT: Orana Steiner School Kindergarten

PLACE HISTORY

The first mass was celebrated in Horsham in 1857 in a private home. The first Church of St Michael and St John was a wooden building which opened in 1879 and which was replaced in 1913 by a red brick Gothic Revival style building designed by the Ballarat architects Clegg, Miller & Riley.

The church designed by Gregory Burgess Architects was built in 1987 by Plazzer Brothers of Horsham, and dedicated by the Bishop of Ballarat, Most Rev Ronald Mulkearns on 10 May 1987. The design team was Gregory Burgess, David Mayes, Des Cullen, Charles Salter, Peter Weiss, Francesco Timpano and Bill DeBrun. Burgess noted that the church had been 'created by an unusually co-operative team of parishioners, artists, tradesmen, engineers and architects'.

In 1987 the church was awarded the Victoria Brick Manufacturers Institute Inaugural 'Excellence in Clay Brick Architecture' Award, and the RAI (VIC) Architecture Medal for most outstanding work across all categories.

The plan of the church was conceived within the geometry of two intersecting circles, whose centres lie on the circumference of each other. The central common area is known as the *Vesica Pisces*, referring to its fish shape and, symbolically, to Christ. Harriet Edquist notes that 'the elaborate series of stained glass windows and roundels which mark the central axis of the church has been designed by the architect to image notions of harmony wholeness, balance and energy' ('The Spiritual in Architecture', p 61.). Above the main entrance to the nave from the narthex is a roundel 'comprising a Trinitarian interlocking ring diagram enclosed within a circle, and a fan-shaped stained glass window emblematic of radiance and energy, echoing the form of the fan-shaped nave, across which the sun passes' (Edquist p63.).

A local vernacular treatment is evident in the domestic detailing at the entrance on the north side of the building, with its small scale, polychrome brick work, blue columns and verandah. But this vernacular form and scale metamorphoses at the apse end into three monumental folded masses of polychrome brick, with lower curved walls at their base which enclose curved spaces off the nave.

The church is entered through a spacious and light-filled narthex (entrance) leading to a broad but shallow nave, designed to allow for a more intimate relationship between each person in the congregation and the celebrant. At the front is the curved sanctuary with a canopy with 'wings' representing the dove of peace. The darker bricks of the sanctuary wall form a chalice shape which encloses the rose window.

The attempt to create an 'organic' architecture, in contrast to the International Modern idiom is reflected in: the undulating walls, with ancillary spaces emerging as buds from a stem; the use on the exterior of dark bricks with oozing mortar; the north-south orientation so that the sun passes across the body of the church; and the hand-made quality of the structure, for example in the detailing of the doors, altar furniture, brickwork and stained glass.

The building is a very individual and complex work but, as Edquist notes, a range of sources are used from the organic and empiricist traditions, including Art Nouveau, Rudolf Steiner, Eero Saarinen and Alvar Aalto. There is also a local vernacular treatment, common to Melbourne contextualism (seen also in the 1970s buildings of Edmund & Corrigan such as the Church of the Resurrection), particularly notable in the entrance with its small scale, polychrome brickwork, blue columns and verandah.

The church furniture and art works were designed for the building (information from a brochure provided by the church):

- . The sanctuary furniture was designed by Burgess and crafted in casuarina timber. The altar is based on the altars of sacrifice from the Old Testament, but also picks up on the meal table theme of the last supper. The chair incorporates the shape of the church. The lectern becomes the Table of the Word.
- . In the narthex on either side of the entrance into the nave are icons of Michael and John, the patrons of the parish of Horsham, created by Dianne Micich of Ballarat in 2007.
- . The central crucifix behind the altar by Mark Weichard (1997) was installed to mark the tenth year of the opening of the church.
- . The statue of Mary and Child was commissioned from the sculptor Eva Schubert for the new church in 1987.
- . The baptismal font is carved from a red gum burl from the Balmoral area, resting on a base of casuarina timber.
- . The Table of the Word was designed and built in 2005 by Brendan Stemp to complement the tabernacle stand.
- . The Rose Window by Stephen Hennessy has 26 individual panels and 265 pieces of glass. Within the large circle 5 smaller circles intersect forming 5 'versica pisces'.
- . Stations of the Cross were designed by the artist Pip Stokes (Burgess's wife). They depict twelve moments from the Gospel of St John.

Peter Corrigan has noted that 'of all the twentieth-century local practitioners, Greg Burgess has attempted to connect us with the old enduring forces, namely nature (the perplexing Australian version), community belief, decency, rites, meaning and rituals. The complete package. He has attempted to direct us to an inner sense

beyond the world of signs.'

Jennifer Taylor in *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, Red Hill [ACT] 1990 writes:

Greg Burgess' Church of St Michael and St John, Horsham, 1987, mediates between the spiritual and material worlds. The highly energised body of the nave and apse sits poised like a great spread-winged eagle, ready for flight. The bulging form of the tabernacle and baptistery to either side of the apse balance and check the sense of movement. On the three remaining sides a flat-roofed band of quite pragmatic architecture, housing the side aisles and service rooms, firmly holds the church within the everyday environment of the suburb.

The church, raised in celebration of communion, is of the same spiritual order as, and forms a complementary partner to, the Hackford House [destroyed by bushfire in 2009]. The suburb has simply replaced the landscape. The hierarchy in form and treatment is explicit, commencing with the mundane porch with its pale blue pipe columns and leading to the curved wall of the apse which swells out and up like a prow and sweeps back, only to be partially dissected by the roof plane, to form a crown for the building. In parts this physical juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, and the transformation of the one into the other are uneasy, and disconcerting in the light of Burgess' faith in the unity of existence. But the irresolution energises the building and challenges the viewer for explanation.

The Church of St Michael and St John is a highly expressionistic work that appears indebted to Eero Saarinen and perhaps to Rudolph Steiner. In its brickwork, and the intentionally ordinary aspects of the architecture as it addresses the suburban street, it is clearly an extension of the Melbourne School of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet it is a highly individual building embodying Burgess' personal predilections and philosophy. In his hands the polychrome brickwork explodes as reverberating patterns of energy improvised upon by the builders as they worked. The curving lines of the scarred geometries that pervade the building embody a mystical significance, and with light and form transmit a sensuousness unknown in the work of his contemporaries.

REFERENCES

Harriet Edquist, 'The Spiritual in Architecture: Greg Burgess' *Church of St Michael and St John*, Horsham', *Transitions* Autumn 1988, pp 59- 65.

Jury Citations for Greg Burgess' RAI A Gold Medal 2004, by Peter Corriagn, Norman Day and Michael Leunig.

Assessment Against Criteria

- a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history
- b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
- c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
- d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

The design of the Church of St Michael and St John, with its complex religious symbolism and contextual references, demonstrate the move during the 1980s away from the abstractions of modernism, which had dominated architectural thinking from World War II up to the 1970s.

- e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
- f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

The Church of St Michael and St John is considered to be one of Victoria's most expressionistic and original church buildings of the second half of the twentieth century. In 1987 Burgess was awarded the RAI A (Vic) Architecture Medal for the church.

- g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

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

The Church is a major work of the internationally-renowned architect Gregory Burgess, who is known for his culturally sensitive designs. Burgess has been the recipient of numerous awards, including in 1997 the internationally prestigious Robert Matthew award for outstanding contributions to the development of architecture in the British Commonwealth. Other key awards include the Sir Zelman Cowan National Architecture Award, the Victoria Architecture Medal, and the Kenneth F Brown Asia Pacific Culture and Architectural Design Award for outstanding examples of contemporary architecture that reflect and enhance the Asia Pacific context. Burgess's buildings for indigenous communities in Australia and his participatory design approach are considered especially notable. In 2004 Burgess was awarded the RAIA's Gold Medal, the Australian architecture professions' highest accolade, for his body of work, and in 2011 was awarded an Order of Australia (AM).

Plaque Citation

Designed by the eminent architect Gregory Burgess and built in 1987, this is considered to be an outstanding example of late twentieth century church design and was awarded the 1987 RAIA (Vic) Architecture Medal.

Extent of Registration

1. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2301 held by the Executive Director being all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 247552, and Lot 1 on Title Plan 379437 and Lot 1 on Title Plan 102858.
2. All of the building marked B1 on Diagram 2301 held by the 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/>