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# Former Elizabeth Fry Retreat Laundry, 83 Argo Street, South Yarra



Former Elizabeth Fry Retreat Laundry

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## Location

83 Argo Street, SOUTH YARRA VIC 3141 - Property No 23124

## Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO475

## Heritage Listing

Stonnington City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

Relevant themes from the City of Stonnington Environmental History are indicated by TEH.

### *What is Significant?*

The Elizabeth Fry Retreat was established by a family of Quakers in 1885 on land now occupied by Argo

Reserve. The Retreat began as refuge and training centre for female ex-prisoners and was initially housed in a converted nineteenth century villa. This was replaced in 1914 by a substantial double-storey brick building, designed by architect J V T Ward. Inmates were put to work in a commercial laundry which provided the Retreat with a major source of income. The laundry was upgraded and rebuilt in the early 1930s. In the post war years, the Retreat operated as a hostel for wayward girls.

The site was turned into a public park in the late 1970s when all of the Elizabeth Fry Retreat buildings were demolished other than a boundary wall and part of the 1930s laundry complex. The surviving laundry building is a small red-brick structure with a distinctive rendered parapet treatment on its south facing gable end.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The original external form, materials and detailing of the building
- The unpainted red-brick surfaces.
- The 1913 foundation stone.
- The legibility of the built form provided by the open parkland setting.
- The red-brick fence/wall on the west boundary of the site.
- The absence of modern signage on and around the building (other than interpretative signage).

Modern additions including the roof cladding, pergola and brick paving and garden retaining walls not significant.

#### *How is it significant?*

The former Elizabeth Fry Retreat laundry is of local historical and architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

#### *Why is it significant?*

Historically, the former Elizabeth Fry Retreat laundry is significant for its associations with the early history of welfare services in Stonnington and the role of religious and charitable groups in the provision of these services (10.3.1 Neglected children and 'fallen' women, Criterion G). The laundry attests to the nature of work performed by inmates of the Retreat, and more generally provides rare evidence in Stonnington of early twentieth century approaches to the institutional care, reform and training of disadvantaged women and girls (Criterion A & B).

The former Elizabeth Fry Retreat Laundry is architecturally significant as a utilitarian institutional building made distinctive by its prominent gable end treatment (Criterion D & E). The brick wall on the reserve's west boundary provides tangible evidence of the scale of the Retreat complex and its insular nature.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Stonnington - Heritage Places in the City of Stonnington - Heritage Citations Project, Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd, 2013;
Construction dates	1930,
Hermes Number	195702
Property Number	

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## **Local Historical Themes**

The former Elizabeth Fry Laundry illustrates the following theme, as identified in the *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History* (Context Pty Ltd, 2006):

10.3.1 Neglected children and 'fallen' women.

## **Physical Description 1**

Argo Reserve is a small public park in South Yarra bordered by Argo Street to the south and Albion Street to the north. A building which originally formed part of the Elizabeth Fry Retreat laundry survives at the northern end of the reserve. Historical records are ambiguous with respect to the building's construction date. It could have been built in 1930, when laundry facilities were upgraded, or 1933, when entirely new laundry buildings were erected.

The former laundry has red-brick walls and corrugated iron roof with a projecting gabled bay on the south side. The gable end contains a loft door and is embellished with bold rendered ornament (detailed to match the original 1914 building). The building is otherwise devoid of decorative ornament. Small steel-framed windows set high in the walls point to the building's original utilitarian purpose.

The building appears to remain substantially intact externally notwithstanding the demolition of adjoining side wings. The roof has modern corrugated steel cladding, a timber pergola has been erected on the east side of the building and the rear (north) wall has brick extensions with a curved profile. A foundation stone on the south elevation was presumably salvaged from the demolished 1914 main building. It reads:

THIS STONE WAS LAID BY DONNALD MACKINNON MLA OCTOBER 8TH 1913  
THE ELIZABETH FRY RETREAT FOUNDED BY THE LATE MRS SARAH J SWINBORN.

A red-brick wall on the west boundary of Argo Reserve is presumably a remnant of the Elizabeth Fry laundry complex and may also have formed part of the 1933 boundary wall.

*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/>*