

# ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, WANDONG



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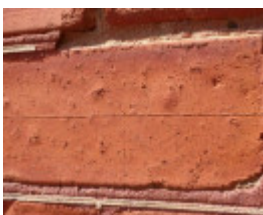


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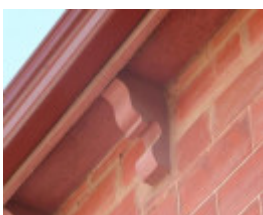


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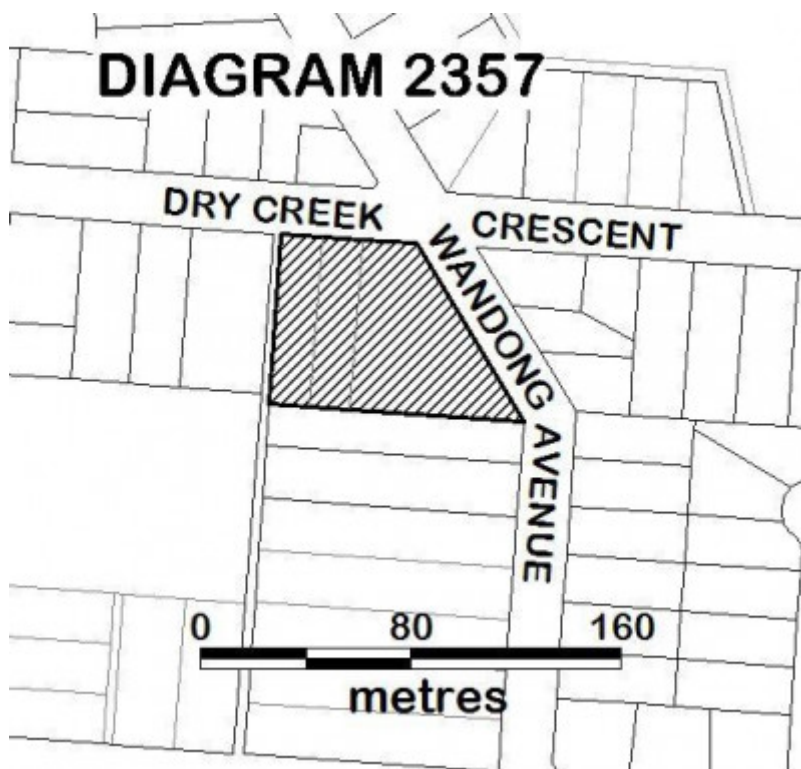


Diagram 2357

**Location**

33-35 WANDONG AVENUE WANDONG, MITCHELL SHIRE

**Municipality**

MITCHELL SHIRE

**Level of significance**

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2357

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO293

## VHR Registration

October 13, 2016

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 12, 2016

What is significant?

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong including a small rectangular, gable roofed church constructed of terra cotta lumber and a row of cypress trees along the northern boundary.

### *History Summary*

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong was constructed in 1891 on land donated by local entrepreneur, Robert A Robertson who was instrumental in the development of the town. The establishment of extensive forestry and milling operations in the area and innovative industries in Wandong, such as timber seasoning and terra cotta lumber, were largely a result of Robertson's initiative. The church was built of this new technology terra cotta lumber, a lightweight and fireproof building material manufactured from a composition of clay and sawdust. This product was patented in the United States in 1881, and in 1885 a patent for its manufacture was granted to the Victoria Terra Cotta Lumber Company Ltd in Brunswick. Robert Robertson was a director of this company and he established a second plant in Wandong where production of bricks and other shaped terra cotta products commenced in 1889. This plant appears to have become the main producer of the material at this time. The terra cotta lumber industry in Victoria played a role in transforming Melbourne into a centre for high-rise construction in the 1880s and 1890s. The material was commonly used in the interior of buildings for fireproofing walls, ceilings, floors, arches, roofs and partitions and its lightweight and insulating properties facilitated high rise construction. Terra cotta lumber was unusually employed for the external structure at St Michael's Catholic Church and for a small number of houses in Wandong. Economic conditions in Victoria in the early 1890s, with a significant reduction in building activity and product manufacturing, impacted greatly on the production of terra cotta lumber which appears to have ceased in Wandong in c1892.

### *Description Summary*

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong is a simple Gothic Revival building which is constructed of a double skin of terra cotta lumber brickwork. Situated on a large site with boundary plantings of cypress trees, the building has a gabled corrugated iron roof, lancet windows, rows of decorative terra cotta consoles under the eaves and a rendered plinth, sills and string courses. Measuring 300 mm x 110mm x 155 mm (length x height x depth), each brick contains two lengthwise cavities and many show hand prints on their surface. The building includes a number of specially formed terra cotta elements, including bricks for the window and vent apexes and bricks that form edges such as the window reveals. An original vestry, with later ramp, is located at the south-east corner of the building and a timber porch at the north-west corner has replaced the original entrance porch. A bluestone foundation stone, recording the date May 1891, is located at the north-east corner of the church. The setting of

the church building includes a mix of tree species that contribute to the setting, in particular a row of cypress trees that line the north boundary of the site.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Taungurung people.

How is it significant?

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong is of historical and scientific significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

Why is it significant?

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong is significant at the state level for the following reasons:

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong (1891) is significant in Victoria as a rare, experimental and highly intact example of the use of a new and innovative construction product, terra cotta lumber, in the late nineteenth century economic boom period. The building clearly demonstrates the unusual external use of this product. The terra cotta lumber industry in Victoria played a role in transforming Melbourne into a centre for high-rise construction in the 1880s and 1890s and St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong has a clear association with the development of the manufacturing and building industry in Victoria at this time. [Criterion B & F]

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong is also significant for the following reasons, but not at the State level:

Wandong was the major place of production of terra cotta lumber from 1889 to c1892 and St Michael's Catholic Church is a clear illustration of this innovative industry. St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong illustrates the contribution made by Robert Robertson to industry in Victoria, including the establishment of a terra cotta lumber works at Wandong.

The setting of the church building includes a mix of tree species that contribute to the setting, in particular a row of cypress trees that line the north boundary of the site.

## Permit Exemptions

<p class="c1">It should be noted that Permit Exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.42(4) of the Heritage Act). Permit Exemptions can also be applied for and granted after registration (under s.66 of the Heritage Act)</p> <p class="c2">General Condition 1</p> <p class="c1">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.</p> <p class="c2">General Condition 2</p> <p class="c1">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.</p> <p class="c2">General Condition 3</p> <p class="c1">All works should be informed by Conservation Management Plans 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.</p> <p class="c2">General Condition 4</p> <p class="c1">Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.</p> <p class="c2">General Condition 5</p> <p class="c1">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.</p> <p class="c2">Specific Permit Exemptions</p> <span class="c3">Exterior</span> <p class="c1">. Minor patching, repair and maintenance which replace like with like.</p> <p class="c1">. Removal of non-original items such as pipe work, ducting, wiring and making good in a manner not detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the place.</p> <p class="c1">. Installation or removal of non-original external fixtures and fittings such as hot water services and taps in a manner not detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the place.</p> <p class="c1">. Painting of previously painted surfaces provided that preparation or painting does not remove the original paint or other decorative scheme.</p> <span class="c3">Interior</span> <p class="c1">. Painting of previously painted walls

and ceilings provided that preparation or painting does not remove any original paint or other decorative scheme.

Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of mirrors, paintings and other wall mounted art.

Installation, removal or replacement of electric clocks, public address systems, detectors, alarms, emergency lights, exit signs, luminaires and the like on non-decorative plaster surfaces.

Removal or installation of notice boards.

Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches, pull cords, push buttons or power outlets are retained in-situ. Note: if wiring original to the place was carried in timber conduits then the conduits should remain in situ.

Installation of new fire hydrant services including sprinklers, fire doors and elements affixed to plaster surfaces.

Installation of new built-in cupboards providing no alteration to the structure is required.

**LANDSCAPE**

The process of gardening, including mowing, hedge clipping, bedding displays, removal of dead shrubs and replanting the same species or cultivar, disease and weed control, and maintenance to care for existing plants.

Subsurface works involving the installation, removal or replacement of watering and drainage systems or services outside the canopy edge of significant trees in accordance with AS4970.

Removal of plants listed as noxious weeds in the *Catchment and Land Protection Act* 1994.

Vegetation protection and management of possums and vermin.

With the exception of the Cyprus trees on the northern boundary, the pruning and replanting of trees is permit exempt.

Cyprus trees on the northern boundary:

The removal or pruning of dead or dangerous trees to maintain safety.

Replanting of removed or dead trees and vegetation with the same plant species.

Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; Pruning of Amenity Trees AS 4373-2007.

Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; Protection of Trees on Development Sites AS 4970-2009.

## Theme

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce 8. Building community life

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Construction dates      | 1891,             |
| Heritage Act Categories | Registered place, |
| Other Names             | WANDONG CHURCH,   |
| Hermes Number           | 197507            |
| Property Number         |                   |

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## History

**Contextual History**

Situated on the main train line from Melbourne to the north east region of Victoria, Wandong was established in a valley close to the forests and associated saw mills of Mt Disappointment. From the 1860s Wandong was an integral part of the Victorian timber cutting and milling industries. The completion of the northern railway in 1872, the purchase of Crown land at Wandong by Patrick Morphett, and the opening of his siding in 1876 stimulated selection and settlement in the area, marking the beginning of forestry operations in the region. A sawmilling industry, and a township centred on the railway line, developed from this time.

Entrepreneur Robert Affleck Robertson arrived in Wandong in c1884 and was instrumental in the development of the township of Wandong. He was at the forefront of forestry exploitation and brought innovative industry to the town by establishing both a timber seasoning and terra cotta lumber works. Robertson migrated to Australia from Canada in 1880 with some knowledge of the timber trade and set about establishing himself in Victoria's sawmilling industry, initially in and around the Ballarat/Blackwood area. His arrival in Wandong resulted in the establishment of extensive forestry and milling operations in the Strath Creek and Mt Disappointment areas. Initially purchasing the existing Derril Mill at Strath Creek, Robertson was involved in a number of saw milling operations in the area. The Comet Mill (VHR H1816), established in 1884, became his flagship operation. This sawmill was reportedly the largest in Australia at this time and the Comet Mill settlement included housing for workers, a school, bakery, butcher's shop and general store. Robertson was also responsible for the construction of tramways that linked the mills to the railway at Wandong

itself.

Robertson's interest in innovation and development led to his association with the Victoria Terra Cotta Lumber Company Ltd, the Australasian Porous Earthenware and Fireproof Brick Company, both in Melbourne, and the creation of the Wandong terra cotta lumber plant, the Ballarat Terra Cotta Lumber Company and the Yarrowonga Saw Mill and Brick and Terra Cotta Lumber Company. It also led to the construction of a large seasoning and timber finishing plant at Wandong to process timber cut at the Comet Sawmills in 1889.

In April 1892 the private subdivision known as Wandong township was offered for sale by auction on behalf of the owner, Robert A Robertson. The associated plan of the township indicates that few of the 190 allotments, located east of the railway line, were occupied or allocated at this time. A small number of houses had been built by this time and sites had been allocated to a state school, the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches, a coffee palace and hall. The auction plan indicates that a number of sites were occupied west of the railway line. The Terra Cotta Lumber Works was located adjacent to Robertson's timber depot and tramway and the seasoning timber works was located to the north-east.

### History of the Terra Cotta Lumber Industry

A porous terra cotta product, known as terra cotta lumber, was patented in the United States in 1881 and was reportedly being manufactured on a large scale in New York by 1884. It was an innovative product that mixed clay and saw dust to produce a lightweight and fireproof building material that could be easily cut, sawn and nailed. Patents for the product were taken out worldwide and in the United States individual manufacturers received licences for its manufacture from the mid to late 1880s. It was reported in the *Kilmore Free Press* on 19 May 1887 that in the United States 'at the present time there are 27 factories in full work and 30 new establishments in course of erection, the former turning out 12,000 tons of terra cotta lumber daily'. The following year the first journal of the International Terra Cotta Lumber Co, the *International Fire-Proof*, was published.

There were already moves to establish a factory to produce terra cotta lumber in Melbourne in the mid-1880s, coinciding with an increase in production in the United States. The lightweight and fireproof nature of the product enabled the construction of taller buildings and the late 1880s were optimistic and busy years in the Melbourne construction industry. Many buildings reached new heights in elevation, design and style and as stated by Miles Lewis 'the central city began to be transformed into a high rise business core, like those in the United States, but unequalled in Britain or on the Continent'. The introduction of both elevators and fireproofing materials enabled a copying of American skyscraper trends.

A patent was granted by the International Terra Cotta Lumber Company, Chicago to a company in Victoria in 1885. The Victoria Terra Cotta Company of Barkly Street, Brunswick was established and a prospectus of the Terra Cotta Lumber Company Ltd, published in 1885, listed a number of local architects and builders as company directors. Machinery was imported from the United States and production had commenced by mid 1887. On showcasing its products at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition of 1888-89, the Victoria Terra Cotta Company was awarded a first order of merit.

In 1888 H Turner from the Terra Cotta Lumber Company of Chicago arrived in Australia to licence and encourage the establishment of factories throughout the country. At this time he envisaged the establishment of ten plants in Victoria. In 1889 he wrote home to Chicago from Wandong, Victoria where the Victoria Terra Cotta Lumber Company planned to build its second plant. Others were planned for Yarrowonga and Ballarat however the latter did not proceed.

Robert A Robertson was a company director of the Brunswick works and was therefore involved in the operations of the company. With sawmilling interests in the Wandong area, Robertson played a significant role in the expansion of operations to the rural locations of Wandong and Yarrowonga. Production continued in Brunswick however Wandong was the primary place of manufacture from 1891-92, or possibly earlier.

The availability of large amounts of sawdust in Wandong, as a by-product of the timber industry, was an attraction for the production of terra cotta lumber. It was also stated that the quality of the clay at Wandong was superior to that at Brunswick. The first batch of terra cotta lumber was produced in Wandong in July 1889 at which time the operations had two fire kilns and reportedly employed thirty men. The daily output was approximately 15,000 standard size bricks and a doubling of this figure was anticipated when the works were fully developed and operational. The factory also produced terra cotta products (as well as terra cotta lumber) and shaped bricks and elements such as cornices and consoles. By 1891 the Wandong works occupied twelve hectares, with the extensive clay deposits said to be the best in the district for the purpose. The site consisted of an engine and boiler house, numerous drying avenues, four burning kilns, and several other sheds and workshops. Large quantities of sawdust were trucked to the works from nearby sawmills.

Detailed descriptions of the terra cotta works at Wandong were included in a number of newspapers in the early 1890s, however by the end of 1891 economic conditions were declining in Victoria with the level of anticipated building almost half that of the previous year. In 1891 Robertson established a terra cotta works in Yarrowonga however by 1893 building construction in the state had severely declined. As a result the Australian Seasoned Timber Co absorbed the Terra Cotta Lumber Co and in 1897 Robertson and the company finally liquidated.

In a brief period, terra cotta lumber helped to transform the centre of Melbourne into a high-rise business core, in a similar manner to cities in the United States. Melbourne architects were keen to incorporate the latest trends in design, fire protection and the use of construction materials. Production of terra cotta lumber continued to a lesser extent in the twentieth

century. In 1928 the product was still being advertised by two Melbourne companies, including the Hoffman Brick & Potteries Ltd.

**Terra Cotta Lumber Product**

Terracotta (terra cotta or terra-cotta) comes from the Italian: 'baked earth' originating from the Latin *terra cocta*. Terra cotta lumber was usually composed of three parts sawdust and two parts clay which produced a lightweight, porous material which could be easily cut, sawn or nailed. Terra cotta lumber was an extruded product, frequently produced in hollow brick form, which was capable of being made to any dimensions. A brick was commonly 12"x9 ½"x4 ½" (31x24x10.7 cm), larger than a typical clay brick. Once mixed, the composite material was rolled, cut to a required size, dried and kiln-baked. The sawdust was burnt out in the final process, resulting in a brick with a porous, 'rusk-like' appearance. The product was about half the weight of an ordinary brick and was fire proof, vermin proof, sound proof and non-shrinkable.

Terra cotta lumber was used for a number of applications, particularly where the primary purpose was to either prevent or retard fires, insulate from heat or reduce noise. This included sheathing boilers and water pipes and lining furnaces and lift wells. It was commonly used for fireproofing walls, ceilings, floors, arches, roofs and partitions and its lightweight and insulating properties facilitated high rise construction. In Victoria, terra cotta lumber was often advertised in newspapers as 'the only fireproof building material' (for example *Argus*, 12 December 1890, p 3).

As it was a porous material, terra cotta lumber was generally manufactured for internal use. External application was far less common, however a small number of examples can be found in Wandong. These include St Michael's Catholic Church and five houses in the town. All appear to be constructed using hollow terra cotta lumber bricks. As a place of manufacture, it would appear likely that these were an experimental use of the material, possibly varying the amount of sawdust (to produce a less porous material) and to make an otherwise obscured product highly visible. A section of retaining wall on Dry Creek, Wandong, built as part of the timber seasoning works, also uses terra cotta lumber. It is interesting to note that a number of porous earthenware types were discussed in the *Australasian*, 27 April 1889, all described as machined compositions of earthy and vegetable matters. One, named 'Woodstone', was described as a clay and sawdust product to be used for outside walls.

In the United States the use of terra cotta lumber or terra cotta for the construction of entire buildings began in 1888 and by 1891 complete terra cotta buildings, including houses, were being constructed by the Denver Terra Cotta and Lumber Company. Dr Miles Lewis notes that it is of interest that the external application of terra cotta lumber seems to predate the use of exposed structural terra cotta in the United States.

**Use of Terra Cotta Lumber in Victoria**

Early uses of terra cotta lumber in Melbourne include the Arcade Building of the Freehold Investment Co in Swanston Street, Melbourne in 1887; the Temperance and General Building, Swanston Street in 1888 and the Empire Buildings, Collins Street, Melbourne in 1888. These buildings have all been subsequently demolished. By 1889 the product was being used for partitions, floors and ceilings in rural Victoria. In July 1889 the Victorian Railways Department accepted tenders for nine rural cool storage sheds (including Kilmore and Wangaratta) using terra cotta lumber. At a similar time a small amount was used as partitioning in the No 3 Goods Shed, Spencer Street railway yards, Melbourne.

Recorded uses of terra cotta lumber in Melbourne from 1890 include:

- Commercial Bank of Australia, Collins Street, Melbourne
- National Mutual Life Association headquarters, Melbourne (specified for partitions, encasing of girders and floors which were carried on arches)
- National Mutual Building, Collins Street, Melbourne (conjunction with rolled steel joists for the floors)
- Benvenuta, Melbourne (as flat arches to floor the balcony of the house)

The material was also used in regional Victoria at buildings such as the Tallangatta Shire Hall (1892) and buildings in Wandong. See **Table 1** below.

**History of St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong**

A group of local Wandong residents met in September 1883 to discuss raising funds towards the building of a Catholic Church at Wandong. However it was not until February 1891 that a notice appeared in the *Kilmore Free Press* advertising the intention to hold a meeting for those interested in building a Catholic Church in Wandong. At this meeting Robert A Robertson was thanked for providing a centrally located, half acre site near the state school, for the intended church and it was reported that funds exceeding £100 were received towards construction of a church at this time. The donated allotment (Lot 33) was transferred to Archbishop Thomas Carr and Father Michael Farrelly in May 1891 and is clearly labelled on the Wandong Township Auction Plan of 1892.

In the *Kilmore Free Press* on 14 May 1891, it was reported that a 'handsome brick church was being erected to accommodate the Roman Catholic Church at Wandong, with Mr McKay as the contractor'. The cost of construction was £365.0.0 and the foundation stone was laid in May 1891. The church was unusually constructed from hollow, locally made terra cotta lumber bricks. As reported in the *Kilmore Free Press*, funds had been raised by the community for the cost of seats in the church by 1893 and the first mass was conducted that year. In 1924 a piece of land adjoining the church was purchased to provide accommodation for vehicles. The last church service was held in 2013.

**KEY REFERENCES**

- L R Dore. 'Terra Cotta Lumber: an Archaeological Study of Rural Trade'. School of Archaeology, La Trobe University, 1996
- L R Dore. *Wandong - Remnants of an Innovative Past*. Kilmore 2012
- M B Lewis. 'Australian Building: a Cultural Investigation', (section 6.09 Bricks and Tiles: Terra Cotta Block & Lumber)

December 2014

*Kilmore Free Press*, 14 May 1891, p 2, record of church building & various newspaper references

'Mitchell Shire Heritage Study Amendment C56 Heritage Citations', April 2014

Context. 'Mitchell Shire Heritage Amendment, review of heritage precincts', December 2012

L Huddle Pty Ltd. 'Mitchell Shire Stage Two Heritage Study', 2006

Amendment C56 to the Mitchell Planning Scheme. Panel Report. December 2013

## Plaque Citation

St Michael's Catholic Church (1891) is a rare example of a building constructed from terra cotta lumber, a light weight innovative construction material manufactured in Wandong and Brunswick during Victoria's economic boom of the late nineteenth century. The external use of terra cotta lumber is an unusual feature of the building.

## Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion How is it significant?

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong is of historical and scientific significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

Why is it significant?

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong is significant at the state level for the following reasons:

St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong (1891) is significant in Victoria as a rare, experimental and highly intact example of the use of a new and innovative construction product, terra cotta lumber, in the late nineteenth century economic boom period. The building remains highly intact to clearly demonstrate the unusual external use of this product. The terra cotta lumber industry in Victoria played a role in transforming Melbourne into a centre for high-rise construction in the 1880s and 1890s and St Michael's Catholic Church, Wandong has a clear association with the development of the manufacturing and building industry in Victoria at this time. [

Criterion B & F]

## Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the following places in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2357

Category: Heritage Place

Place: St Michael's Catholic Church

Location: 33-35 Wandong Avenue Wandong

Mitchell Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2357 encompassing all of Lots 33-35 on Lodged Plan 3204.

Dated 13 October 2016

TIM SMITH

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 41 13 October 2016 2572]



*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/>*