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# St Michael's Memorial Church

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## Location

270 High Street ASHBURTON, BOROONDARA CITY

## Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO923

## Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

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Hermes Number 208930

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

The church is a modern brick Romanesque Revival styled church oriented north-south. The front facade is symmetrical, with two square towers studded with impressed brick crosses, flanking a central gabled form. A large, tall, round-arched window with painted white metal frames and orange glass panes rises above a square, blue-painted timber doorway. A statue of Saint Michael slaying the dragon stands above the doorway. A contemporary metal frame and glass canopy projects above the doorway over the entrance. The canopy, while contemporary in design and materiality, is sympathetic in form. The shape of the canopy with its central high point and its projecting wings echoes the pitch of the central gable and its relationship with the two towers on either side. The church gable is crowned by a white painted timber Celtic cross. Decorative elements include the pattern of indented brick crosses on each tower, corbelled course

along the side elevations, and brick pattern on the rounded apse. The corbel table along the side elevations under the roof are a modern, simplified interpretation of a corbel table. Simple brick patterns similarly decorate the tympanum under the arched windows to the transept. The central facade's arched window is set within a simplified brick archivolt. The ornamental brickwork above the Sacristy door suggests a dripstone moulding. The external window sills are an accentuated stylisation of Norman window sills.

Internally, the church consists of a narthex, nave, transept, sanctuary and altar, with a rounded but flat roofed apse. The interior breaks with the traditional basilica form by excluding side aisles or chapels. Instead, the interior is remarkably open and dominated by rows of five tall arched stained glass windows on each side. The altar and sanctuary, originally located in the apse, have been brought forward into the transept and set upon a rounded raised floor. A baptistery is located within the eastern tower, while a lobby and stair into the gallery is located in the west tower.

Confessionals are located to the west of the nave. Secondary entrances are located off the transepts. Large single arched windows illuminate the transept on east and west. Rows of three arched windows illuminate the sanctuary. Rows of three tall narrow rectangular windows illuminate the apse, which is set within a recess separated from the Sanctuary by a large arch. A crucifix is set within the apse. The overall effect is strikingly simple, relying on material and form over ornamentation. The concave ceiling is rendered light cream, the smooth texture contrasting with the cream brick walls. The windows along the nave are set within shallow recesses formed by brick pilasters and gently arched brick soffits. Stations of the Cross adorn the walls of the nave between the stained-glass windows. The timber seating is arranged in straight rows up to the transept, where portable seating may be arranged around the elevated sanctuary and altar.

The interior of the church has developed over time, with the most notable alteration occurring in 1975 to the sanctuary following the Vatican II reforms. A curved timber panelled wall with side altar and statuette of the Virgin Mary screens the new entry from the priest's sacristy into the sanctuary. The gallery above the narthex is lined in timber, its square and gentle arch forms mirroring the pattern of the pilasters and soffits that frame the nave windows. The organ is set in timber panelling within the eastern transept. The organ replaced another side altar in the east transept some time before 1975. The stained glass and statue of Saint Michael were added some time after the opening of the church, but in locations envisioned in the original plans, which saw a statue located over the doorway. The stained-glass windows are modern in their composition and style, while the statue adopts a more traditional sculptural style.

The priest's sacristy is entered via a stair and extends westwards. Another row of five arched windows pierce the southern elevation of the sacristy. The original side stairs and concrete spheres on either side of the main entrance have been removed and replaced with disabled access ramps. The long conical scroll-shaped lights that originally hung from the ceiling have been removed. The composition of the church exterior and interior forms a cohesive design of stripped back, simplified Romanesque using distinctly modern materials and patterns. The repeated use of brick decorative elements emphasises the material. The quoin-like 'tooth' pattern that edges the transitions between the nave and apse, and the ceiling and apse, creates an interesting contrast between this textured materiality, and the contrasting smooth, light materiality of the apse and original sanctuary. The timber panels used in Petherbridge's 1975 alterations to the sanctuary and transept repeat the same rectangular pattern. Semicircular arches are characteristic of Romanesque architecture. Other characteristics evident in the church are the use of massive walls with limited or small openings, such as in the apse and in the towers. The overall mass of the building, without buttresses, is typically Romanesque. The use of piers or pilasters between arches, occurring on the interior; the ceiling is reminiscent of the barrel-vaulted ceiling. John East described St Michael's Memorial Church, Ashburton as 'an example of the style which might be called Post-Romanesque. The massing, the large arch of the facade with its stepped "mouldings," and the residual brick corbel table on the side elevations all clearly suggest Romanesque influence in a design which is otherwise very much of its time' (East 2016:121).

The church grounds are defined on the north and west by an original cream brick fence. The steps on the boundary have white painted metal balustrades. The landing to the front steps is 'pointed' outwards to the street. Contemporary landscaping surrounds the church, including a metal sculpture beside the church, and a car park to the rear. A Memorial Garden has been planted beside the church, with plaques memorialising deceased parishioners adorning the church wall near the sacristy door.

*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/>*