

CONVENT OF MERCY AND ACADEMY OF MARY IMMACULATE



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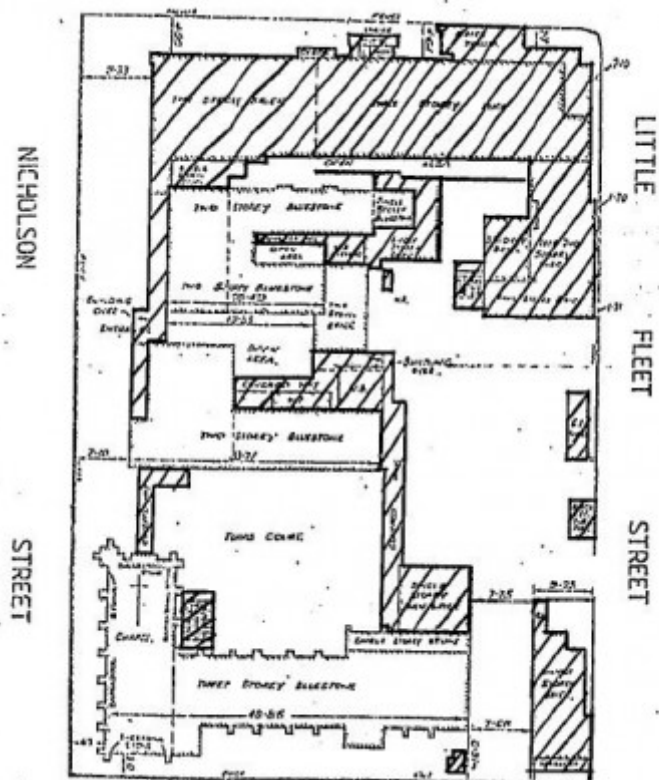
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h00507 plan h00507

Location

88 NICHOLSON STREET FITZROY, YARRA CITY

Municipality

YARRA CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0507

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO184

VHR Registration

July 14, 1982

Heritage Listing

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 11, 2024

What is significant?

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate was founded in 1857 and consists of a number of buildings constructed over a period of thirty years. The first two buildings to occupy the site were two almost identical regency houses erected in 1850 to designs by architects Newson and Blackburn for John Watson and Edward Wight, merchants in partnership. In 1853 the northern house, belonging to Watson, was purchased by Dr James Goold, the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, for use as his official residence. In 1857, Dr Goold invited Mother Ursula Frayne of the Sisters of Mercy to establish a convent and school in Melbourne. To enable the order to establish their convent, Dr Goold sold them his house and in 1861 the sisters acquired the adjoining house and converted it to a school. Additional bluestone wings were added between 1858 and 1863, a three-storey bluestone classroom wing was built along Palmer Street in two stages between 1869 and 1881, and a sandstone memorial chapel was built in memory of Mother Ursula on the corner of Palmer and Nicholson Streets in 1887.

How is it significant?

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is of historical, architectural and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is of historical significance because of its important place in the development of religious institutions and schooling in Victoria. The Sisters of Mercy were the first order of nuns in Victoria and the complex is a reminder of the important role played by Ursula Frayne in the establishment of Catholic education and social welfare in Melbourne. The southern two-storey bluestone extension to the rear of Goold's house is of great importance as the location of the first Catholic Girls' School in Victoria, and also for its use as an orphanage in the early social welfare work of the Catholic Church. Following the demolition of St Francis seminary, it is believed to be the oldest existing Catholic educational complex in Victoria. The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is of historical significance for its association with Mother Ursula Frayne (born in Dublin in 1816), an important figure in the early Australian Catholic Church. Before

commencing her work in Melbourne, Mother Ursula had established the first mission of the Institute of Mercy outside Ireland, at Newfoundland, Canada, in 1842, and in 1849 had established the first secondary school in Western Australia. Her body, and that of Mother Xavier Dillon, are buried in the Chapel beneath a Celtic cross of white marble. One of the original houses on the site is of historical significance as the residence of the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne and as the first building of the Convent.

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is of architectural significance as a collection of largely intact, elegant 19th century religious buildings, including two of the earliest stone houses in Melbourne, and for its association with important figures in the history of Victorian architecture. The architects associated with the development of the complex were all men of great importance to the architectural history of Victoria. Newson and Blackburn, who were responsible for the original two houses, were notable architects of early Melbourne, and responsible for several school buildings. It is believed that William Wardell was responsible for the 1863 school wing, as it is typical of much of his ecclesiastical work of that time and similar to his Christian Brothers College in Victoria Parade, East Melbourne. The three-storey bluestone Palmer Street school wing, built in 1871-81, seems likely to have been the work of Leonard Terry and possibly William Wardell (the two were associated with other Catholic Church projects). The Chapel, blessed and dedicated on 26th March 1889, was designed by Reed Smart and Tappin, who were also responsible for the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford. Each of the buildings is significant for its architectural qualities and the way in which it integrates into the whole. The manner in which the architects designed their additions to the complex displays the important variations in architectural philosophy prevailing in the 19th century.

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is of social significance for its long-term and continuing association with Catholic education in Victoria. The Academy was the first Catholic girls school in Victoria and continues its educational function today.

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](#).

Construction dates	1850,
Architect/Designer	Blackburn, James Jnr,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	482
Property Number	

History

Associated People: Arch/Design- NEWSON AND BLACKBURN; WILLIAM WARDELL; LEONARD TERRY; REED SMART AND TAPPIN.

Extent of Registration

Historic Building No. 507 Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate, 88 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy (excluding the buildings defined by the plan held on the files of the Department of Planning).
[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. 71 14 July 1982 p.2357]

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/>