
St Dominic's Parish Church & Priory

Location

816 Riversdale Road,, CAMBERWELL VIC 3124 - Property No B7398

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Regional

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 21, 2008

What is significant? With the growth of Melbourne ever eastwards in the interwar period, St. Dominic's East Camberwell Parish was established in 1924, and was to be the home of the first Dominican order in Victoria, who had arrived the year before. They purchased the house and estate known as Holyrood, located on the top of a major rise along Riversdale Road. The 1888 Queen Anne style house became the Priory, a role it still serves. A temporary church-school opened in 1925 was replaced by the first stage of the present church (the apse, choir and seven bays of the nave) which opened in 1937, designed by W P Conolly. A two storey extension to the Priory connecting it to the church designed by Conolly and built in matching bluestone was built soon after. The second stage of the church was completed in 1959, to a design by T G Payne, and comprised a matching extension of the nave, and a distinctive tower quite different to that designed by Conolly.

Both sections are constructed of rock-faced bluestone in a broadly Gothic Revival style. The nave is triple aisle, with arcading and clerestory windows to the main aisle, and side aisles providing access to a series of chapels. The apse is pentagonal. The first stage employs sandstone exterior dressings and interior details, which in the later section are constructed with pressed cement and cement render respectively.

The bell tower is the most dominant and distinctive feature. It is square, with diagonal corner buttresses that do not diminish, but instead terminate in four crocketed finials that pierce the skyline. There are large traceried openings between the buttresses for the top third of the tower that feature an unusual central concave pointed arch, the top of which pierces through the top horizontal balustrade. The bulk of the tower is solid bluestone, providing a strong contrast to the delicately detailed top section, and the highly elaborate detailing above the entry portal. While the tower detailing is broadly Decorated Gothic in form, complete with sculptural figures within the entry arch and in a canopied niche above, the main lines of the portal are more fluid, the verticality exaggerated, and the details stylised. The narrow piers of the entry project at a 450 angle whilst being squeezed between the huge main 450 piers of the tower, lending the whole an appearance similar to that of European expressionist forms from the 1910s and 1920s.

How is it significant? It is significant for aesthetic/architectural and historical reasons at the Metropolitan Regional

level.

Why is it significant? St. Dominic's is significant for aesthetic and architectural reasons as a broadly Gothic Revival church with a dominant and highly inventive tower, combining robust and sculpturally expressive forms and details within a traditional nineteenth-century Gothic Revival idiom to create one of the most distinctive examples in Victoria. The tower is also notable as perhaps the last full-blown example of a new Gothic Revival design, at a time when modernism was making a mark in ecclesiastical architecture, but understandable as the completion of an earlier Gothic Revival design.

It is of also interest for the input by two architects, W P Conolly and T G Payne, who practised separately and together in other notable Catholic Church commissions in Melbourne.

St Dominic's is also a local landmark on the Riversdale Road Hill.

St. Dominic's is of historical importance as the first location of the Dominican Order in Victoria. With Sienna College opposite and the Priory adjacent, the three buildings form an ecclesiastical precinct associated with the order. It is also a rare example of a Catholic parish in Melbourne that is run by a religious order.

Classified: 28/04/2008

Hermes Number 71921

Property Number

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/>