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# CHURCH OF CHRIST



CHURCH OF CHRIST SOHE  
2008



1 john knox free presbyterian  
church swanston street  
melbourne front elevation



john knox free presbyterian  
church swanston street detail  
of turret



john knox free presbyterian  
church swanston street  
melbourne aerial view



john knox free presbyterian  
church swanston street  
melbourne front view

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## Location

327-333 SWANSTON STREET AND 178-190 LITTLE LONSDALE STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0455

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO752

## VHR Registration

August 8, 1979

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 30, 2008

#### What is significant?

Designed by Charles Webb, this church was built in 1863 for the Free Presbyterian Church of Australia. Known as the John Knox Presbyterian Church, it replaced an earlier church of the same name which was designed by Charles Laing and opened in 1848 for the newly formed branch of the Presbyterian Church.

In the 1840s there was a major split in the Victorian Presbyterian Church, following a division in the Church of Scotland in 1843, and a faction of Presbyterians formed the Free Presbyterian Church of Australia Felix. From 1846-47 about seventy members of this new church worshipped in temporary accommodation until the construction of the John Knox Church, the predecessor of this building, in 1848. The Reverend James Forbes became the first minister of this church, after his resignation from the established church due to his support of the Free Church. Arriving in the colony in 1839, only three years after the town's foundation, Forbes was minister to the Scots Church congregation until his resignation.

Despite a reunification of most of the Presbyterian factions in 1859, some of the Free Presbyterians continued worshipping separately, including this congregation. In 1861 the church building was felt to be unsafe and in February 1863 the foundation stone of a new church was laid. At this time the church land was subdivided into three allotments, two of which were sold that same year.

In 1879 the John Knox congregation was dissolved and Webb's church was bought by the Church of Christ in 1881.

The form of Charles Webb's rendered brick church, with slate roof, is typical of the Gothic Revival in Victoria. Early English in style, buttresses divide the nave of the church into six bays, each containing a simple lancet window. Most of the decoration of the elaborate front facade is concentrated on the central section, which incorporates a traceried window above an entrance of receding orders, flanking octagonal turrets and a pierced parapet.

#### How is it significant?

The Church of Christ, Swanston Street is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

#### Why is it significant?

The Church of Christ, Swanston Street is of architectural significance as one of the earlier works of the important Victorian architect Charles Webb, who was responsible for a number of significant works including the Royal Arcade (1869, VHR H0023), the South Melbourne Town Hall (1880, VHR H0217) and the Windsor Hotel (1883, VHR H0764). It is also of importance for its facade which is amongst the most elaborate stuccoed Gothic facades in Victoria.

The Church of Christ, Swanston Street is of historical significance for its associations with the early history of the Presbyterian Church in Victoria, in particular the Reverend James Forbes, the first moderator of the presbytery of Melbourne in 1844 and leader in the constitution of the Free Church of Australia Felix in 1847.

[Online Data Upgrade Project 2008]

### 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](#).

## Specific Exemptions:

**General Conditions: 1.** 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. **General Conditions: 2.** 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. **Note:** All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.

**General Conditions: 3.** If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. **Note:** A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.

**General Conditions: 4.** Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. **General Conditions: 5.** Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. **Minor Works :** **Note:** Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Construction dates        1863,  
Architect/Designer        Webb, Charles,  
Heritage Act Categories    Registered place,

Other Names                JOHN KNOX FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
Hermes Number            820  
Property Number

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## History

Designed by Charles Webb, this church was built in 1863 for the Free Presbyterian Church of Australia. Known as the John Knox Presbyterian Church, it replaced an earlier church of the same name which was designed by Charles Laing and opened in 1848 for the newly formed branch of the Presbyterian Church.

In the 1840s there was a major split in the Victorian Presbyterian Church, following a division in the Church of Scotland in 1843, and a faction of Presbyterians formed the Free Presbyterian Church of Australia Felix. From 1846-47 about seventy members of this new church worshipped in temporary accommodation until the construction of the John Knox Church, the predecessor of this building, in 1848. The Reverend James Forbes became the first minister of this church, after his resignation from the established church due to his support of the Free Church. Arriving in the colony in 1839, only three years after the town's foundation, Forbes was minister to the Scots Church congregation until his resignation.

Despite a reunification of most of the Presbyterian factions in 1859, some of the Free Presbyterians continued worshipping separately, including this congregation. In 1861 the church building was felt to be unsafe and in February 1863 the foundation stone of a new church was laid. At this time the church land was subdivided into three allotments, two of which were sold that same year.

In 1879 the John Knox congregation was dissolved and Webb's church was bought by the Church of Christ in 1881.

### **The draft statement of significance and the above history were produced as part of an Online Data Upgrade Project 2008. Sources were as follows:**

- M. Lewis [ed]. *Victorian Churches. Their origins, their stories and their architecture*. Melbourne 1991  
A. Macdonald. *One Hundred Years of Presbyterianism in Victoria*. Melbourne 1937  
J. M. Freeland. *Melbourne Churches 1836-1851*. Melbourne 1963  
J. Alex Allan. 'The History of the John Knox Glebe in Swanston St', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol 20, 1943-4  
E. L. French, 'Forbes, James (1813-1851)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 1, 1966, pp 399-400

### Contextual History:History of Place:

This church replaced the earlier John Knox Church built on Allotment 10, Section 28 in 1847 to a design by Charles Laing. The existing building became necessary when the original church, located on a north-south axis and setback from both Swanston Street and Little Lonsdale Street began to crumble and fall into disrepair.

Peter Cunningham of Fitzroy won the contract for construction of the new John Knox Church at a price of 4,000 pounds.

In 1879 the John Knox congregation was dissolved and the site and church building purchased by the disciples of Christ.

The genesis of the Swanston Street Church of Christ lay in 1853 when a group of four men met in a house in Queens Street, later transferring to a tent in Chapel Street, Prahran, and finally forming the Prahran Church of Christ. In 1854 a few of the Prahran group commenced a meeting in the Mechanics' Institute, Collins Street (the present site of the Athenaeum Library). They next moved to the Temperance Hall, Russell Street and then in 1865, together with the congregation that had been meeting in Barkly Street, Carlton, they erected a church in Lygon Street. Some 60 of the Temperance Hall congregation decided to stay in the City and commenced meetings in 1865 in the Manchester Unity Hall which was next door to the John Knox Church. In 1881 the Swanston Street congregation became tenants of the by-then dissolved John Knox Church and bought the building in 1883.

The building is largely intact, except for the bell which is now at the Anglican Church in Nar-nar-goon, and the cast iron palisade and lamp standards to Swanston Street.

## **Plaque Citation**

Built as the John Knox Free Presbyterian Church in 1863, this Gothic Revival church was designed by Charles Webb. It replaced Melbourne's first church for the newly formed Free Presbyterian Church, built on the site in 1848.

## **Extent of Registration**

Historic Building No. 455 The Former John Knox Church (Presently known as The Church of Christ), 327 Swanston Street, Melbourne (extending from the eastern wall boundary of the Church Hall to the Swanston Street boundary of the property and to the extent of the width of the block).

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. 67 8 August, 1979 p.2499]

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*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/>*