



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

## 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE \*

*St. Joseph's Convent* has a simple and well proportioned form in the Victorian Georgian style. The timber detailing of the enclosing verandah and highlighted skyline features of the parapets contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the place. (Criterion 1.1)

Set in its simply landscaped site and surrounded by an ample grassed area, in one of the principal streets of Albany, the prominent, two-storey form of *St. Joseph's Convent* has a landmark quality in the town. (Criterion 1.3)

*St. Joseph's Convent* makes an important aesthetic contribution to the precinct and cultural environment of Roman Catholic church buildings in Albany. (Criterion 1.4)

### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*St. Joseph's Convent* is a product of the expansion of the Catholic School system in Western Australia and is illustrative of the State Government's support of education in the latter decades of the 19th century. (Criterion 2.2)

*St. Joseph's Convent* is closely associated with the Catholic Church and the religious teaching order of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. (Criterion 2.3)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

*St. Joseph's Convent* is highly valued by the Albany community for its religious and educational associations. (Criterion 4.1)

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

*St. Joseph's Convent* contributes to the community's sense of place as a substantial building in its own right, as well as being part of the Catholic Church precinct. (Criterion 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12. 1. RARITY**

Albany was a centre for the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. The large scale of *St. Joseph's Convent* and the association with other buildings of the Catholic Church precinct demonstrates the degree of their religious and educational influence in the local and state communities at the end of the 19th century. (Criterion 5.1)

### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*St. Joseph's Convent* is representative of the large buildings constructed by the Catholic Church to accommodate the religious orders at the end of the last century. (Criterion 6.1)

### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*St. Joseph's Convent* is in very good condition. A programme of restoration was funded by a National Estate programme in 1981. The building has recently been refurbished to provide suitable accommodation for a lessee and it is expected that the income derived will assist in maintaining the place.

### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

*St. Joseph's Convent* has low integrity having ceased operation as a convent in 1967 when a new school and convent was opened. The subsequent use of the place as a community centre for the parish maintained an association with the Sisters and the Roman Catholic Church. This has been further reduced by the occupation of a large portion of the building by a secular organisation. Religious motifs, interpretative plaques and precinctual qualities assist in maintaining evidence of the original function.

### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

Additions to *St. Joseph's Convent* in 1898 substantially enlarged and altered the form of the original structure. The fabric of the place was badly damaged by Cyclone Alby in 1978 although the subsequent restoration programme paid respect to the original detailing and the building is highly recognisable, externally, as the form dating from the turn of the century. Some internal alterations to room volumes and finishes have reduced the authenticity of the fabric but the overall *St. Joseph's Convent* has high authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Graduate Architect.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*St Joseph's Convent* is a two-storey building constructed in Victorian Georgian style in 1881, for the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition.<sup>1</sup> The place was extended c.1898.<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic Church did not have an official presence in Western Australia until 1843, when Dr John Brady arrived from NSW. The Archdiocese of Perth was established in 1846, with Dr Brady as Bishop.<sup>3</sup> Among the missionaries that he brought out from Europe that year were nuns of the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters established the first Catholic primary school in Western Australia, offering free education for the daughters of European settlers. The school was an immediate success and was soon followed by a secondary school for girls.<sup>4</sup> Other Catholic primary schools were opened, and run by lay teachers. Public funds were provided for both Catholic and government primary schools and only the secondary schools charged fees. The Catholic schools were well patronised by Protestant families.

In 1855, Coadjutor Bishop Serra visited Europe and returned with four sisters of the French order of St Joseph of the Apparition who took over the primary school in Fremantle and established another secondary school for girls in the port town. The following year, however, Governor Kennedy, a Protestant Irishman, put in place an education system where the government would only provide funds for its own primary schools. This was a direct attempt to break the Catholic school system, but people were prepared to pay tuition fees for their children to attend a Catholic school, and to support fund-raising activities, especially for building projects. Money was also provided from European sources 'to support the missionary activities of the Church in the Swan River Settlement,' and the number of Catholics in the colony was growing, most of them Irish, either convicts, or free immigrants fleeing hard times in Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

In 1863, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition moved into a new convent in Adelaide Terrace, Fremantle, and by 1868, had added school buildings to house an infant school, primary school, and day-and-boarding school for young ladies.

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<sup>1</sup> Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. *A pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present* Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1994, pp. 42-45; Roman Catholic Church Diocese of Bunbury Submission file, HCWA file 0001.

<sup>2</sup> Roman Catholic Church Diocese of Bunbury Submission file, op cit; Photograph, c. 1890, Archives of St Joseph's Church, Albany 1853-1920, Microfilm 2747A. (See supporting material in HCWA File 0001)

<sup>3</sup> *Centenary of the Catholic Church in Western Australia, 1846-1946*, a celebratory history prepared by the Church, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Neal, W. D. (ed) *Education in Western Australia*, UWA Press, 1979, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p. 128 & 131.

In 1871, Governor Weld introduced the Elementary Education Act which made attendance at school compulsory and gave denominational schools a share of public funds, specifically, 50% of the amount granted, per capita, to public schools. These funds ceased with the introduction of the Assisted Schools Abolition Act 1895, but in the intervening years the religious orders had financial certainty and were able to greatly expand the Catholic school system in Western Australia. Other factors which contributed to this expansion were the general growth in population and wealth of the State, widespread community recognition of the quality of Catholic schools, and the arrival of other religious orders to take on teaching work.<sup>6</sup>

In Albany, Town Lot 331 had been granted to the Catholic Church in May 1855.<sup>7</sup> The Church also acquired Lots 24, 63 and 64, giving them a land holding centred around Aberdeen Street.<sup>8</sup> The first Catholic church was built in 1855, on the western side of Aberdeen Street. It was constructed of stone and rubble and dedicated to Mary Star of the Sea.<sup>9</sup>

In April 1878, Mother Teresa and two Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition, and a secular teacher, arrived in Albany.<sup>10</sup> Lay teachers assumed responsibility for the primary school which had been established in 1869, and established a secondary school in rented premises. Their first building project was a two-storey primary school, situated beside the old church. That same year, a new church was opened and consecrated the Church of St Joseph of the Apparition. It was sited on Lot 24, on the eastern side of Aberdeen Street.

The construction of *St Joseph's Convent* followed. The place was sited over the boundary of Lot 24 and Lot 331, beside St Joseph's Church. The Sisters moved into *St Joseph's Convent* on 21 June 1881.<sup>11</sup> *St Joseph's Convent* was the first secondary school established in a country area in Western Australia. It was known as St Joseph's School for Young Ladies, and offered a curriculum for boarding and day students which emphasised 'higher learning' and such subjects as foreign languages, music, art, art of speech and needlework.<sup>12</sup> *St Joseph's Convent* opened with 90 pupils. Two of the four sisters who had arrived from France in 1855, were among the five strong Community in Albany. They were Reverend Mother Julie Cabagnol, Superioress until her death in 1895, and Sister Zoe de Chamouin.<sup>13</sup>

Albany was a centre of work for the Sisters of St Joseph. In the ensuing years, they expanded the primary school, and for three years conducted a boy's primary and secondary school until the Christian Brothers arrived to take it over in 1899. The building which housed this school was sited on the

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, pp. 132-147.

<sup>7</sup> Deed of Memorial Book 17, No. 577, Crown Grant 1401, 12 May 1855.

<sup>8</sup> Lands & Survey Description Book, 608A, 11 October 1854.

<sup>9</sup> Speech by Bishop Goody, Bishop of Bunbury, at Albany's Catholic centenary, Nov. 1961; 'Diamond Jubilee of St Joseph's Convent, Albany,' *The Record*, Saturday 16 April 1938, p. 1. (See supporting material)

<sup>10</sup> 'Diamond Jubilee of St Joseph's Convent, Albany,' *op cit*.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*; Neal, W. D. *op cit*, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> 'Diamond Jubilee of St Joseph's Convent, Albany,' *op cit*; Neal, W. D. *op cit*, p. 128. **Note:** The spelling of these names differs between *The Record* report and Neal. I have taken the spelling from Neal.

northern end of Town Lot 331, together with a house which the Brothers occupied. The Sisters also spread their activities to Northam and Mt Barker.<sup>14</sup>

In 1898, as part of this expansion, the Sisters extended *St Joseph's Convent*, adding a wing at each end of the building, with a verandah around three sides.<sup>15</sup> Later, a freestanding section was added behind the place to accommodate growing class sizes. Two ground floor rooms of *St Joseph's Convent* continued to be used for Year 11 and 12 classes while the Sisters occupied the rest of the place. The lower secondary classes were taught in the freestanding extension. Extra facilities, such as a large hall and a tuckshop, were provided at the primary school on the other side of Aberdeen Street. The primary school buildings are no longer extant.<sup>16</sup>

In 1956, Town Lot 331 and Town Lot 24 were subdivided, creating four lots, 26, 27, 28 and 29. *St Joseph's Church* was sited on Lot 29, and *St Joseph's Convent* on Lot 28.<sup>17</sup> Lots 26 and 27 were the site of the Christian Brother's house and boy's school. This subdivision preceded the opening of a new convent and school in Martin Road, in 1967. This school, now known as *St Joseph's College*, is co-educational and the old Christian Brother's school has been incorporated into units for the elderly.<sup>18</sup>

*St Joseph's Convent* became a general purpose centre for the Parish. The place provided a community room for parishioners, a parish office and an office for the Sisters. Other rooms were hired out at nominal rates to low income/non-profit groups as a meeting place. Occasionally, one of the larger rooms was made available for a wake.<sup>19</sup> *St Joseph's Convent* was badly damaged by cyclone Alby in 1978, and architects Hobbs, Smith and Holmes were involved in the restoration of the place.<sup>20</sup>

Since January 1998, the upper floor and half of the ground floor of *St Joseph's Convent* has been leased by Integrated Tree Cropping, a local tree farming company. Their lease is for three years with the option of another three. *St Joseph's* parish hopes that this lease will provide the necessary funds for maintenance of the place. The parish office occupies the remaining half of the ground floor.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Neal, W. D. op cit, p. 147; Telephone conversation by Irene Ham-Sauman with Regina Barnett at *St Joseph's* parish office, Memo, HCWA File 0001.

<sup>15</sup> Neal, W. D. op cit, p. 147; Roman Catholic Church Diocese of Bunbury Submission file, op cit; Photograph, c. 1890, op cit, & photographs after 1900.

<sup>16</sup> Telephone conversation with Regina Barnett, op cit.

<sup>17</sup> DOLA Certificate of Title Vol. 1288 Fol. 59 & Diagram 21042, 22 February 1956, HCWA File 0001.

<sup>18</sup> Telephone conversation with Regina Barnett, op cit.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Roman Catholic Church Diocese of Bunbury Submission file, op cit; Hobbs, Smith & Holmes, 'Restoration of Old Convent Building' plans, February 1980, HCWA File 0001.

<sup>21</sup> Telephone conversation with Regina Barnett, op cit; 'ITC expands its operations' *Albany Advertiser*, 10 February 1998, p. 22.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*St. Joseph's Convent* is a two-storey building constructed in the Victorian Georgian style.<sup>22</sup> The convent is adjacent to the Roman Catholic Church with an unenclosed grassed area separating the two buildings. The convent is set back from Aberdeen Street and is dominant in the streetscape by virtue of its mass and relative isolation from other buildings.

The two-storey rendered brick building has a rectangular form extending in a north/south orientation and is constructed on a random rubble stone base. The front facade is symmetrical and composed of a central section dating from the earliest period of construction in 1881, with a wing at either end, added towards the end of the 19th century. These wings project marginally from the line of the original building and are further defined by a differentiation in roof form. The central pitched section of the corrugated iron roof is terminated at the northern and southern ends by the prominent gable parapets which have a crucifix at each apex. A verandah and a covered upper balcony, distinct from the main roof, encircle three sides of the building. The verandahs are timber decked at both ground and first floor levels. A single storey extension is located on the north side of the building, at the end of the rear verandah which runs along the east facade. A lean-to roof shelters the rear verandah which faces onto the bituminised parking area at the east of the site. The east facing gable of the southern wing has a half timbered effect.

The first floor balcony is supported by timber posts with ornamental brackets of different designs at each level. The ground floor brackets incorporate a trefoil design which is most obvious at the more closely spaced central pair of posts. The spacing of the supporting posts is uneven although symmetrical. Similarly, the timber balusters of the balcony balustrade respond to this irregular rhythm.

The linette feature windows in the upper floor of the chapel, and west facing gable ends have stucco mouldings. The remaining window and door openings have low arch openings. Window construction, with the exception of the feature windows in the chapel and gables, comprises single pane sashes. Doors are generally constructed with four panels and include some glazing in the upper panels. Two course shaped brick lintels over the openings are obvious in the northern elevation, where the external wall has been painted instead of rendered. The location of vents at the mid-level of the wall also differentiate this portion of the building. The remaining elevations at ground floor level have vents located above the window and door openings. These distinctive features are indicative of a different era of construction or renovation which has not been confirmed through documentary evidence.

The southernmost portion of the building at ground floor is occupied by the church for office, library and meeting room functions. Since early 1998, the rest of the building has provided leased office accommodation, hence there are two entries to the building. The formal approach, from Aberdeen Street, is via a gently ramped path and set of stairs to the central door in the west

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<sup>22</sup> Apperly, R. Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989, pp. 42-45.

elevation. A more modest entry to the church office is located in the southern elevation.

The internal layout is similar for both levels and features large rectangular rooms at the north and south ends of the building. The four smaller spaces in the original part of the construction are divided by a central hall running across the short width of the building. There have been some alterations to the openings in these rooms changing the overall volumes. Kitchen and sanitary utilities are located along the north elevation at ground floor, with the area immediately above at first floor, not currently utilised.

Internal finishes comprise timber floors, some of which have been carpeted, and deep moulded skirtings. Walls have been plastered and painted and have dado and picture rail mouldings. A variety of ceiling finishes are apparent. Ceilings are predominantly boarded with timber, although a pressed metal ceiling is obvious in the northern ground floor meeting room and a ripple iron ceiling, raking towards the long sides of the room, is located in the room immediately above. There are some plaster board and timber ceilings in the rooms of the upper back verandah. Some fireplaces with timber and brick surrounds and inbuilt furniture are still in evidence.

The chapel features exposed timber roof trusses, a timber board ceiling and semi-circular stained glass windows accentuated with arched mouldings. The timber floor is carpeted. The window shapes and timber trusses are reflected in the northern meeting room of the first floor, but the plaster mouldings and stained glass have been excluded in this area.

The original form and volume of the four room convent building have been substantially changed and increased. Documentary evidence records considerable damage to the place during Cyclone Alby in 1978. The subsequent programme of restoration involved the replacement of the damaged balcony structure. Instructions on architect's drawings from this period indicate that the new material was to match the existing although the current balustrade differs from the lattice apparent on early photographs of the original building. Structures shown annexed to the building to the east were not scheduled for demolition in the first stage of the restoration programme but are no longer extant. Since then, there have been a number of changes to the internal layout of the place. This has principally involved the relocation of the main staircase and changes to room openings. Fireplaces in the southern most rooms of the original structure have been removed at ground level although the flues are still evident above the picture rail and at the upper floor.

The building is in good condition and internal finishes have recently been upgraded by the new tenants who were also responsible for revealing the feature windows in the gable ends which had been obscured by panelling.

### **13. 3 REFERENCES**

No key references.

### **13. 4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

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