



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 *

By virtue of its pleasing proportions and fine masonry, the 1873 classroom is a fine example of the Victorian Tudor style. The South Street elevation of the Victorian Georgian residential convent, with its Flemish bond brickwork and long verandah, has aesthetic value. The prominent Victorian Free Gothic chapel, by virtue of its steeply pitched gabled roof and pointed arched openings, also has aesthetic value. (Criterion 1.1)

Together with the church, presbytery and parish hall opposite, *Fmr Convent of Mercy and School* forms a precinct of buildings associated with the Catholic Church. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School represents part of the Roman Catholic Church historic precinct that was built on South Street from 1859. It is important for its association with the establishment of the Sisters of Mercy order in York as they played a significant role in the spiritual, educational, and social life of the York Roman Catholic community. (Criterion 2.2.)

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School is closely associated with the evolution of Catholic education in Western Australia and with Governor Weld's dual system of education (1871-1895). (Criterion 2.2)

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School has a close association with the order of the Sisters of Mercy, who established the convent and the school, as well as a more indirect association with Father Patrick Gibney, who was the first priest stationed at this parish and who helped to build most of the buildings in the Catholic precinct. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

* 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.

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School is highly valued by the Roman Catholic community and The York Society for its religious and educational associations, which were a dominant force in the community for over a century. (Criterion 4.1)

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School is valued by the local community for its present functions of housing the municipal archives and the local radio station. (Criterion 4.1)

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School contributes to the Roman Catholic community's sense of place, as it is an important and memorable part of the historic Catholic precinct. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School is no longer used as a convent. The place demonstrates a distinctive way of life no longer practised in York and is a diminishing movement across Australia. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School, located opposite St Patrick's Church and the presbytery, is characteristic of its class, that of a convent. (Criterion 6.1)

The place is representative of convents and schools built by the Catholic Church throughout Western Australian the early 1870s following the introduction of the *Elementary Education Act 1871*. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School is in a fair condition. The place has been reasonably well maintained, although the extensions to the rear of the residential convent and the addition of the Railway Street wing have detracted from the appearance of the place. The grounds of *Fmr Convent of Mercy and School* are unkempt and the place will need to undergo a maintenance programme if the fabric is to be preserved. The mortar to the brickwork at the rear of the radio station, for example, is fretting and needs attention.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The original intention of the place, that of a home for a religious order of nuns and an associated school, is no longer intact. The prominent corner chapel, now an archive room, and the 1873 classroom, now vacant, are externally largely unaltered, and so it could be argued that the perceived integrity of the place is somewhat intact. The integrity of *Fmr Convent of Mercy and School* is moderate.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School has moderate to low authenticity. Over the years, the fabric of the various buildings has been altered or replaced with modern materials. The 1873 wing of the school has the highest authenticity, as the alterations to the fabric are of a relatively minor nature.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Natasha Georgiou, History Consultant. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Loreck, Architect. Additional research has been compiled by HCWA staff.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School comprises a complex of buildings constructed for the Catholic Church c. 1872. The convent is a Victorian Georgian style, brick single-storey building. The school building is single storey, stone and brick in the Victorian Tudor style. The chapel and additions to the school building were completed prior to 1901.

Ensign Robert Dale, of the 63rd Regiment, first explored the Avon Valley in July 1830. His positive report led to further exploring and surveying, including that of Governor Stirling in October 1830.¹ James Clarkson a member of Stirling's exploratory party decided to call the area around Mt. Bakewell 'Yorkshire' as it reminded him of his own county in England.² On 12 November 1830, the district was declared open for settlement and thirteen days later notice given that 'a town to be called York will be laid out in a situation near Mount Bakewell.'³

There was an immediate rush to select land on either side of the Avon River.⁴ On 16 September 1831, the first settlers reached the valley and others soon followed.⁵ The area initially developed as an agricultural district, but by 1836 the nucleus of a township was in place, consisting of army barracks and a store with outbuildings, five houses and about 50 acres of cleared land.⁶ York was a long straggling village on the banks of the Avon River, with Blandstown at one end and J.H. Monger's hotel and store at the other.⁷

Prior to the founding of the Catholic Church in Western Australia in the early 1840s, only a small number of private and Wesleyan schools had been established in the colony. The Catholic settlers, who were a minority, were strongly aware of the neglect of their spiritual welfare. The desire for Catholic education was largely concerned with religious freedom and civic equality, as

¹ Deacon, J. *A Survey of the Historical Development of the Avon Valley with Particular Reference to York, Western Australia, During the Years 1830-1850* UWA, Nedlands, 1948, pp. 10-15.

² *ibid.*, p.15.

³ Survey Dept. Letter Books SI, p.93.

⁴ The first grants were taken up by Byrne, Dale, Brockman, the Clarkson and Hardy brothers, Reveley, Barrett-Lennard, and Wittenoom. Deacon, J., *op. cit.*, p.18.

⁵ *York Heritage Trail* HCWA, 1988, p.1.

⁶ Bunbury, H.W. *Early Days in Western Australia* Oxford University Press, London, 1930, p.28.

⁷ Erickson, R. *Old Toodyay and Newcastle* Toodyay Shire Council, Toodyay, 1974, p.78. On 2 December 1842, Revert Henry Bland sold Avon Locations X and Y to John Henry Monger senior for £110, who in turn bequeathed the land to his son, John Henry Monger, junior. Renowned for his community spirit and generosity, John junior gave the Deed of Grant to the founding York Roman Catholic Church in 1871. This Deed became an Indenture of Conveyance on 20 October 1873 and the land was transferred to Bishop Martin Griver for £15.

the Government appeared to be only concerned with providing Anglican education.⁸

The Catholic Church was established in Western Australia with the arrival of Father John Brady and two clergymen from Sydney in December 1843.⁹ Brady promptly devoted himself to the cause of education and three years later, at his invitation, the Sisters of Mercy arrived from Ireland and soon established the first free Catholic schools in East Perth.¹⁰ By 1848, they had also established a convent and school in Fremantle and, in 1855, opened a school in Guildford.¹¹ From 1849 to 1856, the Government made a contribution towards these schools in the form of small grants and contributions to the school masters' salaries.¹² In 1849, the Sisters of Mercy established a fee paying school for young ladies in Perth to assist in providing funds for the Church's free schools.¹³ Despite the lack of funding, country primary schools were set up in Dardanup (1853) and York and Toodyay (1856). These were established by lay teachers, under the supervision of the local priest, and catered to mixed classes.¹⁴

In 1856, Governor Kennedy introduced a system of education that openly discriminated against Catholics - they would be admitted to schools equally with Protestants only on the condition that the parents accept the curriculum and would stifle their children's Catholic faith.¹⁵ The Catholic community unsuccessfully agitated for equal consideration. Father Gibney, Martin Griver and Bishop Salvado were amongst the advocates for educational equality.¹⁶

In 1870, the first parliamentary election in Western Australia was contested on the question of education. Despite the support of Governor Weld, 'a Catholic of deep culture', efforts for partial funding for Catholic education failed.¹⁷ However, in July 1871 Governor Weld successfully introduced a Bill to the Legislative Assembly 'to provide for Public Elementary Education and to encourage voluntary efforts in support for schools'. Provision was made for two types of schools, Government and Government-assisted. Both were to be inspected and given grants for the secular instruction they provided.¹⁸

⁸ Bourke, D. F., *The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia 1829-1979*, Archdiocese of Perth, 1979, p. 84.

⁹ Mossenson, D., *State Education in Western Australia 1829-1960*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1960, p. 8.

¹⁰ Bourke, op. cit., pp. 24-5. The Institution of the Sisters of Mercy was founded in Ireland by Catherine McAuley in 1831 with the aim of fighting poverty in the slums and promoting education, particularly for girls.

¹¹ The Sisters of Mercy became the largest teaching order in Australia.

¹² Bourke, op. cit., p. 30.

¹³ Mossenson, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁴ Tannock, P. D., 'Catholic Education in Western Australia 1829-1879' in W. D. Neal (ed), *Education in Western Australia*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 130. Churches were also built in many areas during this time.

¹⁵ Bourke, op. cit., p. 85

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 87. The funding was not equitable. No money was provided to assisted schools for building purposes and they received half the amount of money, per child, per year, than Government schools.

The Catholic Church was able to take advantage of this defacto funding arrangement, and soon opened schools in several districts.¹⁹ The Sisters of Mercy retained their role as the main force in education and established convents and schools at York (1871), Guildford (1881), Bunbury and Geraldton (1883) and Toodyay (1889). By 1875, several schools had also been established in country areas by lay teachers.²⁰ The schools were open to all, regardless of religion and social standing. Virtually all the assisted schools established under Weld's Elementary Education Act were Catholic. State aid to the assisted schools was revoked in 1895, primarily due to the close association between assisted schools and the Catholic Church.²¹

The Sisters of Mercy arrived in York on 30 April 1872 to establish a convent. There were three Sisters on the bullock dray that brought them to York, Evangelista O'Reilly, Camillus Reddin, and Vincent Brennan.²² The three sisters initially lived in a small tent in the field below the original school, which had been established by lay teachers in 1856. Father Gibney showed his generosity by retiring to a hut, giving up his newly erected three-roomed presbytery for the use of the Sisters. However, the presbytery was too small for sleeping quarters and the Sisters used several attached stables with mud floors as cells.²³ The Sisters named the newly formed convent St. Patrick's and school commenced in the Church until temporary buildings were constructed by lay brothers from New Norcia.²⁴

In 1873, the Sisters of Mercy replaced these temporary school buildings by erecting a new building that was attached to the convent.²⁵ Mrs. Henrietta Monger laid the foundation stone, as it was her husband who helped secure the grants of land on which the Catholic Church buildings stood. An article in the *WA Catholic Record* stated that 'a handsome and commodious school house has been erected on a site next to the Convent, as it is, York can boast of the best school accommodation to be found in any of our rural districts.'²⁶ It is recorded that the cost amounted to over £1,100, the greater portion of which was contributed by the Catholic parishioners in the form of money and labour gratuitously given whilst the building was going on. The Bishop at the time, Martin Griver, also made significant contributions to all the church buildings in York.²⁷ Soon after a new and elegant church was erected, with the foundation stone being laid on St. Patrick's Day, 1875.²⁸ It was designed by Joseph Nunan, architect of the new convent at Victoria Square and was

¹⁹ Mossenson, op. cit. , p. 59. There were 13 Catholic schools in Western Australia in 1872, by 1875 there were 17. In the 1880s, some of the smaller schools were abandoned, leaving 15 larger schools in the bigger towns.

²⁰ Tannock, op. cit., pp. 135, 138.

²¹ Mossenson, op. cit., pp. 60, 87.

²² McLay, A. *Women out of their Sphere. Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia* Vanguard Press, Northbridge, 1992, p.102.

²³ *ibid.* It seems that from this time on, the former presbytery was known as the Convent.

²⁴ *ibid.* The Catholic Church arrived in York in 1855 and in 1859, York's first Catholic Church, St Patrick's, was built.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *WA Catholic Record* 6 March 1875, p.6.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

described as 'a gem of pure Gothic architecture'.²⁹ The old church was then used by the sisters for a high school.

In 1876, it was proposed that a new presbytery be built as the present one was dilapidated, having been built as temporary accommodation over fifteen years previously. The new presbytery was completed in October but, in 1894, was dynamited by a disgruntled parishioner.³⁰ The foundation stone of the new St Joseph's Presbytery was laid in a private ceremony conducted by Sister M. Ursula Dunne.³¹

By 1901, major extensions to the school and convent at York, including a new Chapel and more rooms, had been completed. The total expenditure of these additions was £2,087. By the following year, all but £100 of this had been paid.³² It is believed that these additions were completed in 1890 but there is no mention of completion in the *WA Catholic Record*, which had regular correspondence from York. The convent extension was of sound well-burnt bricks on a stone foundation. It had twelve rooms and a hall, a back passage, and 100 feet of verandah eight feet wide. The school building of one classroom and two porches was built of granite. The two blocks of buildings were enclosed by a stone wall with a strong timber railing on the front wall. In 1902, an evaluation of the land and buildings put their total worth at £3,500.³³

When Archbishop Prendiville visited the *Fmr Convent of Mercy and School* in 1936, he was not at all impressed and recommended that a new convent be built, 'worthy of the Sisters who work so hard. The present building (with the exception of the Chapel) is not at all suitable' and he further described it as 'a slum'.³⁴ By 1952, at least £1,156 in donations was collected for a new south wing of cells to the historic building and the addition of two classrooms to the school.³⁵ At the end of 1971, the school closed through want of student numbers and staff.³⁶

On 14 July 1977, the Sisters of Mercy granted to the Shire of York and its assigns forever Avon Location X and Y, the land on which the *Fmr Convent of Mercy* is located.³⁷ The buildings were then leased by the Youth Hostel Association, who constructed a small manager's flat on the eastern end of the convent building in the 1980s. The Hostel remained there until 1992.³⁸ Due to structural problems in the shire offices the following year, the Share and Care offices and The Archives and Research Centre were moved from the Town Hall to the old convent. They shared the building with the State Emergency Services, and for a time, the public library was located in the former school building.

²⁹ *ibid*, 6 September 1877, p.6.

³⁰ *ibid*, 6 July, October 1876, p. 6; 6 May 1894, p. 5.

³¹ McLay, A., *op. cit.*, p.105.

³² *ibid*, p.196.

³³ *ibid*.

³⁴ *ibid*, p.198.

³⁵ *ibid*.

³⁶ *ibid*, p.197.

³⁷ Memorial 27/744, Deeds Register, BL.

³⁸ *Western Australian Country Telephone Directory, 1977-1992.*

In 1998, Fmr Convent of Mercy is largely unused. The school buildings is vacant and only the older part of the convent, which houses the Shire Archives, is being used. The York Telecentre and Radio 101.3 York FM are located in the extension at the rear of the convent building.³⁹

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Fmr Convent of Mercy and School consists of two main buildings; a former convent and a former school. The main frontages of the former current address are on South Street and Railway Street. South Street runs south-west to north-east and Railway Street runs mainly north/south. Opposite the convent on Railway Street is a small park with a war memorial and commemorative plaque. To the south of the park is the railway station. Opposite the convent on South Street is, west to east, the St Patrick's Parish Hall, the presbytery and St Patrick's Church.

The former school is situated on South Street, south-west of the junction of South Street and Howick Street, and opposite the church. North-east of the former school is a gravel carpark, which at the time of this assessment was being partially excavated in order to install soak wells. East of the carpark is an established park, extending between South and Joaquina Streets, bordered in places by mature large eucalypts.

At the rear or south-east of *Fmr Convent of Mercy and School* is an extensive level gravel and sand area that extends to Joaquina Street. Apart from occasional car parking, this land does not appear to be utilised. It is reasonable to assume that this area was once playing fields for the school. East of this is an area which appears to be in the process of being landscaped.

The earliest building extant in *Fmr Convent of Mercy and School* is the school wing facing South Street. It is built in a Victorian Tudor Style as indicated by the shallow inverted 'V' shaped window heads to the central window facing South Street, the steeply pitched roof and the use of pinnacles which crown the quoined ends of the parapeted gables. It is constructed of random stone laid so that coursing corresponds to the three course high steps in the brick quoins to openings and corners. The roof is corrugated iron and the floor is timber, presumably on timber joists and bearers. The floor appears to be quite sound so that it is likely that the bearers are supported by masonry piers rather than timber stumps.

Internally the building is one room, with carpet on the floor, plaster walls and a four metre high acoustic tiled ceiling in a 1200mm by 600mm exposed metal grid, installed presumably when the place was converted to a library.

A wing was constructed to the rear and at right angles to the 1873 classroom so that together they form an 'L' shape in plan. The wing appears to date from the 1950s judging by the utilitarian style, with its low pitched roof and the predominant use of steel framed windows. However, an attempt was made to match the original classroom through the use of matching brickwork, stone work and pitching heights. The rear wing appears to have been built in two stages, one classroom per stage, with the first classroom adjoining the 1873 wing. The first classroom has a segmented arch to the main door, and

³⁹ Conversation with Shirley Lutze, York Society member, 22 February 1998.

splayed reveals to two of the three openings. A slight offset in the external eastern wall between the two classrooms also suggests an interval before the construction of the second classroom.

The second classroom is similar to the first internally and externally. With the exception of the external door which has a horizontal head, the reveals are at right angles to the wall and the windows are all steel framed with heads about 3.3 metres high. Taken as a whole, however, the rear wing reads as one building, unified by the common verandah to the east.

The long axis of the original part of the residential convent both addresses and is aligned parallel to South Street, approximately in line with the 1873 wing of the school. The two buildings are spaced a few metres apart.

The residential part of the convent facing South Street is built in a Victorian Georgian Style, as demonstrated by its simple rectangular plan, windows with four panes per sliding sash, and original front verandah with a separate roof built at a lower pitch to the main roof. Internally, the floors are timber and the walls are plastered.

Externally, this building has brick walls laid in Flemish bond and a corrugated iron roof. On the South Street elevation the brick headers have, up to door and window head height, been painted black so as to form a contrasting pattern with the unpainted red stretchers. Originally, this building was probably one room wide with a verandah all around. There is no evidence of the three-roomed presbytery built in 1872. It is likely that the presbytery was demolished on completion of the residential convent. There is however, a small stone building to the west of the school, now used as a shed, which could be the remains of the original presbytery.

In the 1890s, the verandah that was to the south-west appears to have been removed and the chapel added to the convent building. The brick and iron chapel is built in a Victorian Free Gothic Style, as indicated by the steeply pitched parapeted gables to the main roof and pointed arched openings. The chapel has a porch facing South Street with gabled parapets at a low pitch, similar in profile to the head of the central window of the 1873 classroom. The width of the chapel, about five metres, matches the width of the residential convent.

In 1952, a residential wing was added to the convent addressing Railway Street. This wing is built in a utilitarian style with little embellishment apart from a timber cross on the crest of the south-west gable. The wing is built with red bricks in stretcher bond, casement windows and a tiled roof which is not in keeping with the remainder of the convent building. When the wing was added, extension and alterations also took place to the south-east of the original residential convent. These extended up to the eaves line of the south-east and east verandahs. The brickwork is identical to the 1952 brickwork. It appears that in order to maximise the ceiling height, the roof was raised as high as possible without going higher than the main roof.

In the 1980s, modifications to the east end of the original part of the residential convent took place, which consisted of the forming of a manager's flat for the Youth Hostel. The external brickwork of these modifications matches the unpointed brickwork to the side and rear walls of the original

residential convent reasonably well, unlike the brickwork of the 1950s, which is not as sympathetic.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

Provenance of the outbuildings that may be the original presbytery.