

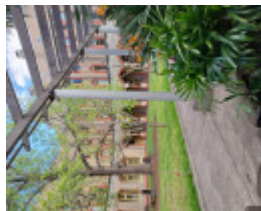
## ABBOTSFORD CONVENT



Abbotsford Convent (1902)  
from south, Photo: 2008



Abbotsford Convent courtyard  
jun1992



Abbotsford Convent courtyard  
Oct 2024



St Marys (1910-11) from  
south, Photo: 2008



Abbotsford Convent site  
viewed from the south, photo:  
nov 1981



St Marys southern entry Oct  
2024



Rosina (1909) Photo: Oct  
2024



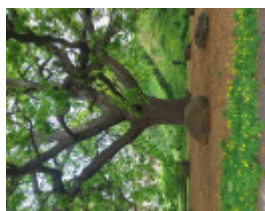
Providence (1887-88) Photo:  
Oct 2024



Courtyard of Sacred Heart  
complex looking north Oct  
2024



St Euphrasias (left) and  
Convent Chapel (right) Oct  
2024



Elm northeast of residence  
Oct 2024



Elm south of Sacred Heart  
Oct 2024



Convent Chapel from east  
Oct 2024



Convent Chapel from east  
Oct 2024



Convent Chapel from south  
Oct 2024



Convent Chapel roof detail  
Oct 2024



Convent Chapel view from  
south Oct 2024



Convent Chapel interior Oct  
2024



Convent Chapel from west  
Oct 2024



Convent Chapel interior Oct  
2024



Convent Chapel interior Oct  
2024



Kreitmeyer Residence Oct  
2024



Kreitmeyer Residence Oct  
2024



Residence Oct 2024



Residence Oct 2024

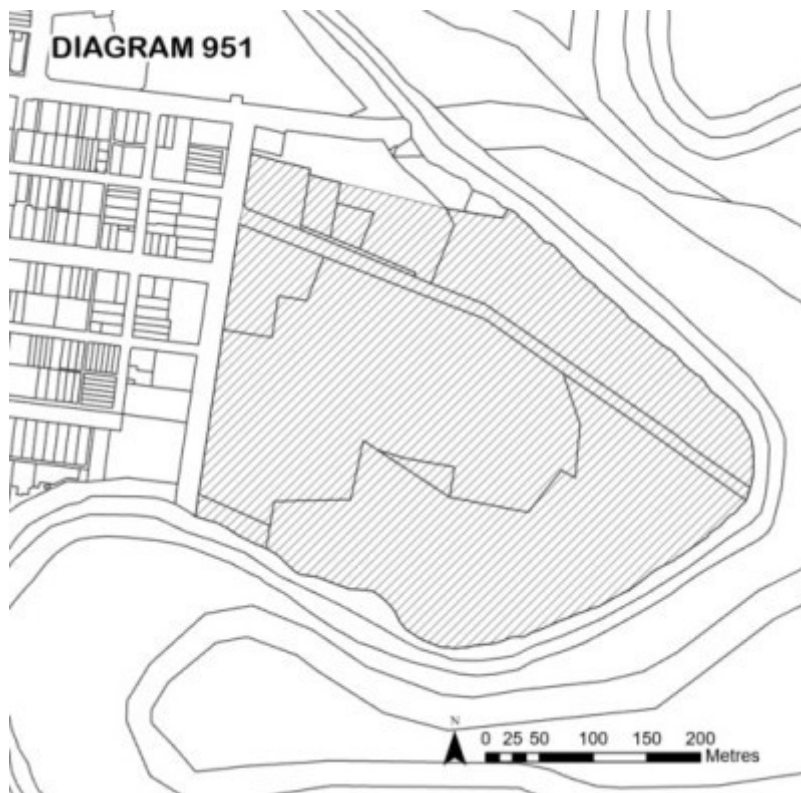


Diagram 951

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### Location

CLARKE STREET AND ST HELIERS STREET ABBOTSFORD, YARRA CITY

### Municipality

YARRA CITY

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0951

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO9

### VHR Registration

August 20, 1982

### Amendment to Registration

February 27, 2025

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 25, 2025

Abbotsford Convent is located on Wurundjeri Country.

## What is significant?

The Abbotsford Convent (former Convent of the Good Shepherd) is a large and architecturally distinctive example of a Catholic convent complex. The complex was constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in a rural setting on a bend of the Yarra River. It includes ecclesiastical, residential, educational and utilitarian buildings, designed by architects Thomas Kelly and later, William B Tappin, of the firm Reed Smart and Tappin.

The place reflects the lengthy occupation of the site by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and includes simple functional structures and notable architectural compositions including the Kreitmeyer House (c.1853) and another residence (c.1850s) which are the earliest structures on the site and predate its use by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; the Cemetery (1866); the Sacred Heart complex (Magdalen Asylum) consists of the two-storey brick Industrial School for neglected children (1867), the Sacred Heart building (1877), the North and South Laundries (1920-1926 and 1907 respectively), St Anne's (1905) which completed the enclosure of the Magdalen Asylum courtyard, and Rosina (1908), designed in the Baroque Revival style; the remains of the 1870s convent walls; the Convent Chapel (1872); St Euphrasia's Convent Day School (c.1878); Mercator (c1887) the main laundry building; Providence (c.1887) built as school accommodation; the Convent (c.1902); St Mary's Preservation Class (1910) also in the Baroque Revival style, and the Junior School (c.1935).

To the south of the convent is a picturesque garden with a central lawn and surrounded by shrubberies, a timber rotunda, curved paths and formal paths lined with elm and oak avenue plantings. The lower garden contains a former orchard area, and to the east is former grazing and farm land. The site retains remnant River Red Gums and vistas to the indigenous bushland of Yarra Bend Park and the Yarra River.

## How is it significant?

The Abbotsford Convent is of historical, archaeological, architectural, and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

### Criterion C

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

## Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects

## Criterion E

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

# Why is it significant?

Abbotsford Convent is historically significant as the only extant former monastic or convent farm surviving in a substantial manner within a city in Australia. It is the site of the largest self-sufficient convent and monastic building and farm complex in the state, with extensive vegetable gardens, orchards and grazing land. The large-scale agricultural operations were remarkable for a city location. The farm and the massive laundry buildings were major symbols of the convent and reflected the objectives of the Good Shepherd Order.

Abbotsford Convent is historically significant as the birthplace in Australia of the Good Shepherd Order, one of the most important religious orders in the Catholic Church in Victoria. The Convent provided refuge, care and 'reform' activities for thousands of women and girls through a variety of welfare, rehabilitation and protection programs during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was the Order's first convent in Australia and New Zealand, and was the Mother House and Novitiate for the Order in Australasia.

Abbotsford Convent is historically significant as a demonstration of changing approaches to the institutional care and education of disadvantaged women and children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Abbotsford Convent is historically significant for its role during the early years of church-based education after the 1872 *Education Act* ended state funding to Denominational schools, and the subsequent expansion of church-based education.

(Criterion A)

Abbotsford Convent is of archaeological significance for its potential to contain subsurface historical archaeological features, deposits and artefacts associated with the use and occupation of the convent and two of Melbourne's earliest villa estates, Abbotsford House and St Heliers, which occupied this site from the 1840s and the St Josephs Industrial School (1874)

(Criterion C)

Abbotsford Convent is architecturally significant as an outstanding example of a nineteenth century religious complex, with buildings constructed in various periods but in a consistent Gothic Revival style, reflecting the contemporary interest in Medievalism and strong influence by the French Mother House. These include the early buildings designed by Thomas Kelly, and those designed in the major building campaign of 1900-1911, mainly by William Tappin, with others by Reed, Smart & Tappin, one of Victoria's major architectural firms of that period. It is significant for the intact interiors, notably in the convent buildings, kitchens and laundries.

(Criterion D)

Abbotsford Convent is of aesthetic significance for the architectural cohesion of the complex, for the designed landscape elements and natural attributes, for the bushland vistas, and for its rural setting on the Yarra River, which has been retained despite the development of surrounding areas. It is a key visual landmark in the area, and notable for the views of the site from the Johnston Street Bridge, from the Kew side of the river, and from the Children's farm. Its collection of mature shrubs and trees of considerable age, including two outstanding English Oaks (*Quercus robur*), a fine Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) remnant River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), some rare plants including *Dombeya tiliacea*, and *Vitex lucens* contribute to the place.

(Criterion E)

## 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:

### University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre

*Former Junior School building (red brick ca. 1935-1942)*

1. All non-structural internal building works.
2. Painting of previously painted internal surfaces in any colour or finish.
3. Removal, maintenance, repair or replacement of later, light-weight partition walls including making good junctions with masonry walls.
4. Installation or removal of surface mounted, ceiling cavity and subfloor services and utilities, including:
  - internet services (wifi antenna and routers etc.)
  - television/display screens and associated audio visual fire detection and prevention systems video surveillance and alarm systems,
  - public address systems and associated speakers
  - telecommunications wiring and cabling,
  - associated subfloor cabling
5. Removal, maintenance, repair or regrading of external accessibility ramps.

#### *School outbuildings and other structures*

6. All internal works to sheds, structures and outbuildings within the Early Learning Centre grounds.
7. Internal and external repairs or recladding of sheds, structures and outbuildings within the Early Learning Centre grounds, including replacement of doors and windows.
8. Removal or demolition of sheds, structures and outbuildings within the Early Learning Centre grounds.

#### *Landscape/ outdoor areas*

9. Removal, replacement and installation and replacement of shade sail fabric and supporting structures.
10. Removal, replacement and installation of playground equipment and outdoor furniture.

11. Removal, replacement and installation of new ground surfacing treatments (for example, asphalt, safety matting) provided it is not within two metres of significant buildings.

#### *Gardening*

12. Planting, pruning and maintenance of trees and shrubs.
13. Removal of trees and shrubs other than the mature Elm trees located adjacent to the east boundary fence.
14. Installation, repair and replacement of irrigation systems

#### *Fencing*

15. Removal, maintenance, repair or replacement of fencing, gates and posts, in the same location, retaining a similar level of visual permeability and no higher than the existing.

#### *Driveway and carpark*

16. Ground level works to maintain, reconfigure or improve the carpark including the repair or resealing of the carpark surface; the repair, removal, installation or maintenance of kerbing, bollards, speed humps, wheel stops and boom gates.

#### **Abbotsford Convent Carpark (north side of St Heliers Street)**

17. Ground level works to maintain, reconfigure or improve the carpark including the repair or resealing of the carpark surface; the repair, removal, installation or maintenance of kerbing, bollards, speed humps, wheel stops and boom gates; the maintenance, removal or installation of plantings and landscaping; the repair, removal or installation of directional signage and line marking; and the repair, removal or installation of lighting.

#### **St Heliers Street (paved road maintained by Yarra City Council)**

18. The repair and resurfacing of footpaths and road surfaces and the installation, repair or removal of regulatory signs, warning signs, and street signs.
19. Bluestone kerbs, channels and crossovers must be retained, with any repairs undertaken on a like for like basis.
20. The removal, repair or installation of underground services, utilities and drains within the St Heliers Street road reservation provided that the surface is returned to its former appearance upon completion.

## **Theme**

### **8. Building community life**

Construction dates	1899,
Architect/Designer	Reed, Smart & Tappin,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered archaeological place,
Other Names	FORMER CONVENT OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, ST HELIERS,
Hermes Number	1
Property Number	

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## **History**

The site of the Abbotsford Convent was chosen by four Irish sisters from the Good Shepherd's mother house in Angers, France, who arrived in Melbourne in 1863. They established the Order on what had been two large



1840s villa estates, St Heliers and Abbotsford House. From the late 1860s the site accommodated the Magdalen Asylum, which was essentially a women's refuge, a reformatory for young offenders, and an industrial school complex for the care and training of children who were disadvantaged or neglected. At the end of the 1870s a Catholic day school was added.

More land was purchased in the 1880s and 1890s to include all of the land between Clarke Street and the Yarra River. This allowed for the construction of the large laundry buildings, which were to become the primary source of income for the convent. The institution provided accommodation for thousands of women and girls who were subject to a variety of welfare and court-based rehabilitation and protection programs. There was a massive expansion program in the early twentieth century, with the construction of a new Convent building, an adjacent contemplative garden, new buildings for classrooms, a refectory and dormitories. Most of these were designed by the architectural firm Reed Smart & Tappin.

The convent became one of the largest self-sufficient convent and farm complexes in Australia: at its peak it housed, fed and clothed a population of over a thousand, and hundreds more children attended the day schools. There were extensive vegetable gardens and orchards on the southern slopes, grazing land for milking cows and horses to the east, and large numbers of pigs and poultry were kept.

In 1975 the site was purchased by the Victorian Government as a higher education campus, with funding from the Federal Government. The proposed redevelopment of the site in the late 1990s led to a massive community-based heritage battle which resulted in 2004 in the transfer of the convent site south of St Heliers Street to the Abbotsford Convent Foundation for community use. The site is now divided into three parts: the north-west part of the site, including the Convent Chapel, which has been retained by the Order; the Collingwood Children's Farm, established in 1979 on the former farm land to the east; and the remainder of the former convent site, including the gardens, managed by the Abbotsford Convent Foundation.

## Selected bibliography

??Context GML. (2019). *Abbotsford Convent Conservation Management Plan Volumes 1 - 3*. Melbourne: Abbotsford Convent Foundation.

?Lewis, M. (1991). *Victorian Churches*. Melbourne: National Trust.

?Organ Historical Trust of Australia. (2024, 11 7). *Good Shepherd Chapel*. Retrieved from Organ Historical Trust of Australia: <https://www.ohtra.org.au/organs/organs/AbbotsfordGoodShepherdChapel.html>

?Catherine Kovesi, "The Abbotsford Convent and Archbishop Goold, Architecture and the Embodiment of Charism", Chapter XII in Jaynie Anderson, Max Vodola, Shane Carmody [eds] *The Architecture of Devotion, James Goold and his Legacies in Colonial Melbourne*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2021

## Extent of Registration

### Heritage Act 2017

#### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H0951

Category: Registered Place, Registered Archaeological Place

Place: Abbotsford Convent

Location: Clarke Street and St Heliers Street, Abbotsford

Municipality: Yarra City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 951 encompassing all of Crown Allotments 2026, 2030, 2031, 2844, 2845, 2810, 77F, 77E and 77J Parish of Jika Jika, all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 116127 and part of Crown Allotment



2330 Parish of Jika Jika and all of the road casement of St Heliers Street.

Dated 27 February 2025

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

*[Government Gazette G 9 27 January 2025 p305]*

*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/>*