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# Carmelite Monastery



Carmelite Monastery, 96  
Stevenson Street KEW

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## Location

96 Stevenson Street KEW, BOROONDARA CITY

## Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

## Level of significance

Incl in HO area indiv sig

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO286

## Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 16, 2021

What is Significant?

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne, 96 Stevenson Street, Kew, is significant. It was established on previously undeveloped land in Stevenson Street in the late 1920s. The land was part of the 'Stevenson Heights Estate' of 1927, subdivided from earlier large estates that were part of Crown Allotment 76. Significant buildings, designed in 1928 by architect William Patrick Conolly, include the Romanesque Revival Church, the Spanish Mission style

Cloister and cottage, and other built elements, including the perimeter wall and Spanish baroque gateway. The grounds are also significant, including the organisation of space into ornamental and productive gardens, the existing pathway layout, and mature trees in particular the row of *Cupressus sempervirens*, which was part of the original planting scheme, and other mature vegetation (including mature conifers, *Quercus palustris*, *Betula pendula*, *Ulmus* sp, *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Grevillea robusta*, *Cordyline australis*). The subdivision pattern reflected in the perimeter wall is also significant.

The later brick buildings, which were not extant in the 1930s, are not significant. Newly brick-paved surfaces, although not an unsympathetic introduction to the interwar garden, and the modern metal entrance gates, are not significant. The tennis court is not significant.

How is it significant?

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne at 96 Stevenson Street, Kew, is of local historic, aesthetic, and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

Historically, the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne as a whole, including its subdivision, Romanesque revival Church, Spanish Mission Cloister, cottage, gateway, perimeter wall, and the grounds are significant as a highly intact and well-maintained architect-designed monastic complex, in continuous use by the Carmelite nuns as a contemplative cloistered community since it opened in 1929. (Criterion A)

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne subdivision is significant for the evidence it provides of the early pattern of subdivision in this part of Kew in 1927 from larger estates with individual mansions. The Monastery was established on previously undeveloped land in Stevenson Street in the late 1920s, on cleared land in between the estates of 'Mount Royal' and 'Mooroolbeck'. The land was originally part of Crown Allotment 76, the original grant of John Bakewell, which was subdivided into irregular shaped parcels of land. The irregular east boundary of the Carmelite Monastery and the boundary wall remain as tangible evidence of this irregularity in the earlier subdivision. (Criterion A)

The Monastery provides evidence of the sustained and influential presence of religious orders in Boroondara from the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, particularly evident in Kew, whose histories became entwined with the histories of local schools, hospitals and welfare institutions founded and maintained by them. Unlike some religious orders, that were active and influential in the community, however, the Carmelites are distinguished as an enclosed religious order. However, the inclusion in the monastery of a public Oratory meant the community was welcomed to their Masses. The grounds and the spatial arrangement of the site into cloistered and publicly accessible spaces provide important evidence of the cloistered lifestyle of the Carmelite nuns, and the relationship between the nuns and the community. (Criterion A)

The Church at the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne is significant as one of a number of Roman Catholic buildings established in Kew in the interwar period that were built in the Romanesque Revival architectural style. Opened in 1921, the Sacred Heart Church on Cotham Road, Kew, is an earlier and grander example of the Romanesque revival style used for Roman Catholic Buildings, than the Church at the Carmelite Monastery. Both churches are associated with church architect William Patrick Conolly who was responsible for the completion of the Sacred Heart Church. The Church at the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne was designed by Conolly seven years later in 1928. Two years after that, Conolly designed the VHR listed third Church at St John's, East Melbourne; likewise a grander building than the Carmelite Church but in the same Romanesque architectural style. Two decades earlier, in 1907-08, Conolly had designed another grand Catholic Church in the Romanesque revival style in regional Victoria, in Benalla. (Criterion D)

The Church at the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne is therefore significant as representative of Conolly's early twentieth century church architecture in Victoria the Romanesque style, which perhaps reached its zenith in the St John's Church example in East Melbourne of 1930. Characteristic features of the style that are represented by the Carmelite Monastery church include: the semi-circular arch openings for the main entry (a simplified Romanesque portal with paired colonnettes) and for the plate tracery windows on the east and west elevations; the circular rose window and the Machicolation motif on the masonry band above it on the principal elevation. The siting of the Church on a relatively high ground, the higher eastern side of the site, is also characteristic of Romanesque Revival architecture. The striking and elaborate interior decoration of the Church, overseen by Conolly and completed in 1931, is also highly intact and well maintained. (Criterion D)

The Cloister, Cottage, boundary wall and gateway are also significant as highly intact Monastic buildings designed in 1928 by Conolly. These other Monastic buildings, Conolly designed in the Spanish Mission architectural style. The terracotta tiled roofs of the Cloister and Cottage, small-paned timber framed windows in arched openings, and the roughcast rendered walls are all characteristic of the style. The buildings are physically and stylistically linked by the use of interwar Mediterranean revival architectural styles (Spanish Mission and Romanesque), and are unified by the consistency of the roughcast render finish to the walls. The buildings are highly intact and well maintained. (Criterion D)

The grounds of the Monastery are significant for their high degree of intactness, integrity and as typical interwar and monastic gardens. The original grounds are highly intact, and appear to retain a very high proportion of their original layout, organisation of space, circulation patterns, and planting. The organisation of the grounds into discrete garden rooms, the combination of formally laid out ornamental gardens and productive gardens, some of the plant species (especially conifers, Mediterranean Cypress, Golden Elm, camellias), and the concrete paths with rolled concrete edges are characteristic of interwar gardens. The layout of the cloister garden is a centuries-old characteristic of cloister gardens; square in plan and divided equally into four sections by two intersecting paths that meet at a central focal point (usually a statue, planting, or fountain). A single tree is planted in each of the four sections. (Criterion D)

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne has potential for strong or special associations with the Carmelite nuns who reside there, the broader Carmelite community, and the congregation. (Criterion G)

The Monastery is significant for its association with Catholic Archbishop Daniel Mannix (1864-1963), who performed the foundation stone ceremony for the new Carmelite Monastery in July 1928, the cloistering ceremony on the Monastery's opening day on 19 May 1929, and a dedication ceremony for the set of mosaic Stations of the Cross in April 1933. (Criterion H)

Heritage Study/Consultant	Boroondara - City of Kew Urban Conservation Study, Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd, 1988; Boroondara - Municipal-Wide Heritage Gap Study Volume 4: Kew, Context, 2018;
Architect/Designer	Conolly, W.P.,
Hermes Number	119445
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne, Kew, occupies a large site on the north side of Stevenson Street, Kew. Its east and west boundaries are coincident with Murphy Street (west) and Hyton Crescent (east), (formerly Iveagh Street).

The site slopes down, approximately from north to south, with a slight fall from east to west. The buildings are clustered in the lower, southern half of the site close to Stevenson Street. The upper northern half of the site consists of ornamental and productive gardens and a tennis court. The site is surrounded by a high brick and roughcast rendered wall, recently painted in a mustard colour.

The Monastery is very well maintained, and comparisons of the place in the present-day with a 1930 Airspy photograph reveal that the buildings and grounds are highly intact. The external boundary walls were repainted in the early 2000s; previously they were unpainted grey-coloured render. The buildings were painted slightly earlier; they too were originally unpainted.

The lower, southern part of the site

The cluster of buildings in the lower southern part of the site consists of the Cloister, Church (or public oratory), and a small single-storey cottage. The buildings are physically and stylistically linked by the use of interwar Mediterranean styles (Spanish Mission and Romanesque revival styles), and unified by the consistency of the roughcast render finish to the walls.

The Church and the Cloister are linked by an enclosed corridor, with tiled gable roof and small-paned windows with semi-circular arched openings. The corridor intersects with a secondary entry into the site with large timber gates, and doubles as a wall enclosing a small garden space behind.

The entrance into the Monastery site is off Stevenson Street, through an arched opening within a gabled roughcast rendered masonry gateway designed in the interwar Spanish Mission architectural style, with flat cement capping that terminates on each side in a scroll. The gateway is topped with a masonry cross. The modern double gates are formed of steel strip lattice riveted in a diamond pattern, framed by distressed copper surrounds. Mounted on each gate is a brass crest of the Order, with the motto ('With zeal am I zealous for the Lord God of Hosts') in Latin.

#### The Cloister

The double-storey brick Cloister is square in plan, with a central courtyard, or 'cloister' garden, built in a domestic Spanish Mission architectural style. It has a terracotta tile hip roof, roughcast rendered walls, and small paned timber sash windows in segmental arched openings on the west facade, and semicircular arched openings in the south and east facades. A narrow southern wing projects from the Cloister into the front garden. A square bell tower with Machicolation motif, an octagonal open 'lantern' and octagonal (in plan) conical slate or timber shingle roof, topped with a ringed, or Celtic, cross.

#### The Church

The Church, oriented north-south with a terracotta tiled gabled roof, is designed in the interwar Romanesque architectural style. The building is rectangular in plan with buttress piers. Semi-octagonal drums project from the east and west walls, which contain side chapels  $\frac{3}{4}$  containing shrines to 'Our Lady' (the Virgin Mary) in the west chapel and St Therèse of Lisieux in the other (east). The external walls are roughcast rendered, except for the principal elevation which is smooth rendered, with horizontal banding to enliven the heavy masonry wall surfaces. The principal elevation is south facing, with buttress piers, round arched principal entry, circular window, and niche with statue at the apex of the gable. Like the gateway, the gable is topped with a simple masonry cross. The semi-circular openings for the plate tracery windows have wide, painted cement semi-circular bands and sills. The geometric patterned leadlight windows have coloured glass and a geometric rose motif.

Features characteristic of the Romanesque style include: the semi-circular arch openings for the main entry, a simplified Romanesque portal with paired colonnettes, and for the plate tracery windows on the east and west elevations; the circular rose window in the principal elevation, and the Machicolation motif on the masonry band above the circular window. The siting of the Church on a relatively high ground, the higher eastern side of the site, is also characteristic of Roman architecture.

Typically, the interiors of Romanesque churches are characterised by relatively bland detailing, often with smooth, light coloured surfaces. To this end, the hectic interior decorative scheme of the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne is a complete departure from this broad characterisation of Romanesque interiors. Instead its busier decorative program and glass mosaics recall more the richly decorated interiors with mosaics of Arab-Norman churches of the twelfth century.

From documentary records, it is known that the interior decoration was finalised in 1931, overseen by architect WP Conolly. Detailed contemporary descriptions of the interior are consistent with the surviving interior, providing evidence that it is highly intact and well maintained. Some of the interior walls appear to have been recently restored. (<http://www.mepaint.com.au>)

The interior decoration includes Australian Cudgegong marble for the altar, the curved balustrade to the raised altar and choir, the sanctuary steps and floor, and skirtings and cappings to the wall dadoes. The dadoes are highly polished scagliola; scagliola was a more economical material than marble, composed of cement or plaster and marble chips or colouring matter to imitate marble (Fleming). The walls above the dadoes are decorated with subtly toned marble-effect finish in pale green, with dull gold wide semi-circular bands around the window openings. The mouldings are pale green and dull gold coloured. The barrel-vaulted ceiling is dissected by four

masonry ribs, the ceiling decorated in a grid pattern of celestial blue panels outlined in dull gold and pale green. The timber doors have a copper bronze finish.

On the end wall of the altar is a large mosaic with life-sized figures of St John of the Cross with infant Jesus, and St Therèse of Lisieux, surmounted by a dove. A smaller mosaic panel of the Annunciation sits within the altar.

At dado height is a band of mosaic panels. The band, or frieze, comprises alternating mosaic-patterned panels with the fourteen scenes from the Stations of the Cross, framed by mosaic bands. The mosaic banding continues over the semi-circular arched openings to the side chapels. These were added in 1933.

The pair of brass candelabra mentioned in the early newspaper descriptions on the altar railings appear to remain in situ.

### The Cottage

The single-storey brick cottage ('domus') is symmetrical in plan, with roughcast rendered walls, terracotta tiled pyramidal roof, small-paned timber sash windows, and arched opening to a central entry porch. The cottage is located in the southwest corner of the site. It is built in the same interwar domestic Spanish Mission architectural style as the Cloister building.

### Other buildings

Newer double-storey brick buildings have been added to the rear of the Monastery complex, possibly in the 1960s or 70s. There are smaller ancillary buildings associated with the productive gardens on the western side of the rear garden.

### The Grounds

Comparison of present-day aerial photography with photographs taken from the air in the 1930s and 1945 show that little has changed in the grounds of the Monastery, other than the expected growth of trees and other plants, and the introduction of a tennis court in the north-eastern-most corner of the site. The 1930s photograph from the air shows the detailed pathway layout and circulation systems and the division of the grounds into separate 'rooms', consisting of ornamental gardens and productive gardens. The pathway layout appears to be identical to that in the 1930s. The site was fully cleared in the 1930s, meaning that all vegetation on the site, including the eucalypts along the northern boundary, has been introduced. The maturity of many of the trees, including the row of Mediterranean Cypress along the west boundary, other mature conifers, and Golden Elms (a popular interwar species), suggests they were likely to have been planted during the establishment phases of the grounds.

Ornamental gardens surround the buildings to the south (the 'front' garden), east (formal walks) and west (informal layout, lawn with specimen trees and serpentine paths), and to the north (two formal gardens with geometric path layout with mature deciduous and evergreen trees).

The productive gardens, laid out in a functional grid pattern, occupy the western and northern sections of the rear half of the site. The organisation of this space suggests the productive gardens may include orchards, picking garden, vegetables, and a chicken coop.

The well-kept 'front' garden consists of open lawn and ornamental perimeter beds. Two mature trees, an elm on the east side, possibly a Golden Elm (*Ulmus glabra*), and Camphor Laurel (*Cinnamomum camphora*) on the west side, are complemented by smaller trees and ornamental shrubs, among them established camellias and more recent plantings. Some surfaces are paved brick (recent) and others concrete. The concrete paths with rolled concrete edging are of a style that is consistent with interwar paving styles.

The layout of the cloister garden is consistent with cloister gardens from the Norman and Early Modern periods, for example in Europe; square in plan and divided equally into four sections by two intersecting paths that meet at a central focal point (usually a statue, planting, or fountain). A single tree is planted in each of the four sections.

The garden to the west of the Monastery buildings appears informal in layout, with lawn and serpentine paths. Mature trees include a tall Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*), a pair of Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), a mature conifer, and *Cordyline australis*.

The northern part of the site, partially visible from aerial photographs and from the surrounding streets, consists of mature deciduous and evergreen trees, Australian and introduced species, the canopies of which are visible

over the high wall. On the western side, the boundary is defined by a row of mature Mediterranean Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), presumably a shelter planting for the large productive garden. There are some gaps in the row, suggesting one or more trees may have died or been removed over time. A single specimen of the same species occurs on the eastern boundary. Other trees on the eastern side include conifers (fir or spruce?), Ash, Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*), Olive, Rhododendron, and Camellia. There are other mature trees within the enclosed parts of the site, some partially visible from the public domain, that were not possible to identify but which may have been part of the early planting scheme.

*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/>*