
SIENA CONVENT



Siena Convent

Location

815 Riversdale Road CAMBERWELL, BOROONDARA CITY

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO724

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 28, 2018

What is Significant?

The Siena Convent and College cloister and chapel at 815 Riversdale Road, Camberwell, is significant.

Siena Convent was founded at this site in a small house in 1924 (since demolished). Purpose-built facilities were constructed in the late 1930s, particularly the convent building comprising an arcaded cloister with a chapel at one corner constructed in 1939. The designer was Sydney-based architect Hamleto Agabiti of Agabiti & Milane.

The complex was constructed of cream and Manganese bricks from the Glen Iris Brick Co. with terracotta from Wunderlich Ltd. It was described as 'Lombardic Byzantine' in style, indicating a combination of the Lombardic Romanesque and eastern Byzantine revivals.

The mature Italian cypresses along the east side of the front setback are a contributory element.

The building is significant to the extent of its 1939 fabric. Later alterations and extensions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Siena Convent and College cloister and chapel are of local historic, aesthetic and social significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

Siena College is significant for its illustration of the monastic houses founded in Boroondara in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whose history is intertwined with the history of the denominational schools, hospitals and welfare facilities founded and maintained by them. It is also an illustration of a purpose-built denominational school founded during the interwar period. (Criterion A)

The Siena College complex is distinguished not only by its very fine brickwork, evoking the Lombardic Romanesque style, but particularly in its unusual use of the Byzantine compound domed form that characterised Byzantine Revival churches in Eastern and South-eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century. The blue terracotta dome of the Chapel is also a unique feature within Boroondara, and is a fine example of the integration of polychromy that terracotta faience made possible during the interwar period. (Criterion E)

Siena College is of social significance for the strong associations held by its alumnae and the Dominican nuns who served here. (Criterion G)

Heritage Study/Consultant	Boroondara - Municipal-Wide Heritage Gap Study: Vol. 2 Camberwell, Context, 2018;
Construction dates	1939,
Hermes Number	202132
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

The 1939 cloister and chapel complex sits near the front of the Siena College campus, behind a modern low brick fence, a landscaped area and modest car park, and is clearly visible from Riversdale Road. While the circular drive, seen in the 1958 aerial, does not survive, the row of Italian Cypress trees along the east side of the front setback are still there.

The south and west sides of the cloister are two storeys in height, with a tiled hipped roof. The east and north sides were originally single storey with a tiled gabled roof, but in 2004 a concrete upper storey extension was added. This original difference in height reflected the position of the complex when it was built. At that time, it was built up to the eastern boundary, so there were no public views to the single-storey eastern wing (or the northern wing at the rear). The row of Italian Cypress trees marks this historical boundary. The western side of the complex, however, was visible through the landscaped grounds, and it is fully architecturally expressed.

There are three elements that project from the envelope of the cloister: the Chapel at the south-east corner, a gabled entrance pavilion at the south-west corner, and a parapeted circular bastion containing a staircase at the

centre of the west elevation.

The entire building is clad in deep cream brickwork with brown Manganese brick accents tracing the round-arched forms of the windows and arcading. The pointing is very deeply inset to create strong shadow lines. There are two levels of arcading to the facade, with round-arched openings and stone (or terracotta) columns. Along the west elevation the round-arched openings are all windows, though some pairs have an engaged column between them. Inside the cloister, there is arcading the ground floor on all sides, and arched windows above.

The entrance pavilion, at the south-west corner, is expressed much like the facade of an Italian Romanesque church. It has a raking parapet at the top with a complex brickwork cornice, a depressed Greek cross in the tympanum, and two levels of arcading below. At ground floor level there are three large arched openings with stepped brick arches, the outermost being of Manganese bricks. Above, there is an arcade of three smaller arched openings with columns. The columns sit proud of the inner cream brick wall, and the continuous arches above them are of Manganese brick which continues at each end with a blind arch which continues to ground level to frame the entire composition.

The Chapel is the most impressive of the three projecting elements. It is a Greek cross in plan, with four arms of equal length comprising engaged half-domes around the shaft of a tall central domed space in the Eastern Byzantine manner. The four half-domes have semi-hemispherical copper roofs and the walls expressed with blind arches in the same cream and Manganese brick as the rest of the complex. The windows to the drum of the central dome are set in dramatically deep stepped arches, again defined by an outer arch of Manganese brick. The semi-hemispherical dome is constructed of off-white ribs with flared lower ends and glazed blue tiles between (all terracotta). A cross stands at the apex.

The interior of the Chapel has a similar architectural expression to the exterior, with arcaded openings, but with a much softer, almost monochrome, palette which may be original. Walls are white while the coffering of the central dome and apse are painted in delicate blue and grey. The central floor is of two-tone hardwoods in cross pattern, while the floor of the apse and steps are of white terrazzo. Internal doors within the chapel are curved to follow the line of the walls. The interior appears to be highly intact.

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/>