
Gembrook Commercial Precinct



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Location

62-72 Main Street and 75-97 Main Street and 66A Station Street GEMBROOK, CARDINIA SHIRE

Municipality

CARDINIA SHIRE

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO189

Heritage Listing

Cardinia Shire

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 4, 2020

What is significant?

The Gembrook commercial precinct which comprises much of the original township area, between Station Road and Gembrook Road. The township developed initially to service the local Gembrook timber and fruit growing industries, then for tourism in association with the arrival of the railway, and later mixed farming. Individually significant places include:

- 93 Main Street (Sacred Heart Catholic Church, HO63)
- 62 Main Street (Bhutan Pines at Gembrook Railway Station site, HO61, as well as the Oaks, Moterey Pines and Blackwoods, HO61)
- avenue plantings of oak, blackwood, flowering gum (which extend along Main Street and beyond the commercial precinct, east to west, from 12 Beenak East Road to 48 Belgrave-Gembrook Road)
- 66A Main Street (Coffee Palace)
- J.A.C. Russell Reserve
- 72 Main Street (Post Office)
- 75 Main Street (Curiosity Shop, only)
- 77 and 79 Main Street (the motor garages)
- 81 Main Street (house)
- 97 Main Street (the former Gembrook Store)

68-70, and 81A, 83-87, 89, 91, 91A, 95 and the house at the rear of 75 Main Street are non-contributory.

How is it Significant?

The Gembrook Commercial Precinct is of local historic and aesthetic significance to Cardinia Shire.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the Gembrook Commercial Precinct is significant for the tangible evidence it provides of important phases of the township's establishment from 1874 to service the local timber and farming industries, and its growth in the interwar period when it grew following the coming of the railway, the picturesque rail journey attracting day-trippers and vacationers and later motorists. (RNE criterion A.4) Historically, it is also significant for its associations with the Rev. John Edward Bromby, who laid out an area for the town in 1874. (RNE criterion H.1)

Historically, the Gembrook Station site, the J.A.C. Russell Reserve, and the Sacred Heart Church are significant for the evidence they provide of the early township and its tourism surge after World War One which was greatly enhanced by the new railway and Gembrook's role as its terminus (RNE criterion A.4). The avenue plantings, 66 Main Street (Coffee Palace), 72 Main Street (Post Office), 75 Main Street (Curiosity Shop), 77 and 79 Main Street (the motor garages), 81 Main Street (house), and 97 Main Street (the former Gembrook Store) form the core of old Gembrook and as such contribute to the significance of the precinct. All these places provide physical evidence of Gembrook's history as a tourism destination, and contribute to the historic character of this largely unified civic and commercial precinct.

Aesthetically, the oak, blackwood and flowering gum street plantings have significance as an element unifying the township and streetscape (RNE criterion E.1).

The former Coffee Palace (now a take-away food store and residence) also contributes to the historic significance of the locality of Gembrook as a surviving example of the coffee palaces opened in many Victorian resort towns in the 1920s and one of the early buildings in the town (RNE criterion A.4). This building, presumably founded on temperance principles like other coffee palaces, has significance also for its associations with locally prominent persons such as Patrick McNulty and his wife, the first owners, and in the late 1930s with the Hickes (RNE criterion H.1).

Physical Description 1

The Gembrook commercial precinct in Main Street contains a number of early twentieth century and interwar commercial buildings, interspersed with a few residential properties set back from the street, post-war properties, and undeveloped lots. Avenue plantings of oak, flowering gum and blackwoods unify the streetscape.

Contributory elements include:

- the oak, flowering gum and Blackwood street plantings. A strong part of the street's character is created by the early twentieth century street plantings of oak (*Quercus canariensis*), which formed the original avenue planting of the town, interplanted with Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and flowering gums. They are informally spaced but read clearly as an avenue. The avenue planting extends, east to west, from 12 Beenak East Road to 48 Belgrave-Gembrook Road. On the south side, the form of the trees has been compromised by pruning to avoid powerlines.

Along the north side of Main Street:

- 60 Main Street & 100 Station Road. J.A.C. Russell Reserve and railway siding site. The Reserve comprises a range of mature trees, including Bhutan Pines (the pines are protected by HO61), oaks (*Quercus muehlenbergii*?), Monterey Pines (*Pinus radiata*) and Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*), as well as a recent Victorian-style rotunda (the rotunda is non-contributory). Note that the current Gembrook Railway Station building was constructed in 1998 to service the Puffing Billy line, so the building is non-contributory. It is located on the site of the Siberia Siding, while the original Gembrook Station was located north of the town centre (a small station building survives, but it is outside this precinct).

- 66 Main Street, Coffee Palace (former). The former Coffee Palace at 66 Main Street Gembrook is a weatherboard gabled building. It appears to contain a number of construction stages which include the gable wing along the side frontage, another small gabled section at the rear and a two-level wing in the centre of the block with a monitor roof form. This unusual roof form appears to be the result of adding steeply-pitched skillions to either side of an early two-storey section (its age indicated by the survival of short-sheet corrugated iron). Windows and joints along the side wall reflect different stages even within this wing. There is a show window in the front and a skillion form street verandah (rebuilt/new); another section adjoins on the east. This east-side shopfront has a flat roof and appear to be fairly recent in date. Monterey pines were noted in the 1996 heritage study in the rear yard, but these are in fact on another property. When inspected in 2006 most of the building had been re-roofed and was in good to fair condition. While altered, it contributes to the precinct.

- 72 Main Street, Post Office is a single-storey weatherboard building built in two phases. The rear section appears to be older, from the first decade of the 20th century, with a hip roof and corbelled brick chimney. A narrower hip-roof section with a simple verandah appears to be a recent addition. Although altered, it is sympathetic and contributes to the precinct.

Along the south side of Main Street:- 75 Main Street, Curiosity Shop, is a face-brick, parapet fronted (with inset rendered panel) shop of 1923 with a new neo-Victorian verandah and mid to late 20th-century chrome shop window with a new roller shutter. The front door has a high-waisted form, popular to the 1920s, but appears to have been salvaged from another location or building. The owner reports that the house and shop were 'destroyed by fire in or around 1955' (P Zampaglione, pers. comm., 2010). This could not be confirmed or denied by consulting the rate books. The house does, indeed appear to have been built post-war, but the shop retains an interwar appearance.

- 77 Main Street, Garage (The Motorist, Gembrook) is a wide brick-fronted interwar garage with a stepped parapet front. While it retains textured render, terracotta vents and parapet form that all suggest an interwar date, it is described as 'an original service station, destroyed by fire in the fifties' ('The Motorist',

www.gembrook.com.au, accessed 28/02/2011). It does, indeed, have steel windows with glazed brick sills and mild-steel decoration that appear to date from the 1950s. Thus it appears that the shell of the building survived the fire and was refurbished in the 1950s.

- 79 Main Street, garage (former), is a second interwar garage or mechanics workshop, now M & M's Place. It has a brick facade (overpainted) and a simple stepped parapet. Ornamentation is limited to four terracotta vents in a cross shape below the parapet. The windows date to the late 20th century.
- 81 Main Street is c1920s-30s L-shaped weatherboard residence with a corrugated iron gable roof, and two corbelled chimneys. It is set back from the street in a modest garden setting.
- 93 Main Street, Sacred Heart Catholic Church (HO63)
- 97 Main Street, (former general store) now Charlotte's of Gembrook, is a weatherboard gable fronted shop building with a skillion verandah over the footpath. The verandah posts are slightly tapered and slope chamfered. When inspected in 2010, one post had been replaced with a plain timber post. It has two original timber shop windows on either side of the front door (door is salvaged from elsewhere). There is a skillion addition to its east side, which is recent in date. At the rear is a group of large mature Monterey pine trees, thought to be dangerous. The shop is in good condition with high integrity.

68-70, 81A, 83-87, 91, 91A and 95 Main Street, and the house at the rear of 75 Main Street are not contributory.

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/>