

FORMER CARLTON REFUGE AND CHAPEL COMPLEX



2024 Chapel



2024 wrought iron gates of 1940 cast iron gateposts origin unknown



2024 Dormitory Cardigan Street 2



Picture2



Aerial image after 1951



image012



1954 Model Baby Health Centre



2024 Entry Administration



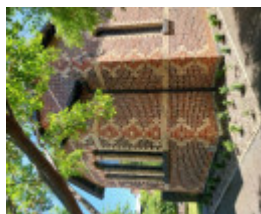
2024 View from public walkway to Laundry on left and Hospital building to right



1863 detail of plan of allotments



2024 Chapel



2024 Chapel



2024 Dormitory Cardigan Street



QUEEN ELIZABETH
MATERNAL AND CHILD
HEALTH CENTRE SOHE
2008



2024 Refuge building viewed
from Keppel Street carpark



1 former carlton refuge
keppel street carlton 1907
building

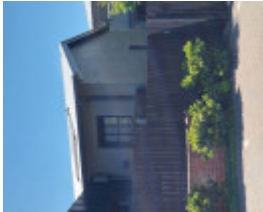
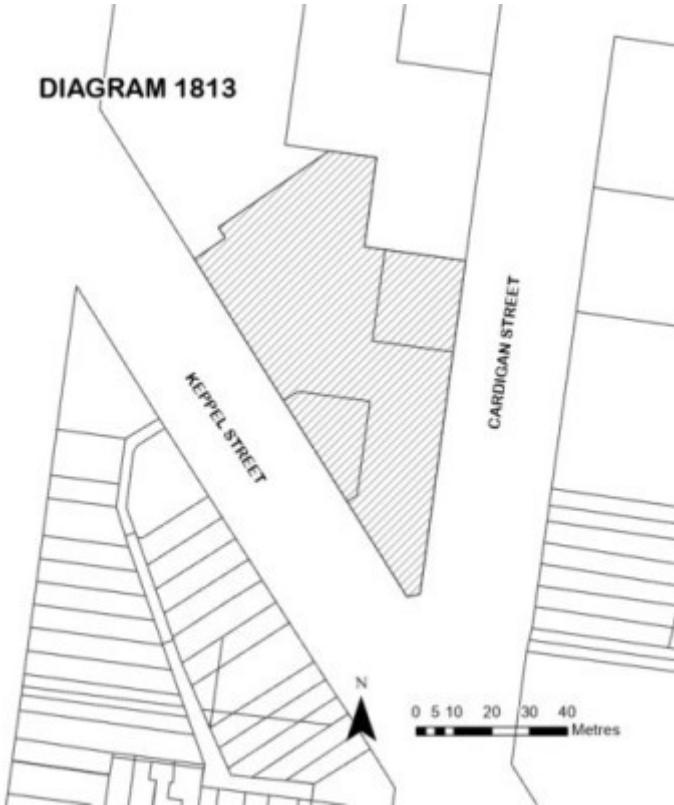


image014



April 2025 Extent diagram

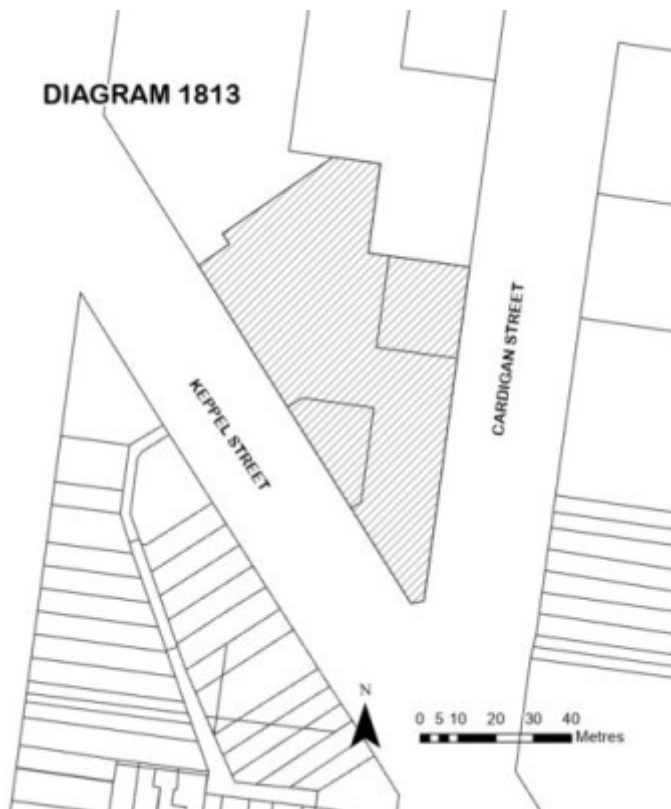


Diagram 1813

Location

54-58 KEPPEL STREET AND 455-495 CARDIGAN STREET CARLTON, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1813

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO884

VHR Registration

September 30, 1999

Amendment to Registration

April 17, 2025

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 23, 2025

Former Carlton Refuge and Chapel Complex is located on Wurundjeri Country.

What is significant?

The Former Carlton Refuge and Chapel Complex including the former Refuge (1861-63), Chapel (1881) and Hospital (1882) both thought to have been designed by architect Albert Purchas; two Dormitories (1907), Entry and Administration Building (1907) designed by architect John James Clark; and Baby Health Centre (1951).

How is it significant?

The Former Carlton Refuge and Chapel Complex is of historical and architectural 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 D

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

Why is it significant?

The Former Carlton Refuge and Chapel Complex is historically significant as the location of three successive institutions established to provide services for unmarried and vulnerable women, girls and their babies from 1861 to 1997. The Carlton Refuge was established in 1861 as a 'female rescue home' by the Anglican and Presbyterian churches. The female rescue movement was based on Evangelical Christian principles, and its aim was to reform 'fallen women', a euphemism for young women without financial means or family support who worked in the sex trade, and/or experienced sexual abuse and exploitation in different kinds of relationships with men. The Carlton Refuge was one of the earliest purpose-built such institutions in Victoria. In 1931 it became known as the 'Carlton Home' and had a focus on pregnant unmarried mothers and their babies. In 1949 the Carlton Home closed, and the place re-opened in 1951 as the Queen Elizabeth Maternal and Child Health Centre and Infants' Hospital, which had an additional function as a residential training centre for mothercraft and infant welfare nurses for the whole of the State. The place demonstrates changing attitudes to the welfare of women and children between 1861 and the 1990s. It has a complex and difficult history and is associated with the histories of women, girls, children, welfare provision, baby health centres, institutional abuse, historical forced adoptions and the Stolen Generations.

(Criterion A)

The Chapel of the Former Carlton Refuge Complex is architecturally significant as a simple Protestant chapel of the early 1880s featuring polychrome brickwork. It was designed with a modest scale, restrained architectural treatment, and limited interior decoration, for shared use by the various Protestant denominations that provided services for the women and girls of the Refuge. As a place of worship, the Chapel reflects the Christian values of repentance and redemption, pertinent themes for the Refuge's founders, who hoped to inculcate true penitence in its 'immoral' residents and inspire them towards salvation through a chaste and virtuous life. The Dormitories are utilitarian in nature with masonry walls and terracotta tiled roofs, and the Entry and Administration Building resembles a Federation-style villa.

(Criterion D)

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](#).

Theme

8. Building community life

Construction dates	1861, 1951,
Architect/Designer	Clark, John James, Purchas, Albert,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	CARLTON HOME, CARLTON REFUGE, FEMALE REFUGE, MAGDALEN ASYLUM, FORMER CARLTON REFUGE, QUEEN ELIZABETH MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH CENTRE,
Hermes Number	3505
Property Number	

History

Contextual History

The Carlton Refuge had its origins in 1857 when Bishop Perry, the Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, and Dr Cairns, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Melbourne, established a home for girls in a rented house in Osborne Street, South Yarra. A matron and her husband, who acted as chaplain, were appointed on 15 June 1857 to the South Yarra establishment and moved to Carlton with the inmates in 1861. Part of the present site was granted by the government in 1858 in Carlton and the remainder in 1860. The Refuge moved to Carlton on 9 October 1861. A permanent reservation made in July 1863 for a 'public refuge or reformatory for the caretaking, education and reformation of women who had previously to their becoming inmates have led an irregular and abandoned life or who have been living as common prostitutes or thieves, and for offices and conveniences connected with such refuge.'

Sequence of development

Building 1- 1970
 Building 2- 1970
 Building 3 -1970
 Building 4- 1975
 Building 5 -1861-63 and 1907 addition
 Building 6-1861-63 and 1879 addition to dining-room
 Building 7-1882 Hospital Ward
 Building 8- 1881 Chapel
 Building 9- 1907
 Building 10- 1907
 Building 11- 1907
 Building 12- 1951 Baby Health Centre
 Building 13- 1959 Isabella Younger Ross Hall
 Building 14- 1970 Plant

The aim of the institution was to provide a refuge for young women after the birth of their first illegitimate child and provide training so they could find respectable work. Many came to the Refuge directly from the Lying-in Hospital (later known as the Women's Hospital). They had to promise to stay for twelve months to be trained for domestic work and when they left, they were helped to find work. From 1870, the Refuge allowed the women to bring their babies with them and a purpose-built nursery was constructed in 1878. The committee of management consisted of a Gentlemen's Committee and a Ladies Committee. The Ladies Committee took a close interest in the organisation of the Refuge and one member of the Committee visited the home each day.

The institution was 'conducted on Protestant Evangelical Principles' from the beginning. Founded by an alliance between the Anglican Archbishop and the Presbyterian Church leader in Melbourne, the Refuge encouraged church attendance. A representative from the Presbyterian Church preached on the first Sunday of every month, a Methodist on the second, an Anglican on the third and a Congregationalist on the fourth. The Baptists were

given the fifth Sunday. The Church of Christ came on the fourth Wednesday of each month to take a service and the Methodist preacher took the rest of the Wednesday evening services each month. The Carlton Refuge was unusual in being a cooperative effort between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church, while involving the other Protestant churches in religious services in the chapel.

The Refuge prided itself on its reformatory influence and rejoiced in its successes. In the first nine years, the institution had taken in 198 inmates, and forty-three of these 'are known to the Ladies Committee to be conducting themselves with propriety'. Taking into account those who had died in hospital in a state of repentance, the Refuge was able to claim a 30% success rate in rescuing the women 'from a life of infamy'.

The inmates' training consisted of mainly of a preparation for domestic service, especially laundry work and sewing. The institution was able to earn a considerable amount of money from these activities. In 1910-11, almost half the institution's income came from the proceeds of the laundry. The Annual Report of 1864-65 advertised the services offered by the home. Plain clothes could be laundered for 2/- per dozen, and morning dresses, chemises, nightgowns and flannel petticoats were made by the inmates at prices between one and five shillings each.

When Melbourne journalist John Stanley James visited the Protestant Female Refuge in Madeline (now Swanston) Street, Carlton in the 1870s, he described the complex as 'a low range of one-storey brick buildings', consisting of a day-room and refectory, kitchen, bedrooms, laundry, and nursery.

The Vagabond described the daily routine:

The inmates rise in the morning at six o'clock, work till eight, when there is a cessation for breakfast of tea and bread and butter. At eleven the same refecton is given for lunch. At one, there is dinner of soup, meat, vegetables, and often pudding. Tea at six, same as breakfast, and from thence, until ten o'clock, when they have all to be in bed, the inmates can make their clothes, read, chat or listen to some of the ladies of the committee, who come and read and talk to them. Morning and evening prayer is read by the matron; and on Sundays, a chance Church of England or Presbyterian minister may come and perform the service.

The rules of the Refuge were strict. No woman over the age of thirty was to be admitted, as older women were considered unlikely to reform. About half the women were between fifteen and twenty, and most were under twenty-five years of age. The inmates had to agree to stay twelve months and never left the grounds during that time. They were virtual prisoners behind the high brick wall and locked gates: the annual report usually noted that one or more had 'escaped' during the year. In 1882-83, no less than twelve women escaped from the Refuge. In 1907-08, four women escaped during the year.

The Sands & McDougall map of Melbourne and suburbs of 1887 names the Carlton Refuge as a Magdalen Asylum, the term applied to ex-prostitutes or 'fallen women'.

Building Sequence

The first building on the site was a small cottage with a front verandah (now demolished) on Keppel Street. This was the quarters for the matron and her husband completed in 1861.

The main building, constructed between 1861 and 1863 was placed in the centre of the block. It consisted of a committee room, which the matron used also as a dining room, a large dining room for the inmates, a kitchen, laundry and packing room.

A long corridor with fourteen bedrooms opening off it connected the matron's cottage with the central building. These rooms for the inmates were cells about eight feet by six feet, with narrow slits for windows. A matching wing providing further sleeping accommodation was added in 1878. This building also had fourteen rooms with small windows. These wings were demolished in 1907.

In 1876-77, a nursery was built to the east of the laundry. Beginning in 1870, a few of the women were allowed to keep their babies with them, but once the nursery was completed, the number of babies rose from 4 to 18. The nursery was surrounded by verandahs to the north, east and west and a laundry was added to the east in 1907. The nursery was demolished in 1975 to make way for the Day Nursery.

The dining room was enlarged in 1879, with a semi-circular addition to the south. The exterior detail of the

matron's room on the south elevation was repeated in the addition, with similar windows and a cornice ornamented with dentils.

The Chapel (Building 8) was built in brick with a gable roof in 1881 at a cost of £494.17.4. At first, the Committee had no money to furnish it but by 1929, it was furnished with eight pews, an organ, four chairs, a simple altar, a baptismal font, a pot plant, a stool and a lectern. The total value of the chapel's furniture and fittings at that time was £20.18.6 and the altar was worth only £2.10.0.

The following year, 1882, a pavilion hospital ward was built at a cost of £311. 5.0. This consisted of a dormitory with a fireplace and a nurse's room and store. It was isolated from the rest of the complex to prevent infection but was linked to the kitchen block by a covered way.

A new addition was built to the west in 1889 between the old matron's cottage and the dormitory wing. It consisted of four sub-matron's bedrooms, five bedrooms and two offices. These were demolished in 1907.

In 1907 a stove room and drying closet was added to north end of the laundry wing. Three pavilions were built at that time, with an administration wing and accommodation for 50 inmates. The sub-matrons' rooms had fireplaces but the inmates' bedrooms were without heating.

In 1912-13 a drying room was added to the laundry, so that the work done by the inmates was less dependent on fine weather.

A ten-foot-high brick wall with bluestone foundations constructed in 1882 surrounded the institution. . In 1940 the wall was demolished and replaced with a cyclone fence. The gate at the corner of Cardigan Street and Keppel Street was also replaced with wrought iron gates in 1940 but the origin of the elaborate cast iron gateposts is unknown.

In the twentieth century, the scope of activity for the Carlton Refuge expanded and in 1930, the name of the institution was changed to the Carlton Home. In 1930-31, students of mothercraft nursing from the Methodist Babies Home came for training to the Carlton Home.

By 1935, the work of the Home included:

1. The care of the unmarried mother and her child.
2. The care of children sent by the Children's Welfare Department.
3. The training of young nurses in mothercraft.
4. The care of married women from industrial and country areas before and after admission to the Women's Hospital. This included looking after toddlers while the mother was in the Hospital.

In 1934-35, Building 11 was altered to provide a separate corridor and entrance to the married mothers' wing so they were 'entirely separated from the inmates'. In 1936 the Williams wing for married mothers was opened in what is now Building 11. It was named in memory of Miss Mary Harriet Williams. At that time, it was the only pre-natal residential clinic in the State.

By 1949, the numbers of unmarried mothers seeking help had diminished and the institution closed down at the end of August 1950. The buildings were taken over by the Victorian Baby Health Centres Association which had run a mother and baby home next to the Women's Hospital combined with a training centre for mothercraft and infant welfare nurses. These functions continued on the Keppel Street site under the new administration and the new institution was called the Queen Elizabeth Maternal and Child Health Centre and Infants' Hospital. It was officially opened in December 1951. The important extension made at this time was the model Baby Health Centre (Building 12) at the corner of Cardigan and Keppel Streets. The baby health centre movement, started in Victoria in 1917 and gradually extended throughout the State. It made a significant contribution to the lowering of infant mortality rates, which fell from 55.6 in 1926 to 28.03 in 1945. The Queen Elizabeth Centre trained Baby Health Centre nurses for the whole State, cared for mothers after delivery needing extra rest and care, mothers experiencing difficulty with breast-feeding or management of their babies, and 'failure-to-thrive' babies, including premature babies.

The Isabella Younger Ross Memorial Hall constructed in 1959 was named after the founder of the Baby Health Centre movement in Victoria. This building, designed by architect R.C. Armstrong for the Hospital and Charities

Commission, consisted of a large auditorium and stage with dressing rooms and toilets behind the stage. An office, kitchen and conference room were located at the south end of the building. It was leased out in 1981 to the Melbourne Chorale. At that time, the land had to be temporarily reserved for recreational purposes as the lease did not conform to the original purpose of the reservation.

The purpose-built Mother and Baby Wing, the Residential Nursery and the Day Nursery (Buildings 1-4) were constructed between 1970 and 1975. The Day Nursery land was excised from the original reservation in order to qualify for a Commonwealth Government grant. Building 14 was the plant room built at the same time. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Mothers and Babies had close links with the major maternity hospitals and the Royal Childrens' Hospital.

The architect for the buildings constructed between 1861 and 1863 is not known.

The architect for the chapel (1881) and the hospital ward was probably Albert Purchas. Purchas was on the Gentlemen's Committee in the 1880s and the Minute Book shows a payment to him as architect of £44.12.9 on 1 September 1882, when the buildings were completed. He is also shown as letting tenders for alterations and repairs in 1889. Purchas, a surveyor, civil engineer, architect and cemetery administrator, was prominent in Melbourne professional life in the second half of the nineteenth century. He was a founding member of the Victorian Institute of Architects as well as the Victorian Institute of Engineers. As architectural adviser to the Church of England, he designed a number of churches including those at St Kilda, Malmsbury, Queenscliff and Brunswick. The St George the Martyr Church of England at Queenscliff is on the Heritage Register as is the St George's Presbyterian Church in St Kilda, also designed by Purchas. Purchas also received a number of commissions for banks in Victoria, including those built for the National Bank at Abbotsford and Richmond. His domestic work included the earliest surviving house in St Kilda built for the Crown Solicitor, Henry Field Gurner in 1854, also on the Heritage Register.

A competition was held for the design of major additions in 1906. The Inspector-General of Public Works, William Davidson and J. Hudson Marsden, architect with the Public Works Department, were asked to assist with the choice of design. The successful architects for the additions were J.J. and E.J. Clark. J.J. Clark then became Honorary Architect for the institution until his death, when his son took over. E.J. Clark remained Honorary Architect for the home until 1937, when he resigned.

J. J. Clark was the designer of the Old Treasury Building (1858-62) and a number of other distinguished public buildings in Melbourne during his period of service in the Victorian Public Works Department. In 1878, he went into private practice. From 1883 to 1886, he was Government Architect for Queensland. In his later years, he practised with his son in Melbourne, winning competitions for the City Baths, the Carlton Refuge, the Melbourne Hospital and many others.

The next Honorary Architect was J. G. Eggleston. No major projects were undertaken in the period when Mr Eggleston was associated with the Home.

The architect for the Isabella Younger Ross Hall (1959) was R.C. Armstrong.

The architects for the design of the 1970-74 extensions consisting of the Mother and Baby Wing, the Residential Nursery and the Day Nursery (Buildings 1-4) were R.S. Demaine, Russell, Trundle, Armstrong and Orton.

Interior

Little original fabric or decoration remains in the interior of the buildings. Many rooms have false ceilings. The dining room in the 1861-63 building retains its original ceiling above the later one. The nurses' room in the hospital (Building 7) has been sub-divided. The 1907 bedrooms remain in their original form and the 1907 administration block is quite intact. The laundry retains no evidence of its original use. The chapel interior remains most intact and reflects its original use.

Secondary sources (selected)

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[CLAN \(Care Leavers Australia Network\) Carlton Refuge \(Keppel Street\)](#)

Carlton Refuge, [History of children's services: the history of the Carlton Refuge from the 1850's to 1920](#), 1992.

Cole, Christina, *Stolen Babies - Broken Hearts: Forced Adoption in Australia 1881-1987*, PhD Thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2013

[Find & Connect: History & information about Australian orphanages, Children's Homes & other institutions](#)

Francis, Rosemary, [Carlton Refuge \(1854-1949\)](#), Australian Women's Register, 2010.

Gleeson, Catherine, [Among the terraces: Carlton's parks and pastimes](#), 1988

National Trust, [Former Carlton Refuge \(Queen Elizabeth Maternal & Child Care Health Centre\)](#)

[Parliament of Victoria Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria*, August 2021.](#)

[PROV, The Female Refuge at Carlton, 2015](#)

Swain, Shurlee with Renate Howe, *Single mothers and their children: disposal, punishment and survival in Australia*, 1995.

Swain, Shurlee, [Female rescue homes](#), eMelbourne: the city past and present, 2008

Swain, Shurlee 2014, *History of institutions providing out-of-home residential care for children*, Australian Catholic University.

Wickham, Dorothy Glennys, [Beyond the Wall: Ballarat Female Refuge, A Study in Moral Authority](#), 2003. [View Publication Details](#)

Primary sources (selected)

[Annual report of the Committee of Management: Carlton Home \(Vic.\), 1931 - 1949. \[View Publication Details\]\(#\)](#)

[Annual report of the Committee of Management: Carlton Refuge \(Vic.\), 1865 - 1930. \[View Publication Details\]\(#\)](#)

[Records of the Carlton Refuge, 1875-1949 \(1875 - 1949\)](#)

['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)

[Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)

Kernot, M.J., *Reminiscences of the Carlton Refuge, 1854 to 1919*, 1919.

Assessment Against Criteria

a. The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history, of the place or object

The Carlton Refuge (Queen Elizabeth Maternal and Child Health Centre) is historically significant as an early charitable institution and the earliest purpose-built residential accommodation for unmarried mothers in Victoria. It is associated with the early history of social welfare and the contribution of the Protestant churches to charitable work in Victoria. It demonstrates the sectarian nature of nineteenth century Victorian society and the strength of the evangelical movement.

b. The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness

The Carlton Refuge (Queen Elizabeth Centre) is a rare surviving example of an early social welfare institution devoted to the welfare of women and children in operation on the same site from 1861 to its closure in 1997.

c. The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage

N/A

d. The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects

e. The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features

N/A

f. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements

N/A

g. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations

The Carlton Refuge (Queen Elizabeth Maternal and Child Health Centre) is important in demonstrating social or cultural associations in its form, illustrating the place of maternal and child health and welfare in the history of Victoria, as well as the place of women, and in particular, sexually active young women, in the social and religious context of nineteenth century Melbourne. The Carlton Refuge and the later institutions on the site illustrate changes in attitudes to women and sexuality since the 1861 foundation. The change in emphasis in the twentieth century to health services for women rather than the reformist zeal of the nineteenth century can be seen in the changes to the buildings. The chapel exemplifies the aims of the founders of the institution, who hoped to inculcate true penitence in the women and inspire them to lead a virtuous life.

h. Any other matter which the Council deems relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance

N/A

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: H1813

Category: Registered Place

Place: Former Carlton Refuge and Chapel Complex

Location: 54–88 Keppel Street and 455–495 Cardigan Street, Carlton

Municipality: City of Melbourne

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 1813 encompassing all of lots CM5, H10A1-H10A4, H10B1, H111-H113, H121, H122, H51-H54, H6A1-H6A4, H6B1, H71, RES1 and RES2 on Plan of Subdivision 640946.

17 April 2025

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

[Government Gazette G16 17 April 2025]

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/>