

CONVENT OF MERCY AND ACADEMY OF MARY IMMACULATE



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IMMACULATE SOHE 2008



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2024. Goold's Residence with
interwar masonry balcony
and verandah in front. Simple
bluestone details visible
behind. Source: Lovell Chen.



2024. Kennedy's residence
with interwar balcony facade
and bluestone residence
visible behind. Source: Lovell
Chen



2024. Ursula Frayne Chapel
(north elevation). Source:
Lovell Chen.



2024. Twelve Sisters House.
Source: Lovell Chen.



2024. Palmer Street Classrooms. Source: Lovell Chen.



2024. North elevation of Palmer Street Classrooms with grotto visible. Source: Lovell Chen.



Aerial extent.

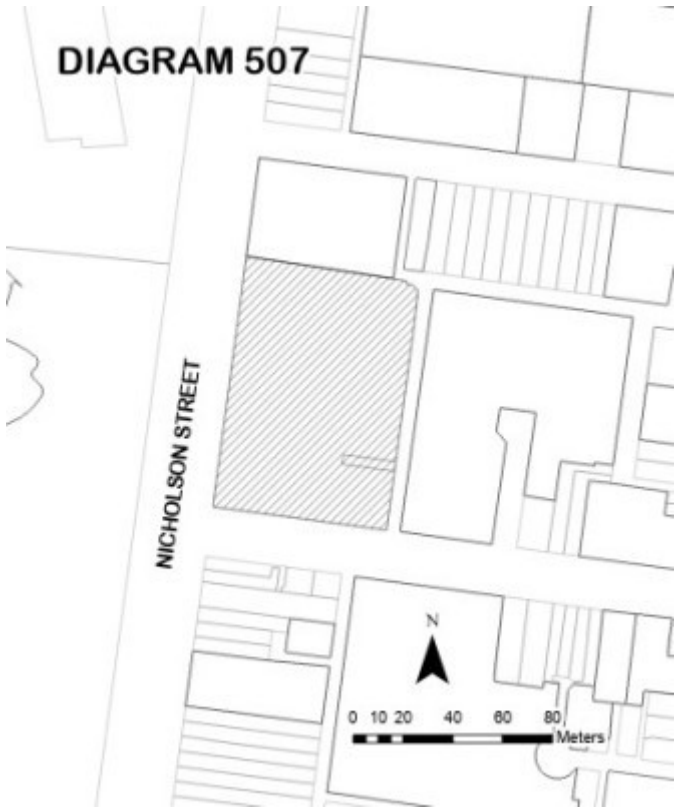


DIAGRAM 507



Areas of greater and lesser sensitivity plan. Source: Lovell Chen.

Location

88 NICHOLSON STREET FITZROY, YARRA CITY

Municipality

YARRA CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0507

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO184

VHR Registration

July 14, 1982

Amendment to Registration

October 10, 2024

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 1, 2025

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is located on Wurundjeri Country.

What is significant?

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate complex, founded in 1857 and consisting of several residential, religious, and educational buildings. Of note are the two 1850 residences on Nicholson Street and the 1854, 1858 and 1861-62 additions to Goold's residence, and the 1862-63 additions to Kennedy's residence, the Ursula Frayne Chapel (1887-1891) and the Palmer Street Classrooms (1869-1871 and 1880-1881). The site contains a broad assortment of ecclesiastical buildings ranging from late nineteenth-century Gothic designs to interwar designs, demonstrating over 150 years of continuous Catholic education at the place.

How is it significant?

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate 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

Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Why is it significant?

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is historically significant for its role in the development of religious institutions and schooling in Victoria. The complex is a reminder of the pivotal role played by Ursula Frayne and the Sisters of Mercy in the establishment of Catholic education and social welfare in Melbourne. It is also of historical significance for the retention of the two 1850 bluestone houses. Although partially obscured by interwar additions, the two 1850 bluestone residences reflect the relative wealth of their owners in pre-separation and pre-gold rush Melbourne, and the development of early suburbs beyond the city grid. They are some of the oldest surviving buildings in the metropolitan area. The southern two-storey bluestone extension (1858) to the rear of Goold's residence is of great importance as the location of the first Catholic Girls' School in Victoria, and also for its use as an orphanage in the early social welfare work of the Catholic Church.

(Criterion A)

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is architecturally significant as a fine collection of largely intact, elegant nineteenth-century religious and residential buildings. The two 1850 residences are thought

to be some of the earliest extant stone houses in Melbourne, and important for their capacity to demonstrate pre-Separation suburban dwellings. The use of bluestone and simple Regency detailing are typical for stone residences of the period. The convent's development of the site reflects an extensive building program, evolving from ad hoc extensions of existing residences to purpose built ecclesiastical buildings. This growth is evidence of the longstanding use of the convent and school. Many of the buildings on the site were designed by prominent architects of nineteenth century Victoria, including Newson and Blackburn (1850 houses), Leonard Terry (Palmer Street classroom building) and Reed Smart and Henderson (Ursula Frayne Chapel).
(Criterion D)

The Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate is significant for its association with Mother Ursula Frayne and the Sisters of Mercy. Frayne is an important figure in the early Australian Catholic Church and established the convent and secondary school after an invitation by Dr James Goold, the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne. Mother Ursula Frayne led the Sisters of Mercy and expansion of their educational activities to include a boarding and day school for girls, as well as two primary schools and a domestic training school for orphans. Her body, and that of Mother Xavier Dillon, are buried in the Chapel beneath a Celtic cross of white marble. The diverse educational and charitable work of the women of the Sisters of Mercy had an important impact on Victoria's history, as the state's first teaching nuns. Following the establishment of this site, numerous Mercy convents and schools were established across Victoria. The Sisters were involved with many education and welfare initiatives across the state. The convent was the first place established by the Sisters of Mercy in the colony of Victoria
(Criterion H)

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:

Area of greater sensitivity

1. Removal or change to non-original fit out, fixtures and fittings provided there are no works to or impact on original or early fabric.
2. Like for like repair and maintenance.

Area of lesser sensitivity

3. All internal alterations, including to fitout, floor layout, plant and equipment.

4. Like for like repair and maintenance to the external building envelope.
5. Demolition of buildings within the area of lesser sensitivity, provided there is no impact on buildings in the area of greater sensitivity.

Theme

8. Building community life

Construction dates	1850,
Architect/Designer	Blackburn, James Jnr,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	482
Property Number	

History

The first two buildings to occupy the elevated Fitzroy site were two almost identical Regency houses erected in 1850 to designs by architects Newson and Blackburn for John Watson and Edward Wight, merchants in partnership. In 1853 the northern house, belonging to Watson, was purchased by Dr James Goold, the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, for use as his official residence, and for a future convent.

An additional wing was constructed in c.1854, expanding the house to the south. Dr Goold had invited Mother Ursula Frayne of the Sisters of Mercy to establish a convent and school in Melbourne. After the completion of his residence at East Melbourne, Dr Goold sold his house to the Sisters of Mercy in 1857 and in 1860 the Sisters acquired the adjoining house and converted it to a school.

Mother Ursula Frayne

Ursula Frayne was born in Dublin in 1816. She became a Sister of Mercy one year after the founding of the Institute of Mercy in Dublin by Mother Catherine McAuley in 1832. In 1842, she was appointed Superior of the institute's first foreign mission in Newfoundland Canada. Just four years later Frayne had led a group of sisters to Perth to staff schools, at the request of then Bishop John Brady. Receiving little financial support from the Bishop, Frayne opened a 'select' fee paying school (for an almost exclusively non-Catholic clientele) so the Sisters could supplement their income.

In 1856 Frayne responded to a request from Bishop James Goold to found a convent in Victoria. Frayne departed Perth for Melbourne and within 6 weeks of her arrival, had raised loans to pay off the mortgage on her convent in Nicholson Street. Under Frayne's direction, the convent undertook extensive building programmes to support the educational and social work of the Sisters of Mercy. The convent included space for a boarding and day school for girls, two primary schools and a domestic training school for orphans. Frayne also founded the St Vincent de Paul's Orphanage in South Melbourne, managing it until the Christian Brothers took over the boys' section.

The Sisters of Mercy

The Sisters of Mercy were the first order of teaching nuns in Victoria, led by Mother Ursula Frayne. Catholic education played an important role in nineteenth-century Victorian society, providing a religious alternative to state schools established under the secular *Victorian Education Act 1872*. This is reflected in the growth and development of the site in the 1870s and 1880s.

The southern two-storey bluestone extension (1858) to the rear of Goold's house is of great importance as the location of the first Catholic Girls' School in Victoria, and also for its use as an orphanage in the early social welfare work of the Catholic Church. After the demolition of St Francis seminary in 1855, it is thought to have become the oldest surviving Catholic educational complex in Victoria.

Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate

Additional bluestone wings were added to the two bluestone residences between 1858 and 1863, to accommodate the school and convent uses. A three-storey bluestone classroom wing was built along Palmer Street in two stages between 1869-71 and 1880-81, to designs by Thomas A Kelly (first stage) and Leonard Terry (second stage). Following the death of Mother Ursula Frayne, a sandstone memorial chapel was built on the corner of Palmer and Nicholson Streets in 1887-89. The chapel was designed by the prominent Melbourne architects, Reed, Henderson and Smart.

A two-storey brick addition, Twelve Sisters House, was also constructed in 1891 at the rear of the convent, for the accommodation of newly arrived nuns from Ireland. The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes was constructed in 1908. Between 1929 and 1933, the rendered facade that forms the overall impression of the building was introduced, creating a covered verandah and balcony in front of the 1850 residences. The last of the sisters departed the convent in 2020. The school continues to operate, now occupying the whole site, a history of over 165 years of education.

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: H0507

Category: Registered Place

Place: Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate

Location: 88 Nicholson Street Fitzroy

Municipality: Yarra City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 507 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 758835, Lot 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on Title Plan 23195, Lot 1 on Title Plan 707025, Lot 1 on Title Plan 354127 and Lot 1 on Title Plan 966253

10 October 2024

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

[Government Gazette G41 10 October 2024 p2041]

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/>