

**BACCHUS MARSH HERITAGE STUDY.**

Ref: 197

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**NAME:** St Bernards Parish Primary School.**PREVIOUS NAME:** St Bernards School, Chapel and Convent**ADDRESS:** Lerderberg Street (west end) and Main Street, via Masonic Lane.**TITLE DETAILS:****USE:** Primary School.**PREVIOUS USE:** Secondary & primary school, chapel and convent.**CONSTRUCTION DATE:** 1900, 1905**SOURCE:** 4**ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS:****DATE:** 1914, 1926, 1956, 1969, 1975.**SOURCE:** 5**DESIGNER:** Convent: D.A. Little. Chapel: Kempson & Connolly**BUILDER:** Chapel: J.F. Taylor**SOURCE:** 4**CRITERIA:** H2,3; So3/ H2; Ar1,3. **HISTORIC THEME:** Community life/Townships**DESCRIPTION:** **STYLE:** Edwardian **STORIES:** 1&2 **DETACHED.****MATERIALS:** **WALLS** Red brick **ROOF** Iron **STRUCTURE** Lb**CONDITION:** Good **INTACTNESS:** Very good**THREATS:** Structural cracks.**SIGNIFICANT INTACT ELEMENTS:****FORM. USE. FENCES/GATES. MARKER. PLANTING FORMATION.****CHAPEL:** FORM, USE, PLAN, EAVES DECORATION, ROOF DECORATION, WALL DECORATION, DOORS, WINDOWS, PAINTWORK SCHEME, UNPAINTED FINISH, INTERIORS, TREES.**SIGNIFICANCE:****TYPE:** HISTORICAL. ARCHITECTURAL. SOCIAL.**LEVEL:** LOCAL.**DESIGNATION EXISTING:** Nil**RECOMMENDED CONTROL:** PLANNING SCHEME. AREA 1.**MAP NO:** U3.07 & U4.07**SURVEY:** RP**DATE:** 29.1.94**NEGS:** 16,17, 18, 17.8, 12-17

**HISTORY:** In April 1890, five Josephite sisters arrived in Bacchus Marsh, at the invitation of the parish priest, to establish a convent school for the Catholic children of the district. Classes commenced at the Fiskin Street Catholic School (ref: 164A) on April 14, 1890. Six months later, St Joseph's Convent moved to The Bungalow, the large Victorian house built by Dr Rae on the present school site. The enrolment was one hundred and eight.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Rae had built the Bungalow in 1880, when ill-health had forced him to leave his practice at Dunglass (ref: 162). Dr Vance then occupied the Bungalow until it was bought by the Sisters of St Joseph in 1890 as their convent. It was demolished early this century.<sup>2</sup>

The Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph was founded in South Australia in 1866 by the Blessed Mother Mary McKillop. Receiving formal approval from Rome in 1888, the order expanded its mission into Victoria and the other states. Convents were established in Numurkah and Surrey Hills in 1890, Footscray in 1894, Yarraville in 1895, and Williamstown in 1900. By 1909, the year McKillop died, 650 Josephite sisters were teaching 12,409 children in 117 Catholic schools in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

At first in Bacchus Marsh, the order attracted to its ranks educated women committed to an intelligent and ambitious program of academic education. For example, in the period to 1921, prior to the opening of the Bacchus Marsh High School, St Bernard's was the only institution to offer secondary education in Bacchus Marsh.

In 1900, a two-storey convent was erected behind The Bungalow facing Main Street. Designed by D.A. Little, the building had classrooms at ground floor level, and living quarters for the sisters and boarders above.<sup>4</sup> Adjoining the convent, in 1905, a chapel was erected by J.F. Taylor to the design of the architects, Kempson and Connolly. Christopher Crisp, editor of the *Bacchus Marsh Express*, thought the completed oratory a "jewel of a building", and Archbishop Carr blessed the chapel on April 30, 1905.<sup>5</sup> The Bungalow, was demolished in 1914, and the first part of a brick school wing was erected in its place. The three-classroom wing was extended in 1926, a Parish Hall (now library and art room) was built in 1956, and an administration block erected in 1969.<sup>6</sup> Enrolments exceeded 300 in 1971, necessitating a new classroom block which Archbishop Little opened on December 12, 1975. The Sisters of St Joseph left the school (now St Bernard's) in 1986 and the first lay principal was appointed in 1987.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan, *A Seed is Sown*, p.30.

<sup>2</sup> Moore & Oomes, *Bacchus Marsh: A Pictorial Chronicle*, p.46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2; Gardiner, *Mary McKillop: An Extraordinary Australian*, p.373.

<sup>4</sup> Wheelahan, *A Century of Dedicated Service in Bacchus Marsh*, p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart, *The Early History of Bacchus Marsh Schools*, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Wheelahan, *op.cit.*, pp.15-19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

**VISUAL DESCRIPTION:**

A. Chapel A red brick Decorated Gothic ecclesiastical building of 1905. It has (rare) green slate gable roof with terra-cotta cresting in a cruciform pattern. There are gable vents. There is a three-bay schoolroom with a smaller room on the axis and the entrance porch going from the side of that. Windows are pointed segmental head with two lancets, the label moulds with foliate steps. There is a render band at cill height. The east end has a triple lancet window. There is a cornice moulding with coved corbels at the gable parapet ends, with gablets.

B. Exterior A gable roofed red brick building of 1926.

C. Convent A two-storey red brick with (unpainted) roughcast and weatherboard infill of 1900. The gable roof has decorative loopy barges and oculus vents. It is double-fronted symmetrically, facing south with a round-headed entry. There are cream-brick dressings on this front. Across it and returning on two sides is a double-storey verandah on brick piers, added later.

The Garden. The garden surrounding the convent and chapel indicate that plantings were for functional purposes and for pleasure. A stone embankment and wall is adjacent to the chapel, planted with agapanthus. A large cypress screens the garden from the south. Large peppercorn trees are randomly planted along the east boundary, with specimen trees and shrubs in the lawns and around the perimeter of the buildings. The rear garden has an interesting paved area consisting of 'crazy paving' in concrete pieces.

Plant species include:

|                                    |                         |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Cupressus macrocarpa</i>        | Monterey Cypress        |
| <i>Schinus molle</i>               | Peppercorn Tree         |
| <i>Cotoneaster serotinus</i>       | Cotoneaster             |
| <i>Prunus armeniaca</i>            | Apricot                 |
| <i>Syringa vulgaris</i>            | Lilac                   |
| <i>Nerium oleander</i>             | Oleander                |
| <i>Agapanthus orientalis/alloa</i> | Blue & white Agapanthus |
| <i>Coprosma oepens</i>             | Mirror Bush             |
| <i>Chaenomeles japonica</i>        | Flowering Quince        |
| <i>Citrus limon</i>                | Lemon                   |
| <i>Bradrychiton populneus</i>      | Kurrajong               |
| <i>Ligustrum sinense</i>           | Chinese Privet          |
| <i>Hedera helix</i>                | English Ivy             |
| Eucalyptus....                     |                         |
| <i>Cedrus atlantica 'glauca'</i>   | Blue Atlas Cedar.       |

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:** This was the only secondary school in Bacchus Marsh until the opening of the High School in 1922. Until the opening of Bacchus Marsh (Anglican) Grammar School, recently, it was the only non-government school here. The chapel is one of the ten churches in Bacchus Marsh identified in the Study. Two other Catholic churches are Decorated Gothic: the Protestants prefer Early English. Kempson and Connolly also designed Our Lady Help of Christians church at Korobeit in the same year, 1905 (ref: 284A).

**SIGNIFICANCE:** A two-storey brick convent and school, designed by D.A. Little and built in 1900. Also, a brick, Decorated Gothic chapel designed by Kempson and Connolly and opened in 1905. There are various additions between 1914 and 1975.

The complex is of local historical significance for its association with religious and educational developments in the community life of Bacchus Marsh and for demonstrating its association with the Blessed Mother Mary McKillop. It is of local social significance as traditional community focus and meeting place.

The chapel is of local architectural significance as a representative example of the design of Kempson and Connolly and as an intact example of an Edwardian rural chapel in the Decorated Gothic style.

**INTACTNESS:** Very good. The Chapel lacks one parapet cross. It needs maintenance.

**CONDITIONS & THREATS:** Good. There is vertical cracking on the centre north wall of the Convent.

PAYTERS STREET

