

Building:	Convent of the Good Shepherd	Significance:	A
Address:	Clarke Street / St Heliers Street, Abbotsford	Melway Map Ref:	2D C9
Building Type:	Convent	Construction Date:	1863-1908
Architect:	J B Denny; Thomas Kelly; Reed Smart & Tappin	Builder:	Unknown



Intactness:		Condition:	
G <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	F <input type="checkbox"/>	P <input type="checkbox"/>	
Existing Heritage Listings:		Recommended Heritage Listings:	
Victorian Heritage Register	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Victorian Heritage Register	<input type="checkbox"/>
Register of the National Estate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Register of the National Estate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
National Trust	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Heritage Overlay Controls	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

History

Crown allotments 77 and 64 on the Yarra River at Abbotsford, were first sold in 1839 to Henry William Hutchinson Smythe, brother-in-law of the first Police Magistrate, Captain William Lonsdale. The land was subdivided by its owner from 1840, James Erskine Murray, in 1842.¹ One of these riverside allotments was purchased by Edward Curr, who built a house on the site, and named it St Helier.² In the late 1850s, Curr's house was shown on a map of the Collingwood. The St Helier house garden featured a geometric layout, with pathways leading south to what was possibly an orchard on the river frontage.³ When Curr died in 1850, his trustees had leased the St Helier property in two parts. The house and house garden comprised one part, while the lower garden and riverbank paddock formed the other. In 1865, Curr's widow, Elizabeth, sold the estate to the Right Rev. James A Goold for £4,000.⁴

To the west of St Helier, the politician John Orr purchased another gentlemen's farmlet, which he called the Abbotsford Estate. Orr constructed a large stone house, Abbotsford House, on the land.⁵ Around this he developed ornamental grounds, with extensive tree-lined paths, walled garden and a fountain. It is possible that the house was built in 1842, but a much more likely date for its construction appears to be 1854.⁶ In 1850, Orr enlarged the estate, through the purchase of land north of St Heliers Street.

From the late 1850s in Victoria, refuges for women and children were set up by non-government, usually church-based organisations. Other early refuges included the Sisters of Mercy House of Mercy (1860), and the Female Refuge (in South Yarra, later in Swanston Street, Carlton, c.1861).⁷

In 1863, four Catholic sisters, the pioneers of the Good Shepherd Order, arrived in Australia. The order was one of the earliest to be established in Victoria, preceded only by the Mercy Convent in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. Following their arrival in the colony, the sisters were taken to view a number of 'available properties' by the Bishop. Eventually, the Order purchased Abbotsford House, where they opened their women's refuge, which was known as the Magdalen Asylum, and minor renovations were made to the residence as part of its conversion to a reformatory.⁸ The Good Shepherd Order purchased the adjoining St Helier's estate for £4,500 in 1865.⁹

Between 1864 and 1868, the Good Shepherd Order expanded its operations at Abbotsford with the establishment of two institutions for criminal and neglected girls. These private institutions comprised an industrial school and reformatory at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, and St Joseph's Industrial School in Geelong.¹⁰ The Industrial School was the first substantial new building to be constructed on the site following the arrival of the Good Shepherd Order. It was designed by architect, J B Denny, and was a 'fine brick building' of two storeys.

The next major building to be constructed on the site was the memorial chapel, designed by architect, Thomas Kelly, and now known as the Church of the Immaculate Conception,

The foundation stone for the chapel, which was located north-east of the Convent building (Abbotsford House), and was constructed of bluestone, with Malmsbury stone dressings, was laid early in 1870.¹¹ It was later greatly enlarged in 1880, through the extension of the transepts, and the addition of a southern aisle to the nave and a western octagonal spire (1888).¹²

Between 1872 and 1877, additions were made to the convent at Abbotsford House, and to the Industrial School of 1868. They consisted of additions to the rear of Abbotsford House, and substantial ward additions on the south side of the Industrial School Building.

In 1879, a Catholic Common School for female students was erected in St Heliers Street. The school catered for the children of the Industrial School, but also had local day students. The school, which was named St Euphrasia's after the founder of the order, was blessed by the Archbishop on 14 June 1879.¹³

In 1899 a new Convent building was designed by the architectural firm of Reed Smart & Tappin.¹⁴ The foundation stone for the building was laid by the Rev. T J Carr, Archbishop of Melbourne, on 11 November 1900.¹⁵ The new Convent was blessed by the Archbishop on 24

June 1902.¹⁶ The construction of the new Convent involved the demolition of the original convent building, Abbotsford House.¹⁷

In 1908, new buildings for the Sacred Heart Class were constructed, under the supervision of Mr Harper, Clerk-of-Works.¹⁸ These buildings included a 'classroom, refractory, dormitories etc.'¹⁹ St Mary's was constructed soon after, in 1912.²⁰

The complex at Abbotsford was all but complete by the outbreak of World War I, and appears to have been little altered until the addition of a number of buildings in the 1970s. An additional school building constructed in the c. 1940s was been converted for use as a kindergarten. The last major residential building in the complex ceased operation in 1973-74.²¹

The Abbotsford site was purchased in 1975 by the State Government on behalf of Lincoln Institute, for the establishment of a major educational complex incorporating the Lincoln Institute's programs and the University of Melbourne's School of Early Childhood Studies.²²

In early 1993, La Trobe University became the owner of a major portion of the land, on four separate titles. The remainder of the site was brought under the administration of the Department of Conservation and Lands (now the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), managed and occupied by the Collingwood Children's Farm.²³

The site is currently subject to negotiations regarding a development proposal being prepared by Australand Properties.

Description

The former Convent of the Good Shepherd comprises a complex of buildings picturesquely sited on a large landscaped site bounded by the Yarra River to the north, east and south. Built in stages over a forty year period, the most significant buildings include the main convent building and Annex, the Sacred Heart Building, St Anne's, St Euphrasia's, Providence and Rosina. Typical of 19th century institutional complexes, the buildings are planned around courtyards.

The main convent building is located at the west end of the site adjacent to the chapel. It is a three-storey, U-shaped building comprising three gable wings around a central open quadrangle. The building is of unpainted roughcast rendered brick construction, with brick dressings to the door and window openings. The gabled roofs are clad in slate. A segmental arched verandah runs along the central section of the south elevation with buttressed piers to the ground floor and a skillion roofed verandah to the first floor. The open cloisters along the east and west sides of the quadrangle have columns with foliated Romanesque capitals on brick and roughcast rendered pedestals, and square impost blocks which support stilted lancet arches. The window openings along the ground floor have stilted lancet arched heads, the first floor are lancet arched and the second floor have flat lancet arches.

The Convent Annex is located immediately to the east of the main convent and comprises two single-storey pavilions, of brick construction with corrugated iron gabled roofs.

The original 1868 section at the north end of the Sacred Heart building comprises an L-shaped double-storey red brick structure with bluestone footings and buttresses, with a hipped slate roof. The southern section is a two and three-storey U-shaped brick building with bluestone footings, stepped buttresses and hipped and gable roofs clad with terracotta tiles. The elevations which face onto the central courtyard have a roughcast rendered finish, with smooth cement rendered lintels and sills to the door and window openings. Paired double-hung sashes replace the original window joinery.

St Anne's is a rectangular planned single-storey structure which encloses the north-west side of the courtyard. It is of brick construction with buttressed external walls and a terracotta tiled hipped roof with overhanging eaves. The walls are roughcast rendered and have ruled rendered trims. The windows are paired double-hung sashes and doors are flush panel timber or half-glazed vertical boarded doors with fanlights.

St Euphrasia's is a double-storey brick structure with bluestone footings and a gabled slate roof. A gabled pediment, located centrally along the main north elevation, is surmounted by a pressed cement cross. The walls are ruled ashlar render with stepped buttresses and with a string course between the floors. The original door and window openings appear originally to have had segmental arched heads, and have been modified to form square-headed rectilinear openings with paired and triple steel-framed double-hung sashes. The chimneys are ruled ashlar render with moulded caps. A steel-framed asbestos cement clad two-storey addition has been constructed along the rear, or south, elevation.

Providence, similar to St Euphrasia's, is a double-storey, rectangular planned, brick structure with bluestone footings and a slate gabled roof with parapeted gable ends. The north, south and west elevations are ashlar rendered with a string course between the floors. The west elevation is red face brick with bluestone lintels and sills.

Planned in a U-shape, Rosina comprises a central double-storey wing with two single-storey pavilions at the rear, enclosing a central courtyard. The brick building is designed in an Edwardian Baroque style. The central wing has a gabled slate roof with projecting pedimented parapeted gable end bays. The external walls and roughcast rendered, with ruled render trim.

Significance

The former Convent of the Good Shepherd is of state historical and architectural significance.

The Convent was one of the first to be established by the order of the Good Shepherd in Victoria, and played a primary role in the establishment of the order throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Convent performed a dominant role in the expansion of charitable facilities during the late 19th and early 20th century building programme of the Catholic Church.

The Convent is an early example of the provision of privately operated reformatories and industrial schools, which was used later in the 19th century as a model for the development of the state's policy of social rehabilitation. The expansion of the complex is associated with a period of rapid growth of Collingwood—and of Melbourne generally—in the late 19th century.

The complex also possesses the oldest known surviving privately built industrial school in Victoria.

The buildings are substantially intact examples of 19th and early 20th century institutional architecture. The convent comprises a visually cohesive complex of buildings, enhanced by their notable landscaped riverside setting. Individually, many of the buildings are outstanding expressions of the 19th century Gothic Revival style. The Convent building is a substantial work of the important architectural firm, Reed, Smart and Tappin.

The complex possesses notable landmark qualities. The steeply pitched roof lines of the buildings dominate the immediate area, particularly as approached from the Johnston Street Bridge, where the buildings rise above the landscaped grounds on the riverside.

The Convent was an important corrective and training centre for delinquent girls in the 19th century. It played an important role within the Collingwood community, fulfilling over a long period a charitable and educational role.

Original Source

Graeme Butler. *Abbotsford Campus Master Plan 1986-1996*. 1986.

Allom Lovell & Associates. *La Trobe University Abbotsford Campus: A Heritage Appraisal*. August 1994.

1 A Lemon. *The Abbotsford Campus: The Historical Background of its Place Names*.

- 2 *ibid.* Andrew Lemon's research indicates that St Helier is the correct form of the name of Curr's house, though a number of versions have been in common use since then.
- 3 *ibid.* p. 2-2, 2-3.
- 4 *ibid.* p. 2-1.
- 5 *ibid.* p. 2-1.
- 6 *ibid.* p. 2-2.
- 7 *ibid.* p. 1-2.
- 8 *ibid.* p. 2-3.
- 9 Quoted in *ibid.* p. A-5.
- 10 *ibid.* p. 1-4.
- 11 *ibid.* p. 2-4.
- 12 M Lewis (ed.). *Victorian Churches: Their Origins, Their Story & Their Architecture.* p. 66. See also G Butler & Associates. *op. cit.* p. A-12.
- 13 Quoted in *ibid.* p. A-9.
- 14 Quoted in *ibid.* p. A-13.
- 15 Quoted in *ibid.* p. A-13.
- 16 Quoted in *ibid.* p. A-13.
- 17 National Trust of Australia (Victoria). Research into Good Shepherd Convent, Abbotsford.
- 18 Quoted in G Butler & Associates. *op. cit.* p. A-14.
- 19 Quoted in *ibid.* p. A-4.
- 20 Historic Buildings Council. Report to the Minister.
- 21 Historic Buildings Council. Report to Minister.
- 22 Education: Latrobe University. May 1990.
- 23 Abbotsford Campus: La Trobe University. February 1994.