

Heritage Overlay **090**
Citation No.: **240**
Place: **St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church**

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: Smith Street, Melton
Critical Dates: 1877
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: Local



Statement of Significance:

St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church, Smith Street, Melton, has significance as a predominantly intact example of a Victorian Early English Gothic Revival style and as a legacy of the development of the Catholic Church in Melton.

St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church, Smith Street, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2, E.1). It demonstrates original design qualities of a Victorian Early English Gothic Revival style. These qualities include the steeply pitched gable roof, together with the minor gable porch at the front and the rear gabled vestry that projects at the side. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the face brick wall construction, slate roof tiles, modest eaves, pointed arched diamond leadlight windows, pointed arched lancet window with rendered drip mould in the gable end, face brick buttresses with rendered copings, vertical timber boarded

and pointed arched doors, decorative iron hinges to the porch doors and the crosses that adorn the gable ends.

St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church, Smith Street, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It is one of only three remaining nineteenth century churches in the Shire of Melton, and the only one to be constructed in unrendered brick.

St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church, Smith Street, is socially significant at a LOCAL level (AHC G.1). It is recognised and valued by the local Catholic community of Melton as an symbol of their faith and their history of local participation in faith education.

Overall, St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church, Smith Street, is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church, Smith Street, Melton, is set amongst asphalt car parking and playing areas.

The face brick, Victorian Early English Gothic Revival styled church building is characterised by a steeply pitched gable roof, together with a minor gable porch at the front and a rear gabled vestry that projects at the side. These roof forms are clad in early slate tiles. Modest overhangs are features of the eaves.

The three bays of pointed arched diamond leadlight windows at the sides of the building are early, as is the lancet window with rendered drip mould in the gable end. The sides of the building, porch and vestry also have early face brick buttresses with rendered copings.

Other early features of the design include the vertical timber boarded and pointed arched doors, decorative iron hinges to the porch doors and the crosses that adorn the gable ends.

Security wire mesh screens have been introduced over the windows.

History:

Melton was originally part of the Keilor ‘mission’ (or parish) of the Catholic Church. Previous to that time Archdeacon Downing, to become known for his part in the events at the Eureka Stockade, occasionally celebrated Mass in the barn of Mr John Leahy in Bacchus Marsh. Later the Catholics in the district gathered to attend Mass at the home of the Hogg family, west of Toolern Vale.

The first Catholic institution in the Shire of Melton was also in this northern part, though further east, near the junction of the east and west branches of Kororoit Creek on the Holden Road. The district included many Irish names amongst the pioneering landowners, many of whom, no doubt, contributed to demand for a church and school.¹ On the site of a 2 acre site gazetted ‘RC Church’ in 186?, was, according to local history, ‘St Catherines Church’.² The great grandmother of Mrs Mary Tolhurst attended this church c.1856-1860.³ Church history records only that a 40 x 18 ft weatherboard school was opened there in 1861, with an average

¹ Eg, Yangardook and Holden parish plans show Moylan, Sullivan, O’Neil, Ryan, Bourke, O’Connor and Phelan close to this site.

² Yangardook Parish Plan

³ Untitled typescript (nd), Melton and District Historical Society. Reproduced in MDHS Newsletter, 20/6/2001.

attendance of 34.⁴ Education history records the establishment of Catholic School No.362 on Kororoit Creek in 1862. It was a tiny shingle roofed wooden building. Attendance gradually declined from the initial 35, and the school closed in 1875 when the supervisor could not obtain a teacher (probably because denominational schools became self-funding at this time, when this provision of the 1872 Education Act was implemented). A few years later the school was destroyed by fire.⁵

In 1854 the Melton district had become part of the newly formed Bacchus Marsh 'mission' under the charge of the W Shinnick as pastor. There was no priest resident at Melton. In 1861 an application was successfully made by the Vicar General for two acres in the township of Melton, trustees being the Bacchus Marsh priest Fr E O'Connell, and locals Thomas Ryan, Michael Bourke and Michael Brady.⁶ The land was on the street where the Wesleyan church had been built in 1867 and Christ Church (Anglican) had been consecrated by Bishop Perry in 1872.

With the arrival of Fr TJ O'Callaghan at Bacchus Marsh (then Gisborne) several decades later, church building in the large parish escalated. After building permanent churches at Gisborne (1872, cost £4000), Riddell's Creek (1872) and Bacchus Marsh (1874), O'Callaghan turned his attention to Melton (1877, cost £1400).

Its foundation stone was laid by Archbishop Goold in 1876, who then administered the first Sacrament of Confirmation in an outdoor ceremony. Some £60 was subscribed towards the cost. Three months later, on Sunday 25th February 1877, the archbishop dedicated the church in the name of St John Chrystostom. *The Advocate* reported that a large congregation was present to hear the sermon preached by Rev JJ McGillicuddy of Williamstown, who eulogised Fr O'Callaghan 'for his zeal in obtaining, in so short a time, the funds required to erect the church'.⁷ The *Bacchus Marsh Express* reported that 'representatives of nearly all religious denominations' were present, and that the sermon had been based on Matthew 17: 1-9.⁸ The musical portions of the service were provided by the choir of St Bridget's church Gisborne. Again a good collection of £60 was collected, to which would be added an amount received from sale of '400 tickets at 7/6 each'. The completion of the church was said to 'add considerably to the appearance of Melton'.⁹

Reports in *The Advocate* indicate that by 1897 the name of the church had unaccountably changed to St Dominics.¹⁰ However, it was not until the 'satellite city' boom of recent decades that St Dominics was established as a separate parish. It thus was very different from most Catholic parishes in having no resident priest, and no school, for most of its history. The Melton Catholics are now proud of the comparatively greater role they have played in the transmission of their faith.¹¹ From the 1890s to about 1915 Mary McKillop's Sisters of St Joseph had travelled from Bacchus Marsh on a Saturday to provide religious instruction, but this was taken over by local women, firstly a Miss Monnie McGuire, then in 1924 by Mrs Nora

⁴ Ebsworth, W, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria* (Polding Press, Melbourne, 1973) p.203

⁵ Blake, *Vision and Realisation*, pp. 31, 77; See also Starr, J, Melton:Plains of Promise, pp.174-5

⁶ Township of Melton; Untitled typescript, *op cit*. (In 1868 another local, Michael Carew, was included amongst the trustees. It is elsewhere stated that the land was donated by Thomas Ryan.)

⁷ *The Advocate*, 3/3/1877. Also the *Argus*, 27 February 1877, p.5.

⁸ Cited in Untitled typescript, *op cit*.

⁹ *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 25/2/1877.

¹⁰ *The Advocate*, 20/3/1897, p.16 as cited in miscellaneous typed document of MDHS.

¹¹ Several untitled and undated MDHS typescripts attest to this.

Smith (33 years), and then by a committee of ladies whose particular zeal is said to have been the subject of comment in wider Catholic circles.¹²

The original church was described as being constructed of ‘solid brick building, resting on bluestone foundations’.¹³ Short historical typescripts and transcriptions of speeches made at the declaration of the parish and the opening of the new school in the mid 1970s describe the subsequent changes to the original church as having been:- a second vestry on the north side (variously described as having been added for altar boys, or for use as a Confessional) was added by Fr Guy Gavan Duffy (early-mid twentieth century); the choir gallery was removed; a confessional was removed from the rear northern side; wooden side altars, altar rails and other major remodelling of the sanctuary in the wake of Vatican II. The church has four stained glass windows, one of which was given by parishioners in memory of Fr Horan (1887-1909). In 1939 wooden painted Stations of the Cross were added. The five rung slip-rail fence (the scene of local farming gatherings and gossip after Mass) and the weatherboard stables became redundant as the motor car began to appear in the early twentieth century. Materials from the stables were used to build a tennis court clubhouse in the early twentieth century.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Community’

Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire:

There were four masonry Victorian Gothic Revival styled church buildings constructed in the Shire of Melton in the nineteenth century. St. Dominics Roman Catholic Church represents the only nineteenth century Catholic Church to survive in the Shire, and the only one of these buildings that was constructed of brick. The three other churches were constructed in the 1860s. Two of these three - the Uniting (former Presbyterian) Church in Yuille Street, and Christ Church at the corner of Unitt and Yuille Streets (now demolished) - have been included in heritage overlays in the Melton Shire Planning Scheme.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Substantially intact

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>Yes</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>

¹² *ibid.* Printed as article in MDHS Newsletter, July 2001.

¹³ *Some of the Fruits of the First Fifty Years: Annals of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, (Melbourne, 1897), pp.65-66

