

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name	St Joseph's Catholic Church		
Address	5 Axe Creek Road AXE CREEK	Grading	2008 Local
Building Type	Church		
Assessment by	Context Pty Ltd		



Recommended Heritage Protection	VHR No HI No PS Yes		
Designer / Architect	Hanlon, Harold	Architectural Style	Interwar Period (c.1919-c.1940)
Maker / Builder	No information held		

Integrity

High

History and Historical Context

History of Shire of Strathfieldsaye

The land around the former Shires of Strathfieldsaye and McIvor had a long history prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Jaara Jaara people are the original inhabitants of the area.

The area around Port Phillip was explored by Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General of New South Wales, and a large party in 1836, on the homeward leg of a journey to Portland Bay. Impressed by what he perceived as the bounty of the land, Mitchell named the area *Australia Felix*.^[1]

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

The Port Phillip district was opened up for settlement soon thereafter, and much of the land in the Western districts of Victoria, including the former Shires of McIvor and Strathfieldsaye, was subsequently dominated by a series of pastoral runs. Most of the area around the town of Axedale and the numerous small towns in its vicinity was licensed to David Jennings as part of the Campaspe Plains run. The run covered an area of more than 144,900 acres and was populated with an estimated 12,000 sheep. A portion of Campaspe Plains was licensed to A. Jennings and George Playne in 1840 and the 67,000 acre station became known as Axedale. In the coming decade the holders of the license changed a number of times. By the time the leasehold over the land was cancelled in 1865, the run had greatly reduced in size.[2]

Following the cancellation of leasehold, land holdings were of a smaller scale and pastoralists were gradually overtaken by farmers. The discovery of gold at Bendigo and the surrounding areas changed the face of the district and brought about new patterns of settlement and expansion. William John Bulling claimed to be the first man to discover gold at McIvor, and he was granted a £400 reward for the find. By 1853, over one hundred prospectors had assembled at Wild Duck Creek in the hopes of striking it rich. This number expanded the following year, and included some 2,000 Chinese immigrants.[3]

The Strathfieldsaye Road District was proclaimed in the Government Gazette on the 12th August 1861, and encompassed within it the parishes of Axedale, Strathfieldsaye, Eppalock, Mandurang, Sedgwick and Lyell.[4] The process of election of the board was punctuated by rivalries between Catholic and Protestant faiths, a characteristic of the district which infiltrates much of its history. Strathfieldsaye met the criterion prescribed to become a Shire in 1863, a transition that was officially proclaimed on the 17th September of that year.[5]

In 1864, Strathfieldsaye Shire was divided into three wards; Mandurang, Strathfieldsaye and Axedale.[6]

History of Axe Creek

Axe Creek was incorporated into the parish of Strathfieldsaye when it was surveyed in 1854. Much of its development occurred in conjunction with the nearby towns of Strathfieldsaye, Eppalock and Emu Creek, which were all located within 20 miles of one another. The land provided good soil for cultivation, a fact that was not missed by pastoralists, who continued to move into the region. The proximity of the creek was of added benefit to farmers, and provided a good water source for their crops and animals and providing rich soils that were suitable for the planting of orchards and vineyards. By the 1880s, there were several major winegrowers operating in the vicinity of Axe Creek.[7] Bendigo was a source of stable markets for the produce of Axe Creek, including its wines, fruits and vegetables.

The influx of prospectors during the 1850s and the frequency of travellers along the road to Bendigo prompted the construction of a number of hotels in and around Axe Creek. One of these was the Axe Creek Bridge Hotel was in operation in 1863, and was also used as a polling place for the district.[8] The wine industry developed from the 1860s, and a number of German immigrants who settled in the region planted successful vineyards. The wine industry was devastated following a Phylloxera outbreak in the 1890s, and many vineyards were converted to orchards after that time.

The timber industry was also important to the development of Axe Creek. Construction of the railway from Bendigo to Heathcote in the late 1880s was beneficial to timber cutters, who prior to that time had carted their stocks to and from Bendigo, where they found a stable market in the mining industry.

Denominational schooling facilities had been established by the 1860s, and a state school opened in 1876.

History of St Joseph's Catholic Church, 5 Axe Creek Road, Axe Creek

St. Joseph's Church was built in 1937 in response to an outcry from the local community with regard to the inadequacy of

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

their present facilities of worship, which were conducted from as early as 1865 at the old Axe Creek State School No 796. Increasing maintenance costs of this building led in the early 1920s to the formation of a committee in order to raise money for a new church.[9] The Axe Creek Race Club was formed and profits made from the race meetings held went towards the new building. The original structure was said to have been sold to Herb Lowndes to be used as a shearing shed. Fundraising efforts for the new building commenced, including balls, euchre nights, and concerts supplemented the existing horse racing funds and were generously added to by community benefactors.

The church was built upon land that had been donated by Tom and Jim McMahon, local Axe Creek farmers, after some debate over its location. There had been disagreement over whether to rebuild the church on the original site, or to move it further north. Tom and Jim MacMahon's property was located at the crossroads of the Longlea, Axe Creek, Strathfieldsaye and Eppalock roads.[10]

The foundation stone for the new building was laid in a ceremony held on the 12th December 1937 and the stone was blessed by the most Rev John McCarthy D.D Bishop of Sandhurst.[11] The ceremony was attended by a congregation of almost three hundred people[12], a reflection of the local enthusiasm for the project. Prior to laying the stone, locals had also been involved in clearing the land upon which the Church was to be built, and a number of working bees were held.[13] The contract for the construction of the building was let to J. J. Moran, a builder of Bendigo, who tendered the sum of £1,700 for the work. He completed construction of the building in four months.[14]

St. Joseph's Church was designed by H.L Hanlon of Benalla. The building was described in *The Advocate* as follows:

"The new church is of beautiful design. It is of brick with plastered base. The windows are of circular headed steel, with tapestry brick arches both inside and outside. There is a 4' x 6' tapestry dado with colortex reaching to the ceiling, which is of plaster sheeting. In the sanctuary there is a stained glass window above the altar. Seating accommodation is for 200."[15]

Little is known of H. L. Hanlon, except that he operated architectural practices in Benalla and Warangaratta. In 1938 he designed a house at Warangaratta for Dr. J. Kelly.[16]

St. Joseph's incorporated an altar originally from St. Aidan's in Bendigo and pews from the original 1865 church. St. Joseph's was opened soon after construction of the building was completed, in a ceremony led by Counsellor Tom Somerville.[17]

The church was in 2008 owned by the Roman Catholic Trusts Corporation and operational as a church.

[1] Randell, J. O. (1985). *McIvor: A History of the Shire and the Township of Heathcote*, Shire of McIvor, p. 1.

[2] Spreadborough, Robert and Anderson, Hugh (1983). *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, p. 150.

[3] Spreadborough & Anderson (1983), p. 31.

[4] Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria, pp. 11 - 12.

[5] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 18.

[6] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 107.

[7] Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd (2002), *Heathcote - Strathfieldsaye Thematic History*, City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo, p. 26.

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

[8] Mitchell, Barbara (2005). *On the Creeks: Early Life at Strathfieldsaye in the Valley of the Three Creeks - Axe, Emu and Sheepwash*, Barbara Mitchell, Bendigo, Victoria, p. 99.

[9] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.146.

[10] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.146.

[11] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.146.

[12] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.147.

[13] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.147.

[14] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.147.

[15] *The Advocate*, 16/12/1937, as cited in Mitchell, B. (2005), p.147.

[16] Miles Lewis Architectural Index, State Library of Victoria.

[17] Mitchell, B. (2005), p.147.

Secondary sources

Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd (2002), *Heathcote - Strathfieldsaye Thematic History*, City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo.

Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria.

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Relevant Historical Australian Themes

8 Building Community Life.

8.1 Maintaining spiritual life.

Description

Physical Description

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

St Joseph's Catholic church is designed in the Neo Romanesque style in face red brick with a terra cotta tile roof. The nave is of three bays in length with expressed brick piers. Each bay contains a pair of round arch windows with dark tapestry brick dressings and brick sills. The porch window is tripartite with stucco dressings, and the gable end is decorated with timber strapping in an Edwardian manner. Later alterations include a modern render to the base, and a concrete ramp. The interior has not been investigated.

Physical Condition

Good

Conservation Policy

The following works are recommended to conserve the building:

Regular painting of all exterior timber.

It is recommended that the face brick not be painted.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The fabric of the 1937 brick church including the stained glass window in the sanctuary, the pews from the previous Catholic church at Axe Creek, and the altar from St Aidan's in Bendigo are significant. The toilet block and the concrete ramp are not significant.

How is it significant?

St Joseph's Catholic Church at Axe Creek is locally significant to the City of Greater Bendigo.

Why is it significant?

St Joseph's Catholic Church is historically significant for its associations with John McCarthy, a former Bishop of Sandhurst who presided over the opening. Although construction is dated to the comparatively late date of 1937, St Joseph's is the first purpose built Catholic Church in Axe Creek. *Criterion A*

St Joseph's is of aesthetic significance for its very late demonstration of the neo Romanesque style with the rounded windows constructed of contemporary materials including tapestry bricks. The interior is significant for the church fittings both designed, and derived from other places of worship. *Criterion D*

The church is of social significance for the Axe Creek community whose forbears donated the land and raised the funds to complete the church. It is also of social significance as a place of continuous worship for over seventy years, and as a continuation of worship in the Axe Creek location for over 140 years. *Criterion G*

Assessment Against Criteria

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

HERCON CRITERIA

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion A*

Possession of uncommon rare or endangers aspects of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion B*

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion C*

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments.
Criterion D

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics. *Criterion E*

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period. *Criterion F*

Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions.
Criterion G

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history. *Criterion H*

Recommendations 2008

External Paint Controls

Yes

Internal Alteration Controls

No

Tree Controls

No

Fences & Outbuildings

No

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

No

Incorporated Plan

Yes

Aboriginal Heritage Place

No

Other Recommendations

It is recommended that St Joseph's Church at 5 Axe Creek Road, Axe Creek be added as an individual place to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme with the schedule entry as shown below. The extent of registration is the whole of the property as defined by the title boundaries. The recommended Incorporated Plan is the 'Permit Exemption Incorporated Plan - Former Shires of McIvor and Strathfieldsaye.'