

Victorian Heritage Database Report

## Former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent, 66 Alma Street, ST ARNAUD

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**Location:**

66 Alma Street ST ARNAUD, NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

**Heritage Status / Level of Significance:**

Recommended for Heritage Overlay

**Statement of Significance:**

The former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent, 66 Alma Street, St. Arnaud, is significant as an imposing and substantially intact eclectic Federation Gothic styled convent building constructed in 1902/1903 by the architects Clegg, and Miller of Ballarat, with an attached chapel added in 1933/34 and designed by E. J and K. B. Keogh. The convent was the home to the original five Sisters of Mercy who came to Ballarat in 1901 and

founded a branch of their order in St. Arnaud.

The former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level. It demonstrates original design qualities of an eclectic Federation Gothic style (with interwar additions) formed by a central hipped roof section, with flanking one and two storey steeply pitched gabled wings. The significant design qualities include the slate tiled roof cladding, terra cotta ridge capping, terra cotta finials, parapetted gable ends adorned with cement rendered crosses and cast iron cross, unpainted brick chimneys with cement rendered dressings, timber framed double hung and pointed metal framed and leadlighted windows, cement rendered quoins, quatrefoil motifs, drip moulds and dressings about the windows, large oculi niches with quatrefoils, and the main timber door with decorative leadlighted highlights and sidelights. Other intact qualities include the projecting brick buttresses with cement dressings, cement rendered stringcourses, dormers along the gabled wing and the rear double hipped wing. The substantial grounds, exotic cypress, palm and native gum trees, and the visual connections to St. Patrick's Catholic School also contribute to the significance of the place.

The former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent is historically significant at a LOCAL level. It is associated with the development of the Catholic Church in St. Arnaud from the late 1850s, and particularly with the founding of the Sisters of Mercy order in St Arnaud in 1901 by five nuns from Ballarat. The main part of the building is further associated with the architects Clegg and Miller, who were based in Ballarat, while the later additions, of which the Chapel is the most notable, are associated with the architects E. J and K. B. Keogh, who were based in Bendigo. Both partnerships were responsible for numerous buildings in central Victoria commissioned by the Catholic Diocese.

The former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent is socially significant at a LOCAL level. It is recognised and highly valued by sections of the St. Arnaud community for its past religious and educational roles.

Overall, the former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent is of LOCAL significance.

## **Description**

The former Sisters of Mercy Catholic Convent, 66 Alma Street, St. Arnaud, is set on a large allotment on the top of a hill. The site is characterised by the imposing brick Convent building surrounded by substantial exotic and native trees, including cypresses, palms and gums. The Convent is bound on at least two sides by an introduced galvanised corrugated iron fence, and has visual connections to St. Patrick's Catholic School that was built on the same parcel of land in 1927.

The asymmetrical, two storey, unpainted red brick eclectic Federation Gothic styled convent building is characterised by a central hipped roof section, with flanking one and two storey steeply pitched gabled wings. All the roof forms are clad in early slate tiles with the central hipped section having decorative terra cotta ridge capping and terra cotta finials. The flanking gabled wings have parapetted ends, and like the projecting gabled central bay of the hipped section, are adorned with cement rendered crosses, with a cast iron cross on one gable. Prominent unpainted brick chimneys with cement rendered dressings are symmetrically located about the central section and adorn the roofline at the rear.

The early window openings of the convent include many that are timber framed and double hung (some with diamond leadlighting to the upper sashes), and some that are metal framed with pointed heads. Tracery windows with leadlighting can also be seen on the chapel addition. The windows on the ground floor at the front are surrounded by cement rendered quoins and drip moulds, while the upper storey windows are also adorned with cement rendered quatrefoils. Additional oculi niches on the projecting bay of the central section and on the gable ends of the side facades are also decorated by quatrefoil motifs. The main entrance to the building is through the central section and has an early timber door completed with elaborate leadlighted side and highlights.

Other early features of the design include the projecting buttresses with cement dressings, cement rendered

stringcourses and the dormers along the roofline of the flanking gabled wing.

A later single storey parapetted red brick addition is situated at the rear, where there is an early double hipped projecting wing and a galvanised corrugated iron shed.

Comparative Information:

The Victorian Heritage Register lists only 3 other Roman Catholic Convents in Victoria. Two of these convents, namely the Convent of Mercy and Academy of Mary Immaculate in Fitzroy, and the Sacred Heart Convent and College in Newtown, were built in 1850 and 1864 respectively.

The third Convent building is more comparable with the St. Arnaud building in that it was constructed in 1899. The Former Convent of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford is an outstanding expression of the influence of French Medieval and Renaissance architecture and symbolic of a medieval village in miniature. The site also has a notable landscape setting.

Heritage Study / Consultant	Northern Grampians - Shire of Northern Grampians - Stage 2 Heritage Study, Wendy Jacobs, Vicki Johnson, David Rowe, Phil Taylor, 2004
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	108339
Property number	

*This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online*