
Cabra Convent, Boarding School, Chapel and Gatehouse

CUM:002

Address 225 Cross Road
Suburb CUMBERLAND PARK 5041

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE**Description**

The principal building on the site, the boarding school, is three storeys high, and constructed of random coursed bluestone with brick quoins, surrounds and string courses in a Gothic style. Two gabled wings project at each end of the main elevation, the centre of which is articulated by a gabled-facade containing a statue of Our Lady. Hipped and gabled corrugated iron roof features small dormer vents and simple crosses to gable peaks. The eaves are underlined with a row of fine brick dentils. Pointed arch windows are highlighted with stuccoed hood moulding. A raked verandah runs between the two wings, supported on cast iron posts with simple brackets with small gable over central opening.

The gatehouse is a single storey cottage, constructed with similar detailing to the main building.

To the east of the main building is the chapel, a later addition in a Romanesque styling, constructed of random coursed bluestone with brick quoins, surrounds and pilasters. The gabled roof is clad with terracotta tiles with small vents and a masonry cross to the gable apex. Openings are circular headed with leadlighting to windows.

Statement of heritage value

The group of early convent buildings represents the establishment and expansion of the Dominican Order in South Australia and is associated with the development of Catholic education in the State. The school is the oldest surviving private school in the Mitcham area and one of the largest convent complexes remaining in the State.

Relevant criteria

- (d) it is an outstanding representative of a particular class of places of cultural significance as a large and intact convent building, dating from the mid-1880s, and in continuous use as a convent and school since its construction.
- (g) it has a special association with the work of an organisation of historical importance, being established by the Dominican Order and associated with the development and expansion of Catholicism and private education in the State.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Cabra Convent, Boarding School, Chapel and Gatehouse be entered in the State Heritage Register.

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HERITAGE VALUE

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The result of a trip to Ireland by the Bishop of Adelaide, Dr Sheils, was the foundation of the Dominican Order in this State. In 1867 Bishop Shiel made the visit to Ireland and Europe with the intention of finding priests and others who were interested in continuing their work in Adelaide. He visited the Dominican nuns at Cabra, near Dublin, and was able to convince a group of them to establish a school 'to provide Primary and Higher Education' or 'Catholic education for the young who were destined to occupy a more prominent place in society'. Seven sisters accepted the challenge and returned with the Bishop to Adelaide, arriving on 4 December 1868.

The nuns opened a boarding and day school in Franklin Street, Adelaide, in January 1869. A fee was charged at this school, but by 1871 a free school was opened. The success of these schools soon stretched the limits of the accommodation at Franklin Street and a new site had to be found.

Ten acres of land were made available at Cumberland Park in 1881 through a donation by Dr F Byrne (a priest in the Archdiocese) and a further ten acres were purchased in 1884. Building work commenced and the foundation stone of the main building was laid by the Archbishop Reynolds on 15 March 1885 with 2 000 people present. By 24 January 1886 the building was completed and the Sisters moved to their new home, an impressive building surrounded by a semi-rural and sparsely populated landscape. The building had cost about £7 400 and contained convent quarters, boarding school, classrooms, musing rooms and chapel as well as accommodation for novices. Day and boarding school commenced at the convent in February 1886.

The foundation stone of a new chapel was laid by the Archbishop Dr Robert William Spence in 1915. The chapel was completed at a cost of £9 000 and dedicated on 13 October 1917. An altar of Carrara marble was donated by Mrs O'Mara, an old scholar. A branch school was opened at St Theresa's in Colonel Light Gardens in 1925. In 1927 the generosity of an old scholar enabled additions to be made to the main building in the form of the east wing, which housed novitiates and a children's recreational hall. In the late 1930s and 1940s additional classrooms were built, including the first science laboratory and the St Vincent Ferrer Classrooms.

The fourth Bishop and first Archbishop of Adelaide, Christopher Augustine Reynolds, is buried in the convent cemetery.

Criterion (g) it has a special association with the work of an organisation of historical importance.

The Convent at Cabra was established by the Dominican Order of nuns, who had been encouraged to come to Australia from Ireland in the late 1860s, under the auspices of Bishop Sheil, who wished to improve the education of Catholic children in South Australia. The Dominican nuns moved out to Cabra Convent early in 1886, after having operated a boarding and day school in Adelaide from 1869. Cabra Convent has been associated with both Catholic education and the Dominican Order in South Australia for over one hundred years.

References

Aeuckens, A. 1984, *More About Mitcham*, City of Mitcham, p. 97-98

Marsden, A. & Brasse, L. 1979, *City of Mitcham Heritage Survey*, National Estate, Adelaide

Norman, W. A. 1954, *The History of the City of Mitcham*, Corporation of the City of Mitcham, p. 118

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SITE RECORD

Location	225 Cross Road, Cumberland Park 5041
Description	Three storey random coursed stone convent and boarding school building, attached chapel and stone gatehouse.
Boundary	Boarding School, Convent, Chapel and stone Gatehouse only, more recent school buildings adjacent are not included.
Land Description	Part Lots 171 and 173, Section 1, Hd Adelaide, CT 549/169; 4389/409
Local Government	Mitcham
Owner	Dominican Convent Inc 225 Cross Road Cumberland Park SA 5041
Use	School administration building and classrooms, chapel and residence.
Condition	Good
Other Assessments	National Trust Recorded, 2936; Mitcham Heritage Survey, Classification A
Heritage Status	SHR Nominated, File No.11512
Photographs	E/05, 06; Slides 1-12
Report By	Sarah Laurence



