

Carmelite Monastery Melbourne Statement of Significance August 2020

Heritage Place:	96 Stevenson Street Kew	PS ref no:	HO826
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What is significant?

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne, 96 Stevenson Street, Kew, is significant. It was established on previously undeveloped land in Stevenson Street in the late 1920s. The land was part of the 'Stevenson Heights Estate' of 1927, subdivided from earlier large estates that were part of Crown Allotment 76. Significant buildings, designed in 1928 by architect William Patrick Conolly, include the Romanesque Revival Church, the Spanish Mission style Cloister and cottage, and other built elements, including the perimeter wall and Spanish baroque gateway. The grounds are also significant, including the organisation of space into ornamental and productive gardens, the existing pathway layout, and mature trees in particular the row of *Cupressus sempervirens*, which was part of the original planting scheme, and other mature vegetation (including mature conifers, *Quercus palustris*, *Betula pendula*, *Ulmus* sp, *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Grevillea robusta*, *Cordyline australis*). The subdivision pattern reflected in the perimeter wall is also significant.

The later brick buildings, which were not extant in the 1930s, are not significant. Newly brick-paved surfaces, although not an unsympathetic introduction to the interwar garden, and the modern metal entrance gates, are not significant. The tennis court is not significant.

This document is an incorporated document in the Boroondara Planning Scheme pursuant to section 6(2)(j) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

How is it significant?

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne at 96 Stevenson Street, Kew, is of local historic, aesthetic, and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

Historically, the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne as a whole, including its subdivision, Romanesque revival Church, Spanish Mission Cloister, cottage, gateway, perimeter wall, and the grounds are significant as a highly intact and well-maintained architect-designed monastic complex, in continuous use by the Carmelite nuns as a contemplative cloistered community since it opened in 1929. (Criterion A)

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne subdivision is significant for the evidence it provides of the early pattern of subdivision in this part of Kew in 1927 from larger estates with individual mansions. The Monastery was established on previously undeveloped land in Stevenson Street in the late 1920s, on cleared land in between the estates of 'Mount Royal' and 'Mooroolbeck'. The land was originally part of Crown Allotment 76, the original grant of John Bakewell, which was subdivided into irregular shaped parcels of land. The irregular east boundary of the Carmelite Monastery and the boundary wall remain as tangible evidence of this irregularity in the earlier subdivision. (Criterion A)

The Monastery provides evidence of the sustained and influential presence of religious orders in Boroondara from the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, particularly evident in Kew, whose histories became entwined with the histories of local schools, hospitals and welfare institutions founded and maintained by them. Unlike some religious orders, that were active and influential in the community, however, the Carmelites are distinguished as an enclosed religious order. However, the inclusion in the monastery of a public Oratory meant the community was welcomed to their Masses. The grounds and the spatial arrangement of the site into cloistered and publicly accessible spaces provide important evidence of the cloistered lifestyle of the Carmelite nuns, and the relationship between the nuns and the community. (Criterion A)

The Church at the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne is significant as one of a number of Roman Catholic buildings established in Kew in the interwar period that were built in the Romanesque Revival architectural style. Opened in 1921, the Sacred Heart Church on Cotham Road, Kew, is an earlier and grander example of the Romanesque revival style used for Roman Catholic Buildings, than the Church at the Carmelite Monastery. Both churches are associated with church architect William Patrick Conolly who was responsible for the completion of the Sacred Heart Church. The Church at the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne was designed by Conolly seven years later in 1928. Two years after that, Conolly designed the VHR listed third Church at St John's, East Melbourne; likewise a grander building than the Carmelite Church but in the same Romanesque architectural style. Two decades earlier, in 1907-08, Conolly had designed another grand Catholic Church in the Romanesque revival style in regional Victoria, in Benalla. (Criterion D)

The Church at the Carmelite Monastery Melbourne is therefore significant as representative of Conolly's early twentieth century church architecture in Victoria the Romanesque style, which perhaps reached its zenith in the St John's Church example in East Melbourne of 1930. Characteristic features of the style that are represented by the Carmelite Monastery church

include: the semi-circular arch openings for the main entry (a simplified Romanesque portal with paired colonnettes) and for the plate tracery windows on the east and west elevations; the circular rose window and the Machicolation motif on the masonry band above it on the principal elevation. The siting of the Church on a relatively high ground, the higher eastern side of the site, is also characteristic of Romanesque Revival architecture. The striking and elaborate interior decoration of the Church, overseen by Conolly and completed in 1931, is also highly intact and well maintained. (Criterion D)

The Cloister, Cottage, boundary wall and gateway are also significant as highly intact Monastic buildings designed in 1928 by Conolly. These other Monastic buildings, Conolly designed in the Spanish Mission architectural style. The terracotta tiled roofs of the Cloister and Cottage, small-paned timber framed windows in arched openings, and the rough rendered walls are all characteristic of the style. The buildings are physically and stylistically linked by the use of interwar Mediterranean revival architectural styles (Spanish Mission and Romanesque), and are unified by the consistency of the rough render finish to the walls. The buildings are highly intact and well maintained. (Criterion D)

The grounds of the Monastery are significant for their high degree of intactness, integrity and as typical interwar and monastic gardens. The original grounds are highly intact, and appear to retain a very high proportion of their original layout, organisation of space, circulation patterns, and planting. The organisation of the grounds into discrete garden rooms, the combination of formally laid out ornamental gardens and productive gardens, some of the plant species (especially conifers, Mediterranean Cypress, Golden Elm, camellias), and the concrete paths with rolled concrete edges are characteristic of interwar gardens. The layout of the cloister garden is a centuries-old characteristic of cloister gardens; square in plan and divided equally into four sections by two intersecting paths that meet at a central focal point (usually a statue, planting, or fountain). A single tree is planted in each of the four sections. (Criterion D)

The Carmelite Monastery Melbourne has potential for strong or special associations with the Carmelite nuns who reside there, the broader Carmelite community, and the congregation. (Criterion G)

The Monastery is significant for its association with Catholic Archbishop Daniel Mannix (1864-1963), who performed the foundation stone ceremony for the new Carmelite Monastery in July 1928, the cloistering ceremony on the Monastery's opening day on 19 May 1929, and a dedication ceremony for the set of mosaic Stations of the Cross in April 1933. (Criterion H)

Primary source

City of Boroondara Municipal-Wide Heritage Gap Study Volume 4: Kew