

Heritage Citation



St Joseph's Convent (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 88 Lockerbie Street, Kangaroo Point, Queensland 4169
Type of place	Residence (group), Institutional / group housing
Period	Victorian 1860-1890
Style	Filigree
Lot plan	L1_SP177551; L2_SP177551; L3_SP177551; L4_SP177551; L5_SP177551; L6_SP177551; L7_SP177551; L8_SP177551; L9_SP177551; L10_SP177551; L11_SP177551; L12_SP177551; L13_SP177551; L14_SP177551; L15_SP177551
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 July 2005 Date of Citation — October 2008

Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Timber
People/associations	the Sisters of Mercy (Association)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social

This two-storey timber convent was constructed circa 1890 for the Sisters of Mercy, who taught at the adjacent St Joseph's school until the second half of the twentieth century. Developments in Woolloongabba and Kangaroo Point during the 1960s and 1970s saw the numbers at St Joseph's parish diminish dramatically, forcing them to amalgamate with St Benedict's, East Brisbane in 1980. In 1996, after more than 100 years service to Catholic education, the remaining six Sisters of Mercy vacated the convent, which has since passed into private ownership. This fine building, together with the adjacent St Joseph's school, forms an historical precinct that makes a strong aesthetic contribution to Leopard Street.

History

Land at Kangaroo Point was first subdivided and sold in the early 1840s. By the 1850s, there were some eighty to ninety houses on the peninsula, including several fine residences. Various industries also operated in the suburb from this period, including a boiling down works, a soap and candle factory, ship building, foundries and sawmills. Residential development was consolidated during the boom of the 1880s, particularly at Woolloongabba which adjoined the southern boundary of Kangaroo Point, with the result that the area surrounding the site of St Joseph's was quite densely settled by the 1890s, with working class homes in the lower areas, and more elaborate residences on higher ground.

When Moreton Bay was opened to free settlement in 1842, it was included within the Catholic diocese of New South Wales. From 1843 Father Hanly was stationed in Brisbane, and ministered to a huge parish which extended west to the Darling Downs. In 1849-50 the first St Stephen's Church was erected in Elizabeth Street in Brisbane. The Archdiocese of Brisbane was created in 1859, with Rev. James Quinn ordained as Bishop of Brisbane the same year. Quinn arrived in Brisbane from Ireland in 1861, along with a number of priests and Sisters of Mercy under the supervision of Mother Mary Vincent Whitty, who established All Hallow's School in Fortitude Valley.

In 1869 Bishop Quinn invited the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, an order founded in South Australia in 1866 by Mary Helen McKillop, to establish a branch of the order in Brisbane. This order pledged to live in poverty and was dedicated to educating the children of the poor. A small group of Sisters under the supervisions of Mother Mary Helen McKillop, arrived in Brisbane on 31 December 1869, and early in 1870 established schools at South Brisbane [Sr. Mary's], Petrie Terrace, and Woolloongabba [St Joseph's] – in that order. These were located in largely working class dormitory suburbs.

The Sisters opened the first St Joseph's School at Hubert St, One-Mile Swap (Woolloongabba) on 28 March 1870. Initially they travelled daily from Montague Road, South Brisbane until a small cottage in Gibbons Street, Woolloongabba was converted into a convent for them. The next year, in January 1871, school re-opened in a

small timber Catholic church on Leopard Street, Kangaroo Point and the sisters rented a house at 66 River Terrace, near Paton Street, as their convent.

The land on which the Leopard Street church was located had been alienated from the Crown in 1853. Title was transferred in 1863 to the Right Reverend Dr James Quinn, Catholic Bishop of Brisbane in 1863, who subdivided this property in 1865. A small timber church has been established here by January 1871.

Small groups of Sisters of St Joseph came to Brisbane until September 1875, but a dispute with Bishop Quinn, who wished to establish Diocesan control over the Sisters, led to their withdrawal in 1879-80 to Sydney, where in 1883 they established a Mother-house. It is understood that the Sisters remained at St Joseph's School at Kangaroo Point until the end of 1879, but in 1880 school opened under the tutelage of the Sisters of Mercy, who took over most of the schools established in Queensland by the Sisters of St Joseph. The Sisters travelled daily from their Mother House at All Hallows, Petrie's Bight, to Kangaroo Point.

In 1880 the parish of St Joseph separated from the parish of St Stephen, with Father Breen appointed as the first parish priest. Woolloongabba expanded rapidly in the 1880s, a result of a Queensland-wide economic boom, large-scale immigration to Brisbane, and improved public transport (train and tram) in the Woolloongabba district.

As the parish of St Joseph expanded, so did the school and the work of the Sisters of Mercy, who erected St Josephs Convent circa 1890, a branch house of All Hallows Convent and a substantial timber building, beside St Joseph's Church and School, on two blocks of land at the corner of Leopard and Robert (now Lockerbie) streets. The Sisters of Mercy and Archbishop Robert Dunne, who was ordained Bishop of Brisbane in mid-1882, had acquired title to the land in 1883. They also later acquired title to a third block behind the convent, with a frontage to Lockerbie Street. Besides teaching at the adjacent school, the Sisters earned an income from teaching music at the convent. They allowed the eastern end of the site to be used as a playground for St Joseph's School, and this use continues.

In its construction, St Joseph's Convent at Kangaroo Point demonstrated the structural hierarchy within the Order of the Sisters of Mercy. Teaching sisters would have occupied the cells on the upper floor of the two-storeyed wing, while those engaged in domestic service would have occupied rooms in the rear wings. The building was designed such that the principal circulation pattern was along the rear passages and verandahs surrounding the courtyard at the rear. Despite the existence of a wrap-around front verandah on the upper storey of the main wing, there was only one door opening onto it, and this was from a common room –none of the cells open to this verandah.

The parish of St Joseph encompassed a large area south and east of Woolloongabba and Kangaroo Point. As these southern suburbs developed, several parishes separated from St Joseph's, including St James' at Coorparoo and Mary Immaculate at Ipswich Road, Annerley in 1913; St Benedict's, East Brisbane in 1917; and St Luke's, Buranda, in 1937. Later Ekibin and Camp Hill parishes were established as well.

The population of Woolloongabba and Kangaroo Point expanded in the interwar years with an influx of new residents, many of whom were immigrant and working class, and this trend continued in the post-Second World War period. A new St Joseph's School was erected in 1950-51, completed and furnished at a cost of £32,000. This was a huge undertaking for St Joseph's Parish, which was predominantly working class. It was erected as a response to inner-city post-Second World War immigration, combined with a national post-war 'baby-boom', which together created new demands on primary school facilities, both State-funded and denominational, across Queensland.

In the period 1965-1980, St Joseph's parish diminished. From 1965 approximately 200 homes in the Woolloongabba area were resumed by the State Government for the construction of the Southeast Freeway.

Many of the occupants were St Joseph's parishioners, and were forced to move to other districts. In the 1970s and 1980s, large numbers of home units and flats constructed in the area created a less stable population, less likely to affiliate with their local church parish. In 1980 St Joseph's Kangaroo Point and St Benedict's East Brisbane combined as the Amalgamated Parish of St Joseph and St Benedict, and since March 1980 has been served by the Missionary Order of the White Fathers of Africa.

In the 1980s and 1990s enrolments at St Joseph's School increased, reflecting the 'gentrification' of inner city suburbs such as Woolloongabba, but by the mid-1990s none of the 6 sisters occupying St Joseph's Convent were associated with the adjacent school, and they vacated the building in October 1996. The building was briefly rented by the Christian Brothers, but has since passed into private ownership.

Description

St Joseph's Convent is a substantial, two-storeyed timber building located at the corner of Leopard and Lockerbie Street, on a site which runs back along Lockerbie Street. The front elevation is to Leopard Street, which follows the ridge south from the Kangaroo Point Cliffs. The building historically is part of an ecclesiastical precinct which includes the adjacent St Joseph's School, Church and Presbytery (all of which front Leopard Street) and makes a significant contribution to the streetscape.

The building comprises a two-storeyed wing fronting Leopard Street, with two single-storey wings at right angles to this, at the rear, with a narrow open courtyard between them. There is a later covered walkway at the eastern end, connecting these two rear wings. Each wing (including the main wing) is one room deep, and has verandahs on most sides. The whole of the building rests on brick piers, and because of the fall of the land to the east, the sub-floor at the eastern end of the north wing has an enclosed laundry and storage rooms, with early brick fireplace.

The building has a series of hipped roofs clad with corrugated iron. Each main roof has two metal ridge ventilators. The north wing has two brick chimneys (a double chimney above the dining room, common room, and a single chimney above the kitchen). The south wing has a single brick chimney over the room at the western end of this wing. All the eaves have battening for ventilation purposes, and decorative timber corbels.

The western (front) elevation of the main has a centrally-positioned gabled pediment in the roof, over the front entrance. This has been in-filled with sheeting and batons, but earlier photographs show a central circular ventilator in the gable, which may remain behind the sheeting. The eastern (rear) elevation of the main wing has a centrally-positioned projecting gable incorporating an internal stairwell, lit by a double-hung sash window.

The two-storeyed wing has verandahs on both levels on the western (front), north and south sides, the upper level verandahs having separate roofs to the core. These have decorative cast-iron balustrading, with later glass louvers above. The upper floor verandah roofs are lined with fibrous cement sheeting, and the lower with ripple iron.

Both of the rear wings have side and eastern end verandahs, broken only by the return of the hip over the kitchen at the eastern end of the north wing. The side verandahs of the rear wings have the same decorative cast-iron balustrading as the main wing, and are enclosed with later glass louvers and/or fibrous-cement sheeting. The rear (eastern) verandah of each wing has been enclosed with timber boards.

The building is timber framed, clad externally with 8" wide chamfer boards and internally (walls and ceilings) with 6" wide, vertically-jointed, single-bead, tongue-and-groove timber boards. Most of the original joinery survives, including early double-hung sashes, deep skirting boards in most rooms, timber fire-place surrounds, and early timber arches.

The main entrance doorway has surrounding lights, and opens into a central wide hall. To the left, a centrally positioned door off the hallway opens into one large room. There are stencilled Christian crosses in the fanlights above the doorways of this room, which, besides the door to the hall, also open to the front verandah and to a passage running the length of this wing, at the rear. To the right, another centrally positioned door off the hall opens to another large room, which has been partitioned at an early date at the southern end, to create a small additional room accessed from the front and south side verandahs and from the passage at the back. There are elaborate plaster ceiling roses in the hall and in the two rooms which open off it. The north verandah of this level has been enclosed at a later date to create two small rooms, one with an external northern entrance.

The rear door of the central hall also has surrounding lights, and opens onto the passage at the rear of the building, and opposite the rear stairwell. There is a small storage cupboard beneath the stairs, enclosed with early panelling. The stair, which comprises two flights of timber treads and risers, has a turned timber balustrade and decorative newels. It is the only internal access to the upper floor, leading to a passage which extends most of the length of the wing. There is a later external fire-escape stair off the southern end of the front verandah.

The upper floor comprises a sitting room at the northern end of the building, and a series of small, narrow cells opening off the rear corridor, each with a double-hung sash window to the front verandah. The northern sitting room has the one door on this upper level which opens onto the front verandah, and is accessed principally from a door in its southern wall, opening onto the rear corridor. The southern verandah has been enclosed for a bathroom, accessed from both the front verandah and the rear corridor. The single-storey wings are accessed principally via the ground-floor rear corridor of the main wing. The northern wing comprises three main rooms, all of which have doors and windows opening to both side verandahs. The two rooms at the western end have back-to-back brick fireplaces with decorative timber surrounds and plasterwork with rounded edge mouldings over the chimney brickwork. These rooms were likely a common room and a dining room. The room at the eastern end of the wing is the kitchen. It has an early brick stove recess and two rooms – a pantry and possibly a bedroom – opening off it to the north. The kitchen also has a door onto a rear (eastern) enclosed verandah, with a bathroom at the northeast end. From the southern verandah of this wing, outside the kitchen, there is a timber stair leading to the sub-floor laundry.

The southern wing comprises what were originally 5 small rooms, possibly formerly used as cells and/or music teaching rooms. The largest of these is at the western end, closest to the main wing, and has its own fireplace. The rear eastern verandah of this wing has been enclosed to create a room and a bathroom. As a consequence, later access between the south and north verandahs of this wing has been created by a reconfiguration of the partitioning of the end two rooms.

Despite some minor modifications, the building remains substantially intact, and provides important evidence of the design and functioning of the place as a late nineteenth century convent.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as it reflects the expansion of Catholic education in Queensland in the late nineteenth century and the changes that occurred over the next 100 years.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as a rare, surviving example of a late nineteenth century purpose-built timber convent.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as a fine example of a late nineteenth century purpose-built timber convent.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a fine timber and tin convent that forms part of an historical ecclesiastical precinct and makes a strong

contribution to the streetscape.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as a convent for the Sisters of Mercy for more than a century and as an important part of the St Joseph's parish.

References

1. Queensland Heritage Register, *St Joseph's Convent (former)*, File No 602192 (since removed)
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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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