

## Heritage Citation



### St Vincent's Orphanage (former)

#### Key details

<b>Addresses</b>	At 131 Queens Road, Nudgee, Queensland 4014
<b>Type of place</b>	Residence (group), Cottage, Institutional / group housing, Art work
<b>Period</b>	Victorian 1860-1890, Federation 1890-1914, Interwar 1919-1939, Late 20th Century 1960-1999
<b>Style</b>	Free Gothic, Gothick Picturesque
<b>Lot plan</b>	L902_SP303595
<b>Key dates</b>	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 July 2003 Date of Citation — February 2011

<b>People/associations</b>	Andrea Giovanni Stombuco - Convent and Chapel (Architect); Edward Valley and M. Hawker - Convent and Chapel (Builder); George Agnew - Dormitories (Architect)
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<b>Criterion for listing</b>	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (F) Technical; (G) Social; (H) Historical association
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Opened in 1867 on a 3,500 acre site, St. Vincent's Orphanage was run by the Catholic Order of the Sisters of Mercy for more than 100 years. It developed into the largest non-governmental orphan's institution in Queensland. More than 10,000 children passed through the orphanage until it closed c1977. The site contains nineteenth century buildings, with the earliest dating from 1869. It also has three unique, purpose-built 1906 timber orphanage dormitories.

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## History

A party of six nuns from the Catholic Order of the Sisters of Mercy led by Sister Mary Whitley landed in Brisbane in May 1861. They undertook welfare work for the Catholic Diocese of Queensland and exhibited a particular interest in caring for the Catholic orphans of Brisbane. In 1869, they established a small St. Vincent's Orphanage at New Farm, close to Brisbane Town.

The Bishop of Brisbane, Dr. James Quinn (he later changed his surname to O'Quinn) donated this large, 3,500 acre site in the farming district of Nudgee to the nuns. The orphanage's site originally ran all the way to Moreton Bay, in what is now the suburb of Nudgee Beach. Moving with the orphans from New Farm, the Sisters of Mercy began operating St. Vincent's Orphanage at this Nudgee site in 1867 in two crude timber slab and corrugated iron buildings. By 1870, there were 134 children housed in five buildings. The cottage referred to on the site in 2003 as 'The Guest House' is the only remnant of this first building period. It was built in 1869.

The two-storey convent and chapel building was designed by Andrea Stombuco. The builder was Adam Valley aided by carpenter M. Hawker. It was opened and blessed on 2 January 1885. This entire building was enlarged during 1913-15. The new, enlarged chapel (accommodating 500 worshipers) was opened and blessed on 11 May 1915. The rear of the building was extended with an annex in 1942. This two-storey, masonry extension is marked with the title 'AMDG' and the date '1942'. The architect was Frank L. Cullen. It is possibly associated with the United States Army's forces who occupied part of the orphanage site from February 1942. It has the style of a 1940s hospital building.

The marble statue located on a grassed traffic island outside of this building was placed there in 1923. The statue was unveiled by the then Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes. The statue marked the Main Entrance to St. Vincent's Orphanage with a circular, gravel, carriageway probably laid down around the same time.

During the 1880s, a masonry, single-storey residence, with wide verandahs, named 'Rathbawn', was built for Archbishop Quinn on the site. It became the Brisbane Archbishop's country retreat and it was named after his birthplace in County Kildare, Ireland. It was also known as the 'Country House' and after Quinn's death (18 August 1881), the residence was used to house private boarders; then Novice's accommodation and as a

Sewing Room. 'Rathbawn Cottage' was destroyed in a fire in the 1980s.

In 1886-87, two-storey masonry dormitory buildings linked by covered ways and designed by Francis Drummond Grenville Stanley, were constructed. Stanley designed extensions to these dormitories in 1893-94. On 5 December 1905, a cyclone destroyed or severely damaged the dormitories. The Brisbane Courier organised a public appeal for building funds. A total of ?1,127.14.5 was raised and it was hoped that this would enable a new Nudgee orphanage to be built.

In 1906, replacement, timber dormitories were built. These buildings followed some of the earlier dormitories' designs in that they were linked by covered, all-weather walkways and had open verandahs. George Agnew is thought to have been the designer and builder. Only three dormitories remain as the others were demolished in August 1977. They are 'Bayview', 'Happy Haven' and the Infant's Dormitory (former).

During the 1890s, the Queensland colonial government offered a subsidy of ten pence per child per day for institutions that accommodated orphans, deserted or illegitimate children or the children of goaled or drunken fathers or prostitute mothers. Only children under the age of 12 were admitted and subsidised. But during the 1890s Depression, the government reduced its funding of St. Vincent's Orphanage and hundreds of children had to be returned to sometimes, unsuitable parents.

'St Rochs', a timber, nursery complex was built in the western part of the site in 1938. It accommodated children aged nine months to two years. At the time the orphanage site also included a guest cottage as well as outbuildings, such as sheds, barns and dairies associated with the farming activities on the site. This is possibly the building identified as the Infants' Dormitory (former). From February 1942 to July 1943, 'St Rochs' and some other buildings on the orphanage site were requisitioned by the United States Army. The children were evacuated to Gatton where they were accommodated at the local presbytery.

The large site allowed the orphanage to be largely self-sufficient regarding food and clothing. The girls were taught sewing and there was a large laundry. An on-site bakery provided bread. Dairy cattle, chickens and various crops were tended by the nuns and their orphaned charges. In 1944, the Allied Works Council (AWC) of the Commonwealth Government leased a site that was developed farmland on the St. Vincent's Orphanage site. The Sisters of Mercy agreed to allow the AWC to excavate some of its fertile cropland for fill. The site chosen was near the corner of St Vincent's Road and Queens Road.

Quarrying operations commenced on 25 February 1944. A new, protective fence was built surrounding the pit site and three loading ramps were constructive for the use of dump trucks. As the earth that was dug from the site, was transported to Eagle Farm to complete the east/west runway for the United States Army Air Force.

The Church had initially requested a lease payment of £5.4.2 per month. But the AWC finally agreed to pay £62.10.0 per annum. The lease was settled on 18 March 1944. The AWC completed the earth removal, using ten trucks, by November 1944 and the quarry was closed. The nuns were left with a hole in the ground and they estimated that they had lost 18 acres of good farm soil that was needed to grow crops for the orphanage. The Archbishop of Brisbane James Duhig protested to the AWC on the nun's behalf but to no avail.

In 1945, the quarry re-opened. The British Pacific Fleet was formed on 22 November 1944 with Brisbane designated as an Advanced Fleet Base. The Royal Navy leased the quarry as a Borrow Pit. The quarry provide fill for use in the naval boom defences at Pinkenba and on Shirley's Wharf and Berth 'E' at Hamilton. The Royal Navy had 119,000 cubic yards of soil removed from the Nudgee quarry. During 1945-46, the Royal Australian Air Force wanted to buy the quarry. The Church requested £1,191 but the RAAF offered £1,000 and the sale fell through. The Commonwealth Government purchased the site from the Church on 14 August 1947. The Brisbane City Council bought the old quarry on 27 November 1963. The quarry site could still be seen in December 2002.

In 1967, eight brick cottages, linked by covered walkways, were built to accommodate the children requiring special care. The garden-hedge grotto featuring a small statue of Our Lady probably dates from this time.

A six-storey building 'Emmaus' or 'McAuley at Banyo' to house aged and infirm sisters and designed by architects Cullen, Fagg, Hargraves and Mooney, was added in 1972. It overshadows the earlier buildings.

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## 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:

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#### Historical

##### CRITERION A

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

as an orphanage dating from 1867 that provides evidence of the early need for this benevolent institution within a decade of the formation of the colony.

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#### Rarity

##### CRITERION B

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

St Vincent's with its convent, chapel and remaining dormitory buildings provide rare evidence of a nineteenth century orphanage.

## **Representative**

### CRITERION D

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

as a surviving collection of buildings used as an orphanage from the nineteenth century, St Vincent's provides evidence of the operations of nineteenth and twentieth century orphanage practices.

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## **Aesthetic**

### CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

St Vincent's orphanage with its surviving ecclesiastical buildings of architectural merit on an elevated site overlooking Moreton Bay has a fine setting and scenic views.

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## **Technical**

### CRITERION F

The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technological achievement at a particular period

the ecclesiastical work of Andrea Stombucco in the convent and chapel.

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## **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 an orphanage established by Bishop Quinn and run by the Sisters of Mercy, St Vincent's has a strong association with the Catholic Church and its social and spiritual practices.

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## **Historical association**

### CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of

importance in the city's or local area's history

as an orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy for over a century; and as the work of notable architect, Andrea Stombucco.

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## References

1. Thomas Adsett Architects, *Sisters of Mercy Site, 131 Queens Road, Nudgee, Proposed Emmaus Village, Aged Care Additions*, Report, 21 October 2005
  2. Allom-Lovell Architects *St Vincent's Orphanage Nudgee –First Report*, March 1985
  3. Allom-Lovell Architects *The Former St Vincent's Orphanage*, Nudgee, Report May 2007
  4. Brisbane City Council, aerial photographs, 1946, 2001
  5. Brisbane City Council, *Properties on the Web*, website
  6. Brisbane City Council, *Information Sheet Heritage Buildings* (with site photographs), 1 February 1991
  7. Nundah & Districts Historical Society, *Newsletter No.76 December 2008*, (Brisbane: Nundah & Districts Historical Society Inc., 2008)
  8. *Catholic Miscellany*, 1914 issue
  9. Sandgate & Districts Historical Society, *By the Seaside*, (Brisbane: Sandgate & Districts Historical Society and Museum Inc., 1989)
  10. Tremayne, Jean and Pechey, Sue, *Pioneers, Picnics and Pineapples*, (Brisbane: A.E.B.I.S., 1994)
  11. Various, "St. Vincent's Home", *Banyo-Nudgee Heritage Trail*, (Brisbane: Bangee Festival Committee, 2000)
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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.

**Citation prepared by** — Brisbane City Council (page revised June 2022)



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