

# HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

## LANDSCAPE RENEWAL

## ST MARYS ANGLICAN CHURCH NORTH MELBOURNE

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## 1 Introduction

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This report was prepared by Fiona Webber of John Patrick Landscape Architects Pty Ltd on behalf of the administration of St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne. It provides an assessment of the potential impacts that proposed landscape renewal works may have on the heritage significance of the church and associated landscape.

St. Mary's North Melbourne is included in the Victorian Heritage Register as HO0010, and is located at 428 Queensberry St, North Melbourne, at the corner of Queensberry and Howard Streets.

This Heritage Impact Statement forms part of a permit application for landscape works proposed for the eastern portion of the site, fronting Howard Street. Proposed works include levelling of a lawn area, and the addition of paths, seating, and landscape planting. A large, existing Moreton Bay Fig tree (*Ficus macrocarpa*) at the south-eastern corner of the site is to be retained.

A pre-application discussion (P39662) was undertaken with Heritage Officer Fiona Stevens on 15 May 2024.

## 2 Heritage significance

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The VHR citation's Statement of Significance indicates that St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne is of historical, social, architectural, and aesthetic significance to Victoria. Historical and social significance is due to the church being the instigating church for the Diocesan Centre, now known as the Anglican Inner- City Mission. The church is of social significance for its use by the people of North Melbourne for many years including its association with the depression years. The church structure is of historical importance as one of North Melbourne's oldest buildings and is of architectural significance for its design by architect Lloyd Tayler.

The church is of aesthetic significance due to the presence of bluestone gables and attractive gardens. The entire site is included in the extent of heritage registration. No specific landscape elements are noted in the Statement of Significance.

## 3 Existing condition and use

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The existing landscape of the eastern portion of the site includes a gravel 'apron' of several metres width immediately adjacent to the church, an uneven lawn which grades down to the gravel apron, and a boundary shrub bed.

A historic iron fence comprised of vertical rods with timber posts is present on the Howard Street boundary and continues along the Queensberry Street frontage. Pedestrian entry from Howard Street is provided by a wrought iron gate opposite, but slightly misaligned with, the façade of an eastern projection of the church building. No path is present within the site from the pedestrian gate, which leads onto the lawn.

A boundary garden bed, edged with loose stone, extends from the pedestrian gate to the northern extent of the site where it continues along the northern boundary. The garden bed next to the Howard Street boundary is planted with various shrubs and has been used as a repository for human cremains.

Existing vegetation of the Howard Street boundary and northern boundary garden beds is largely mixed shrubs, many of which are 'old fashioned' species such as Tree Dahlia (*Dahlia imperialis*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), and Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*). Agapanthus contribute the somewhat patchy border planting south of the boundary pedestrian gate.

A large Morton Bay Fig tree (*Ficus macrocarpa*), with mulch beneath, is present in the south-eastern corner of the site. The fig is a dominant feature of the landscape, with the canopy extending north to the Howard Street pedestrian gate.



Figure 1: View looking southwest from the corner of the site (Howard St boundary) of the area of proposed works. The view is slightly distorted due to creation of panoramic view.



Figure 2: View north toward the neighbouring vicarage on Howard Street. A gravel 'skirt' next to the church building is being encroached by the adjacent lawn. Part of a garden bed on the Howard Street boundary is visible at right of frame. The canopy of an existing Moreton Bay Fig is visible at top of frame.



Figure 3: View north-west from a pedestrian gate on the Howard Street boundary. A shrub bed, edged with unmortared stone, runs along the boundary from the gate to the northern extent of the site.





Figure 4: An historic iron fence, with timber posts, is present on the Howard Street boundary. A wrought iron pedestrian gate is slightly misaligned with the building façade.





Figure 5: View along the Howard Street boundary of the site, from near the intersection with Queensberry Street. A large Moreton Bay Fig in the south-eastern corner of the site is to be retained.

### Current use of the place

The client has advised that the eastern portion of the site is regularly used, especially by dog owners, but due to the uneven character of the lawn and absence of a path, this portion is unsafe. The Howard Street pedestrian gate provides access to the church, however the lawn must be traversed to reach the gravel area adjacent to the building.

## Opportunities and constraints

Constraints to landscape modification arising from the significance of the church building are a requirement to retain views of the building, particularly the dominant projecting façade and its stained-glass windows. Introduced landscape elements must also be appropriate to the style of the building and the period of construction.

While not mentioned in the Statement of Significance, the Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrocarpa*) in the south-eastern corner of the site is a dominant landscape element which contributes to the character of the eastern/Howard Street garden. This tree, which is to be retained under the proposal, requires a large Tree Protection Zone, which limits the extent and type of works which can be undertaken adjacent. This constraint has been addressed in the proposal.

The garden bed immediately adjacent to the Howard Street boundary has been used as a repository for cremains which it is preferable to not disturb. This garden bed is retained under the proposal with no excavation of soil or change of use.

An opportunity exists to facilitate the continuation of the social significance of St Mary's. In addition to the social significance of St Mary's being associated with its use during the depression years, significance is also due to the church serving *as an anchor point for the people of North Melbourne for many years*. The objective of the proposed landscape works is to improve the usability of the lawn for congregational and community gatherings and to provide better access to the church. This aim could be viewed as contributing to the ongoing social significance of the place.

An opportunity exists to improve the relationship between the pedestrian gate entry on Howard Street and the projection of the church building by introducing the proposed wide path which aligns the gate and fence, which appear to be of historical interest, with the significant building. This will also improve safety for users of the garden, especially dog owners, as well as for those accessing the church itself.

The introduction of additional garden beds allows the existing planting to be supplemented with additional plants appropriate to the historic character of the site.

## 4 Proposed works

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The proposed landscape plan provides a new landscape scheme for the entire eastern portion of the site. The lawn is to be levelled, two paths are introduced, a low retaining wall is to be constructed, a bench seat is to be installed, and new planting added.

The existing lawn is to be levelled to allow for flexible uses and safe pedestrian travel. A path is introduced from the existing pedestrian gate on the eastern boundary to facilitate access to the lawn and the gravel apron next to the building. This proposed path is of a width which allows the gate and eastern projecting façade of the building to be visually aligned.



The existing boundary garden bed north of the pedestrian gate, the location of cremains, is to be retained, with the existing loose bluestone edging re-laid with a concrete footing. A minor adjustment to the edge of the garden bed adjacent to the gate will be required with the re-laid edge altered from curved to square cornered.

As there is a substantial level change between the lawn and gravel apron, a retaining wall is to be constructed at the interface. Levels are such that the retaining wall will not be required for the entire edge of the gravel area. Portions of the interface only require the addition of a 250mm high steel edge. Steps are required in the proposed path from the boundary gate at the interface of lawn and gravel, where the low retaining wall will be located. The existing iron boundary fence and gate is to be retained.

A new path is also proposed at the northern extent of the defined lawn, allowing all-abilities access between the church entrance and the lawn, and improving safety for all garden users. An area of new paving at the church entrance (at north of building) is proposed, to be constructed of bluestone to continue the material of the new path.

A cut bluestone bench seat with memorial engraving on the visible side is proposed for installation immediately adjacent to the eastern projection of the building, and centrally aligned with it. Planted urns are proposed at each end of the bench seat.

An existing urn and plinth is to be relocated a few metres from within the lawn to the edge of the northern extent of the lawn.

Proposed new planting draws from a palette of trees, shrubs and groundcovers which were available and popular in the period of construction of the church and in the following few decades. Examples include the groundcover *Bergenia*, old fashioned *Viburnum* as shrub mass, and Smokebush, *Cotinus coggygria*, as feature planting.

The garden bed on the northern boundary is to be widened, with additional planting proposed to define the northern extent of the garden, and to visually link with new garden beds. An existing water tank next to the northern boundary is to be retained, with additional planting to screen. New planting is also proposed for the western border of the levelled lawn, with the introduction of a small tree adjacent to a proposed semi-circular bench seat and bluestone retaining wall.

The existing Moreton Bay Fig is to be retained, with the addition of a border shrub planting to the edge of the mulched area below. A new layered planting of shrubs and ground covers is proposed next to the eastern boundary, south of the pedestrian gate, to visually link this portion of the garden with the northern section.

Agapanthus, already present north of the gate entrance, will be continued as a boundary planting south of the gate and along the Queensberry Street boundary.

### Options considered

To improve the functionality of the eastern garden, levelling of the lawn and the addition of access paths is required, at a minimum. Limiting works to levelling and paving was considered, however the client wishes to formalise the garden to a degree, and to proceed with a more complete garden renewal.

## 5 Information to support an assessment against the Heritage Act

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### History of the garden

Scant photographic evidence of the garden at periods since establishment has been discovered in the current study, despite a search of the usual sources and requests to the church administration. Sources of information regarding development of the garden are limited to an early drawing, a series of aerial photographs, and several late 1990's or early 2000s photos.

A c.1862 drawing of St. Mary's (Fig. 6) shows the adjacent St. Mary's schoolyard, separated from the church garden by a timber fence. An annotation below the drawing, "from the N.W." appears to be incorrect as the relative positions of the church, parsonage (vicarage) and school indicate a view from the southwest. The drawing shows shrub mass and a tree with the appearance of a conifer, perhaps a Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), next to the western façade of the church. Given the construction years of the church (1858-1868) and the estimated date of the drawing, it is unlikely that a tree of the size shown in the drawing would have been present. It is also noted that drawings often do not accurately represent features present, particularly as regards landscape elements which may be added to provide a setting for the building and to complete the composition. The drawing can not be relied upon to provide information on the early elements of the churchyard.



Figure 6: c.1862 drawing of St. Mary's English church, parsonage and school, North Melbourne by J.E. Butler. Source: State Library Victoria.

A series of three photos sourced from Picture Victoria ([www.picturevictoria.vic.gov.au](http://www.picturevictoria.vic.gov.au)) which capture views of St. Mary's from different vantage points are undated, however an estimate of the age of a car in frame in one of the photos suggests the photos were taken c.1950s. The photo of this series showing the eastern façade of the church and the garden as viewed from Howard Street (Fig. 7) shows that fastigate conifers were present against the building façade, framing the stained-glass window of the eastern projection of the building, and emphasising the structure of the building.

The varied height of the conifers may indicate planting at different periods or may be the result of competition for water and nutrients with the Moreton Bay Fig, or some other localised site conditions. The Moreton Bay Fig (at left of frame) is of substantial size. Other planting in the eastern portion of the site consists of a few, regularly spaced shrubs and perhaps a small tree, adjacent to the eastern boundary fence. Little can be seen of surfaces next to the building, however at the bottom right of frame lawn and either gravel or paving may be present.





Figure 7: Undated (estimated c.1950s) view of the eastern façade of St Mary's. The most notable landscape element is the fastigiate conifers next to the building. Source: Picture Victoria.

The period in which the conifers next to the church were removed is not known, however a 1997 photo (Fig. 8) shows they were not present. In a 2008 view (Fig. 9) the lawn and gravel apron next to the building are evident. A young tree or shrub adjacent to the building has since been removed.



Figure 8: 1997 view of the eastern façade of St Mary's.



Figure 9: 2008 view of the eastern façade of St. Mary's.



Figure 10: December 1945 aerial photograph, cropped to centralise the subject site (indicated in yellow). Melbourne and Metropolitan Area Project, Run 25, Frame 60107. Source: Landata ([www.landata.online](http://www.landata.online)).



Figure 11: December 1979 aerial photograph, cropped to centralise the subject site (indicated in yellow). Heytesbury North Project, Run 9, Frame 189. Source: Landata ([www.landata.online](http://www.landata.online)).



Figure 12: March 1982 aerial photograph, cropped to centralise the subject site (indicated in yellow). Heytesbury North Project, Run 4, Frame 229. Source: Landata ([www.landata.online](http://www.landata.online)).



A series of aerial photos 1945 – 1982 provide some additional information about the landscape through this period.

The 1945 aerial (Fig. 10) shows an almost featureless garden east of the church, apart from the Moreton Bay Fig in the southeastern corner. A feature is visible in the lawn, toward the northern extent of the garden. This may be a planter urn with plinth, as is currently present at or near this location. While not discernible, it is possible that fastigate conifers are present next to the church building.

In the 1945 photo a path is visible at the northeastern corner of the building, linking the northern entrance and a minor entrance on the eastern side of the church building. A faint line, perhaps an informal foot path may be visible just north of the Moreton Bay Fig canopy, leading from the Howard Street boundary.

A 1979 aerial (Fig. 11) clearly shows a path from the Howard Street pedestrian gate to the eastern façade of the church building, joining an area of regular width between the church building and the eastern lawn. Whether this area is gravelled or paved can't be determined from the photograph, however it appears to continue to the extent of both the southern and northern façades of the building.

The path from the eastern boundary pedestrian gate to the eastern façade of the church is also visible in the 1982 aerial photo (Fig. 12), however it appears less defined. This may be due to the relatively poor resolution of the photo or may indicate a gravel rather than paved surface. The current absence of a path in this location also suggests a gravelled surface. Very few other landscape features in the eastern garden appear to be present in 1982.

In the period from the 1980s to present, the existing confluent planting next to the eastern boundary was established, as was the continuation of this garden area along the northern boundary.

### **Impact of the proposal on the cultural heritage significance**

The cultural heritage significance of the eastern garden area of St. Mary's lies in its provision of an appropriate setting for the church building, and as an area of possible use by the congregation. An 'appropriate setting' can be defined as one that includes landscape features and materials commonly used at the time of construction and in the following decades, laid out in a style of the period. Garden style, or design, the particular plants present, and other inclusions provide the character of the landscape.

An analysis of views into the site from the adjacent area (Figs. 13-18) found that ground level features are of limited visibility from the Howard Street footpath until a point just north of the pedestrian entry gate. Clear views are then obtained to the corner of the site, and from a portion of the Queensberry Street footpath.

An indication of the appearance of the proposed works from the Howard Street median strip and from within the eastern garden are provided as Figures 19 & 20.



Figure 13: Views of the eastern garden are obscured by existing vegetation (which is to be retained) from the Howard Street footpath next to the northern portion of the garden.



Figure 14: Views of the ground surface are limited by existing vegetation from the Howard Street footpath until the viewer is almost at the pedestrian gate.





Figure 15: View from the Howard Street median strip approximately level with the northern boundary of the St. Mary's site. Views from the Howard Street median strip of the area of proposed works are obscured by boundary vegetation within the site.



Figure 16: View from the Howard Street median strip, of the eastern façade of the church. Ground plane features within the church site are of limited visibility.





Figure 17: Open views are present from the pedestrian gate on Howard Street to the south-eastern corner of the site.



Figure 18: Views of the eastern garden are obtained from Queensberry Street near the south-eastern corner of the St. Mary's site.





Figure 19: Drawing of the likely view of proposed works from the Howard Street central median strip.



Figure 20: Drawing of the appearance of proposed works from within the eastern garden.





Figure 21: Example image of the bluestone bench seat proposed for adjacent to the eastern façade of St. Mary's.

The introduction of hardscape paths will substantially alter the appearance of the eastern garden when viewed from within, and adjacent to the site, however these changes are proposed with due consideration of the materials used and location of additional features and planting.

While the addition of a hardscaped path from the Howard Street boundary gate to the gravel apron next to the church building will substantially alter the appearance of the eastern garden, historic aerial photographs (1979, Fig. 11 & 1982, Fig.12) show that a path previously existed in this location, albeit likely formed in gravel.

Levelling of the lawn and introduction of a low retaining wall between the lawn and gravel apron is not expected to greatly impact the appearance of the garden. The addition of planting associated with a curved bench seat and retaining wall will add a feature where currently none exists, however this is toward the northern extent of the church building so that views of most of the building façade are retained.

The more intensively planted border next to the northern boundary of the garden is expected to enhance the existing garden beds and to provide an opportunity to introduce additional plants appropriate to the site and the period of establishment of the church.

The most dominant landscape feature of the eastern garden, the large Moreton Bay Fig, and its contribution to landscape character and aesthetics is to be retained.

The bench seat proposed for installation against the eastern façade of the church is of bluestone construction, with both the seat and supports of the minimum thickness required for structural stability. An example concept



image is provided as Figure 21. While the addition of a bench seat will alter the appearance of the church building, the visually minimal style of the proposed bench has been selected so that it does not detract from the appearance of the façade. The seat is also expected to visually blend with the bluestone plinth of the façade wall. The intended use of the seat, to provide an opportunity for viewing the eastern garden, and provision of amenity at times when the lawn is used for events, supports the social significance of St. Mary's church.

### **Summary of impacts and conclusion**

The existing landscape of the eastern garden is simple, comprising lawn, border shrub planting and a large tree, and the addition of any landscape features would alter the landscape character. The proposed works, which include the addition of hardscaping and multi-level planting will substantially alter the appearance of the eastern garden but will not necessarily reduce the heritage significance of this section of the site.

Construction of a path from the Howard Street pedestrian gate to the church can be considered reinstatement a path previously present in this location.

Selection of materials for paths and seating has been undertaken with consideration of the bluestone construction of the church building and the planting palette comprises vegetation available and popular at the time of construction of the church, and the following few decades. To some extent, the proposed additional planting will result in a landscape more representative of a heritage garden than that which currently exists.

The retention of existing shrub border plantings, the existing fence and large Moreton Bay Fig to a degree mitigates visual impacts.

An analysis of views into the site of the area of proposed works has shown that visibility of the ground plane, where hard landscaping is proposed, is limited to those from vantage points at the south-eastern and southern immediate surrounds.

The addition of paths, levelling of the lawn and construction of a retaining wall, and the installation of additional planting is required to meet the client's brief.