Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: Uniting Church Address: 603 Toorak Road, Toorak

Designer: I.F. Smart (church) and Ferguson & Urie (stained glass windows) **Builder:** James Bonham HO Reference: HO110 Citation status: Final Date Updated: 25 October 2023

Year of Construction: 1875



Photograph (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of HO110.

Heritage Group: Religion	Key Theme: Community Culture	
Heritage Type: Church	Key Sub-theme: Worshipping	
Significance Level: Local		
Recommendation: Retain as individually significant place on the HO; tree controls are recommended for		
the mature cypress (Cupressus) and spruce (Picea) plantings; internal controls recommended in relation		
to the layout, timber vaulted ceiling, arcade, arcade profiled columns, windows, cedar fittings and organ		
in the Toorak Uniting Church building.		

Controls:	External paint colours	Internal alterations	Tree controls
	Victorian Heritage Register	Incorporated Plans	Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	Prohibited uses may be permitted	Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 603 Toorak Road, Toorak, is significant. Specifically, the built form, scale, detailing, setback and internal layout, timber vaulted ceiling, lancet arched arcade, arcade profiled columns, windows, cedar fittings and organ of the 1875 stone Gothic Revival church is of local heritage significance along with the 1892 Arts and Crafts manse and associated former stables. The bluestone boundary wall with a wrought iron gate and landscaping specifically with regards to the mature cypress (*Cupressus*) and spruce (*Picea*) on the site's southern elevation is also significant. The 1962 childcare center and community building on the south western corner of site is not significant.

How is it significant?

The Uniting Church is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?

The Toorak Uniting Church, formerly known as the Toorak Presbyterian Church, is historically significant as a Gothic Revival church that developed strong associations with squatters and leading politicians from its outset, making it a particularly influential congregation. Designed by architects Reeds and Barnes, the church attended by a range of notable people such as pastoralist and politician Francis Ormand MLC and influential merchant and squatter James Balfour MLC. In was also the site for many weddings and memorials. The manse is historically significant as well for its contribution to the ecclesiastic narrative of the site. (Criterion A)

The Uniting Church is aesthetically significant as a highly intact Gothic Revival church that is highly visible from the surrounding area and therefore is a landmark building. The key features of particular interest include the stained glass windows designed by Ferguson & Urie, slate double transept cross shaped roof, textured sandstone blocks on a bluestone base, white limestone dressing emphasising fenestration forms and façade detailing, towers and turrets, and the overall imposing built form. The interior of the church is notable for its timber vaulted ceiling, layout, lancet arched arcade, arcade profiled columns, cedar fittings and organ. The manse, called Kinross, in the north western corner of the site has high integrity and is also aesthetically significant to the site, as a highly intact and decorative Arts and Crafts manse. (Criterion E)



Location map and extent of HO110, showing contributory elements.

HERCON Criteria Assessment

А	Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history	The Toorak Uniting Church, formerly known as the Toorak Presbyterian Church, is historically significant as a Gothic Revival church that developed strong associations with squatters and leading politicians from its outset, making it a particularly influential congregation. Designed by architects Reeds & Barnes, the church was attended by a range of notable people such as pastoralist and politician Francis Ormand MLC and influential merchant and squatter James Balfour MLC. In was also the site for many weddings and memorials. The manse is historically significant as well for its contribution to the ecclesiastic narrative of the site.
В	Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history	This place does not meet this criterion.

С	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our	This place does not meet this criterion.
D	cultural or natural history Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments	This place does not meet this criterion.
Ε	Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics	The Uniting Church is aesthetically significant as a highly intact Gothic Revival church that is highly visible from the surrounding area and therefore is a landmark building. The key features of particular interest include the stained glass windows designed by Ferguson & Urie, slate double transept cross shaped roof, textured sandstone blocks on a bluestone base, white limestone dressing emphasising fenestration forms and façade detailing, towers and turrets, and the overall imposing built form. The interior of the church is notable for its timber vaulted ceiling, layout, lancet arched arcade, arcade profiled columns, cedar fittings and organ. The manse, called Kinross, in the north western corner of the site has high integrity and is also aesthetically significant to the site, as a highly intact and decorative Arts and Crafts manse.
F	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period	This place does not meet this criterion.
G	Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions	This place does not meet this criterion.
Н	Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

• Physical Analysis

Toorak Uniting Church

The Toorak Uniting Church, formerly known as the Toorak Presbyterian Church, is a church built in the Gothic style. The structure consists of highly textured sandstone blocks of varying sizes sourced from Barrabool and a bluestone base. The distinct sandstone colour and texture is contrasted by white limestone dressing emphasising fenestration forms and façade detailing. The limestone is sourced from Oamaru, New Zealand. The church has an imposing façade dominated by a tall tower. Compared to standard Australian Gothic style churches, the Toorak Uniting Church has a complex plan including a tower, stair turret, fleche, double transept, nave and apse. Following the plan, the double transept cross shaped roof as a series of open gable and hipped roofs. Excluding the towers and turrets, the steep pitched roof is clad in slate tiles. The roof features a series of interspaced gable dormer windows. Located on the upper section of the roof close to the ridge, the dormers feature a Tudor arch louvred vent window and a smaller circle opening above. The dormers are clad in black sheet metal.

The main south elevation facing Toorak Road include the open gable nave with the tall imposing tower to the right. The façade includes two flanking circular stair turrets. The left stair turret to the nave rises slightly above the apex of the gable. The right stair turret is set back from the façade and is taller, servicing the main tower. The front façade base is expressed in a bluestone. The base of the left turret is further emphasised with engaged piers. The tower is detailed with thin slit windows, level courses and group of narrow louvred windows on the top level. The top windows lead up to the dentilled cornice and the tower is capped by a circular spire roof and ball finial consisting of sandstone. The right turret features similar detailing and is located on the southwest corner of the main tower.

The main tower is square in form and tapers slightly upwards to the tall spire roof adding to the imposing vertical element of the church. The tower presents symmetrical fenestration and detailing on its four elevations. The quoined tower can be accessed from ground level and is grounded by tall, engaged corner piers. A pair of narrow lancet windows sit under the first pair of limestone level courses. A tall single lancet window is located centred above the course. The window is detailed with diamond patterned leadlight and quoining. A bank of four short slit windows sits above the tall window and string course. The top level is detailed with a string course, corner engage pier and a dentilled cornice. The top-level window consists of a pair of lancet windows capped with a quatrefoil opening. The windows and opening are louvred stone tracery. The centred window is dressed in white limestone and contrasted with bluestone in an emphasised Tudor arch form. The tower is capped in a tall spire roof consisting of sandstone with a small centred triangular vent window recessed on each face.

The high-pitched nave is detailed with quoining that follows into the gable pitch. The gable form is highlighted by an expressed limestone eave. Three interspaced centred slit windows are located under the main feature lancet window. The high gothic style form features three tall lancet windows capped with three quatrefoil shaped openings. The windows have a highly decorative leadlight stained glass. The windows are emphasised with recessed white limestone and an expressed darker stone in a Tudor arch form with quoining. There is a blue signboard with gold die-cast lettering reading 'TOORAK UNITING CHURCH' located at the sill of the lancet windows. The apex of the open gable includes a gothic shaped vent window with louvred tracery.

The nave includes a short open gable and lean-to projection on the west elevation where the main entrance into the church is located. The main raise main blue timber double doors are framed by an expressed white limestone quoining, Tudor arch, and lintel with a circle motif. The projection includes high detailed engaged piers with Tudor arched windows located in between piers. The nave is crossed by the double transepts.

The shorter south transept presents an open gable form. It features a group of three tall lancet windows with expressed quoined Tudor arch. The north transept projects further than the south transept and presents an open gable front extending from the main hipped roof. There is a single-storey secondary entrance projection located between both transepts. The north transept gable front features a paired window with a quatrefoil opening. The transepts are connected at the roof level by a flat roof clad in sheet metal. The section features a spire with characteristic Gothic architecture detailing known as a Flèche. The fleche has a narrow form and is shorter than the overall stair turrets and tower. The octagonal form features Gothic style narrow windows and a spire roof clad in sheet metal. The spire is capped with a finely detailed wrought iron ball finial.

The church has a polygonal form apse located on the north elevation. The apse features a single Tudor arched window on each face and a short gable roof on the east and west sides. The interior of the church includes cedar fittings and a pipe organ built in 1979. Key defining features in the interior include a distinct timber vaulted ceiling, lancet arched arcade and arcade profiled columns. The manse, called Kinross, in the north western corner of the site has high integrity and is also aesthetically significant to the site, as a highly intact and decorative Arts and Crafts manse. There are twelve elders' chairs with canopies designed with an Arts and Crafts idiom by Thear & Company. The highly detailed stained glass windows are designed by Ferguson & Urie.

Kinross

The former Manse, known as Kinross, is currently used as an arts centre and café. Kinross is located at the north west corner of the church grounds. Kinross is designed with an Arts and Crafts style. The twostorey structure consists of dark brown brick with contrasting red brick detailing. The ground level is laid in a Flemish bond and the upper level is laid in a stretcher bond. The structure has a robust and wellgrounded form comprising with a complex and asymmetrical plan. The plan is reflected on the roof form as a series of interlocking hipped, open gable and polygonal bay roof. The roof is clad in slate tiles with sections of metal and terracotta crested ridge capping with finials.

The main entrance is located on the south east side of the structure on a raised, angled recessed porch between the main structure and an east projecting gable. The entry consists of a wide quoined Tudor arch expressed with red brick and a sandstone arch mould with end decorative mouldings. There is a metal name plate to the right of the opening reading 'Kinross'. The top of the arch includes a black wrought iron sconce light. The main entrance consists of a white framed timber door with side lights and a group of four fanlights.

To the left of the angled porch is a wide arched window and three fanlights with stained glass. The rest of the paired and single ground level windows are yellow framed single hung sash windows and a stained-glass narrow fanlight. The windows have a narrow sandstone sill and wider textured lintel. There is a red brick pointed arch flush to the façade located above the sandstone lintels. The window sill and lintels are set within red brick string and level courses. The upper level windows present similar detailing.

The east elevation includes two feature bays at the centre. To the right of the main entrance is the open gable bay which is capped with white timber brackets attached to the bargeboard over the projecting eave imitating half-timbering. To the right of the gable bay is a polygonal bay which is capped with a bracketed eave leading to the distinct roof form. The second floor above the main entrance is also recessed to form a verandah. It features a brick pier balustrade with a limestone cap and string course. The verandah opening is topped with a heavy-set sandstone lintel and red brick dentilled cornice.

A section on the upper level of the east elevation is clad in imitation timber shingles. The south elevation is set behind a stand of mature tree ferns (*Polypodiopsida*) and features similar fenestration detailing. The half open gable façade features red brick gauged arch with checkered nogging and similar imitation half-timbering found on the east elevation. The west elevation roof includes two tall open face brick chimneys with stone corbels and terracotta chimney pots.

To the north of the structure is a secondary free-standing single storey structure that was formerly a stables. The masonry structure features similar façade detailing as the main structure and likely used as a service wing or as stables. The open face brown brick structure is raised on an exposed concrete slab. It includes several blue timber doors. The windows include a stone sill. The windows and doors are capped with a red brick flat gauged arch. The flat roof structure includes an open gable two-storey section on the north end. The roof of the structure is clad in corrugated galvanised iron.

Church grounds

In addition to the site being used as a place of worship, there is an arts centre, café, John Macrae Centre (kindergarten) located on the church grounds. There are two 1960s structures located to the north west of the main church that houses the kindergarten. A neighbouring building to the west of the church outside the site curtilage is used as an administration centre for the church. The majority of the church grounds have been laid in concrete tiles or asphalt and used as a courtyard, driveway and parking area. There is a small garden located at the north of the site between Kinross and the kindergarten. There are mature trees located throughout the site including a prominent tall spruce tree and cypress (*Cupressus*) located on the Toorak Street frontage. There is an additional mature spruce (*Picea*) tree located to the west of the main church. The street front boundary is demarcated by a short bluestone wall and piers with garden bed planting between the street and the church setback. There is a highly detailed short black wrought iron gate located at the east end of the front wall.

Toorak Uniting Church is considered to be in good condition. While the grounds appear largely altered, the main church building and former manse remain largely intact. The historic buildings and fence is considered to have high integrity.

• Alterations and Additions

Toorak Uniting Church:

- Second transept added in 1889 designed by I.F. Smart.
- Security grill added to stained glass windows.
- Flat roof clad in sheet metal between transepts added.

Kinross:

- Several skylights added to the main roof.
- Sections of metal roof ridge capping added.
- Corrugated galvanised iron added to the service wing.

Church grounds:

• Most of the grounds have been laid in concrete or asphalt.

History

• Historical Context

For thousands of years preceding European colonialism, the area now known as Stonnington was the traditional home of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. This environment would have provided Traditional Owners with access to pre-contact plains, grassy woodland, and floodplains on the banks of the Yarra River (Birrarung), Gardiners Creek (Kooyong Koot), and Hawksburn Creek (now channelised), in a rolling landscape on the northern shore of Port Phillip Bay. It is important to note that the rich cultural heritage of Traditional Owners in Stonnington did not end with colonialism—it has a rich presence to this day.

Following the establishment of Melbourne in 1835, squatter John Gardiner and many others like him sought out land in what would become present day Toorak and surrounds on account of its densely timbered landscape, undulating terrain and proximity to water. By 1840, crown land sales marked the area's transition to pastoral settlement, and later in 1851, with the purchase of land in Hawthorn by Thomas Herbert Power, the surrounding environments gradually became a place where the early merchant and squatter elite of Melbourne built their homesteads. In Toorak, this is best represented by the purchase of lot 26 by James Jackson, associate in Jackson, Rae & Co. soap and candle merchants. Jackson was described by politician William Westgarth as 'Melbourne's greatest merchant of this early time' (Forster 1999, 10). It is only fitting that his house, called Toorak House, would be the namesake of what would become arguably the most affluent suburb in Melbourne. Following the discovery of gold in the 1850s and the wealth this produced for ancillary trades, the Toorak area drew in Melbourne's newly wealthy. Today, over a century later, Toorak still has connotations of wealth and prestige as best represented in its history and built environment (Forster 1999, 5–26).

• Place History

The Uniting Church, known as The Toorak Presbyterian Church' at the time of its erection, was initially constructed from 1875 to early 1876 to designs prepared by prominent architectural firm Reed & Barnes. A partnership between Joseph Reed and Frederick Barnes, the duo was particularly known for their designs of public buildings and landmarks across Victoria. Their portfolio was expansive, and included the World Heritage Listed neoclassical Royal Exhibition Building (1978-80), the Italianite homestead at The Gums at Caramut (1875-76), the Gothic style Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne (1878-82), as well as the neoclassical State Library of Victoria (1854) and Melbourne Town Hall (1867) (Saunders 1976).

While discussions over the formation of a new Presbyterian church in Toorak began as early as 1873, its works only commenced following the successful procurement of a suitable site. The subdivision of

Toorak Estate in 1874 bought about such an opportunity, making the land on which the church would come to sit available for purchase. It was quickly bought up by wealthy businessman and politician James McBain in November 1874, who then donated the land to the church (Muntz 1874; The Age 1875, 2). The foundation stone was laid by Mr. W. Bayles in May 1875, and construction was subsequently headed by contractor James Bonham over the next year. An early newspaper article on the church describes in detail Reed and Barnes' design, and makes particular note of the material type and window detailing:

...The foundation will be of bluestone, with a bold levelled plinth of the same material. The superstructure will be faced with Barrabool freestone, relieved with Oamaru limestone dressing on to the doors and windows, buttresses, quoins, &c., backed with brick, and finished in a similar manner to Scots' Church, Collins-street. A large three-light traceried window will occupy the front gable, and single-light windows the sides. The roof will be timbered and diagonal-boarded, the inside stained, and outside covered with slates. The windows are to be fitted with lead quarry-lights. The fittings of the church will be of polished cedar...(The Age 1875, 2)

It was officially opened in January 1876, and the first Minister was Reverend Murdoch MacDonald. An MMBW Plan from 1905 shows the church fronting Toorak Road, with pathways connected to a manse and school room at the rear of the church building.

Notable events following its completion include the installation of an organ built by Alfred Fuller in 1881, as well as the installation of a second transept designed by J. F. Smart in 1888-89 (The Argus 1881, 9). The integrity of the organ was diminished when it was rebuilt in 1926 and then again in 1940 (The Argus 1926, 6). It was subsequently relocated to St. Leonard's College and replaced. Other prominent architectural features include the large stain glass window by Gerguson & Urie at the rear of the church that was erected in 1882. Substantial alterations and improvements were made to the interior in the late 1920s, which also saw the addition of another donated stain glass window by Brooks, Robinson and Co. in memory of Mrs. W. F. Walker (The Prahan Telegraph 1929, 6).

The Toorak Presbyterian Church developed strong associations with squatters and leading politicians from the outset, making it a particularly influential congregation (eMelbourne, 2008). Noted attendants during its early history include pastoralist and politician Francis Ormand MLC and influential merchant and squatter James Balfour MLC (eMelbourne, 2008). Although the decline of the Protestant religion, as well as the decline in power and influence of Scottish pastoral families throughout the 20th century reduced the attendance of the church, it continued to operate as a popular site for weddings and memorials (The Argus 1948, 11; The Herald 1936, 4; The Argus 1947, 8). It was ultimately renamed the Uniting Church when the majority of Victoria's Presbyterians entered the newly formed Uniting Church in the 1970s.

Comparative Analysis

Reed and Barnes are considered to be some of the most pre-eminent 19th century ecclesiastic architects in Victoria, and this is reflected in the church at 603 Toorak Road, Toorak. Comparable examples are not restrained to the City of Stonnington and instead can be recognised across Victoria.

Comparable examples include:

- Scots Church (140-154 Collins Street, Melbourne) (HO578 City of Melbourne and VHR No. H0005). Scots Church is an iconic Melbourne landmark. Constructed in 1873-74 to designs drawn by Reed and Barnes, the church is comparable to the Uniting Church on Toorak Road as a late 19th century Gothic Revival church designed by famed architects Reed and Barnes. Structurally, both churches sit on bluestone foundations and have Barabool Freestone from Geelong as the main construction of the building. Where Scots Church is dressed in Kakanui stone from New Zealand however, the Uniting Church is dressed with limestone. Both buildings are quipped with a spire as well as a shorter turret, and both churches are equipped with stained glass windows by famed Melbourne leadlighters, Ferguson and Urie.
- Holy Trinity Anglican Church Complex (2A Brighton Road, and 175 & 177 Chapel Street, St Kilda) (HO65 City of Port Phillip). The Holy Trinity Anglican Church in St Kilda was designed by Reed and Barnes, and constructed in 1882-83. In keeping with both the Uniting Church on Toorak Road and the above addressed Scots Church, the Holy Trinity Anglican Church is constructed in the Gothic Revival style, with bluestone foundations and Barabool Freestone for the main structure of the building. Some differences are present however, the main one being the absence of a spire and the presence of an apsidal baptistery with a conical roof.
- Church of All Nations and Organ (180 Palmerston Street, Carlton) (HO976 City of Yarra and VHR No. H2179). The Church of All Nations was constructed in 1869-70 based on designs by Reed and Barnes. The church is comparable to the Uniting Church on Toorak Road for their shared associative significance, form and proportions, as well as for their Gothic Revival aesthetics. The key differences between both structures however can be noted in the tower design at Church of All Nations. Due to lacking funds, the nave was shortened and the tower was redesigned in a shorter, squat, medieval style. In addition, the Church of All Nations is less of a Gothic Revival style and more aligned with Norman Romanesque styling. Lastly, the church has been wholly constructed in bluestone with freestone dressing, rather than the Barabool Freestone recorded at Scots Church, Holy Trinity and the Uniting Church addressed above.

A comparative analysis of the Uniting Church interior with other protected interiors on the municipal Heritage Overlay is difficult on account of the lack of church buildings with interior controls. Within the City of Stonnington, the only church with interior controls is the modernist style St James' Anglican Church and Hall in Glen Iris (HO408). This overall dearth of church interior protection is not indicative of their low heritage value at the local level as such, but rather because the control was not available for application at the time the majority of these churches were assessed. The following comparative analysis therefore primarily draws from examples outside of the City of Stonnington.

Comparative Gothic Revival church interiors with internal controls include:

• Congregational Church (former), 72 Hotham Street, St Kilda East (HO152 City of Port Phillip). Constructed in 1887-88 to designs by architects Beasley and Little, the Congregational Church comprises a late polychrome brick church in the Gothic Revival mode. While it was constructed at a slightly later period than the Uniting Church, it shares analogous Gothic derived internal features, including lancet arched windows and a distinct timber vaulted ceiling with timber panels, as well as rendered walls. It is currently being used as a Russian Catholic church, and comprises several minor alterations including chandelier lighting.

• St Aloysisus Church, 233 Balaclava Road, Caulfield North (HO77 Glen Eira City). Designed in an Interwar Gothic Transitional design style, the interior of the St Stephen's Church is particularly distinguished by its prominent vaulted timber lined ceiling. While more impressive than the St Peter's Catholic Church in terms of scale and ceiling detail, it nevertheless compares well in terms of its incorporation of lancet arched windows, Gothic style lancet arched arcade and timber lined and vaulted ceiling. Unlike the Uniting Church however, it does not feature timber trusses

As the above examples have shown, the Uniting Church features a highly intact Gothic Revival style interior that compares well in terms of intactness and design quality to similar examples on the Heritage Overlay. It encompasses the key elements typically associated with this style, and is particularly noted for its distinct timber vaulted ceiling, use of interior window hood moulds and lanced arched arcade with profiled columns.

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Limitations

- 1. Access to all heritage places was limited to a visual inspection from the public domain. The interiors of buildings and inaccessible areas such as rear gardens were not accessed as part of this heritage study.
- 2. Condition and site modification assessment was limited to a visual inspection undertaken from the public domain.
- 3. The historical notes provided for this citation are not considered to be an exhaustive history of the site.

Further Images



Oblique view of southern elevation, looking north east (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



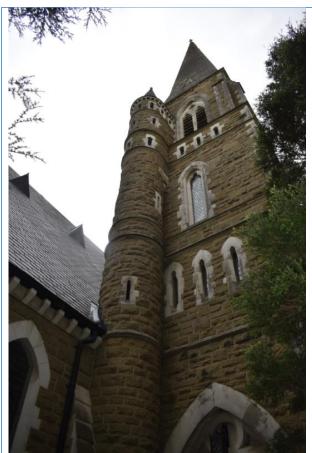
Eastern elevation, looking north west (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



The Uniting Church façade (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Western elevation, looking north east (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Northern elevation of spire, looking north west (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Eastern elevation of spire, looking south west (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Façade of 1962 hall and childcare (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

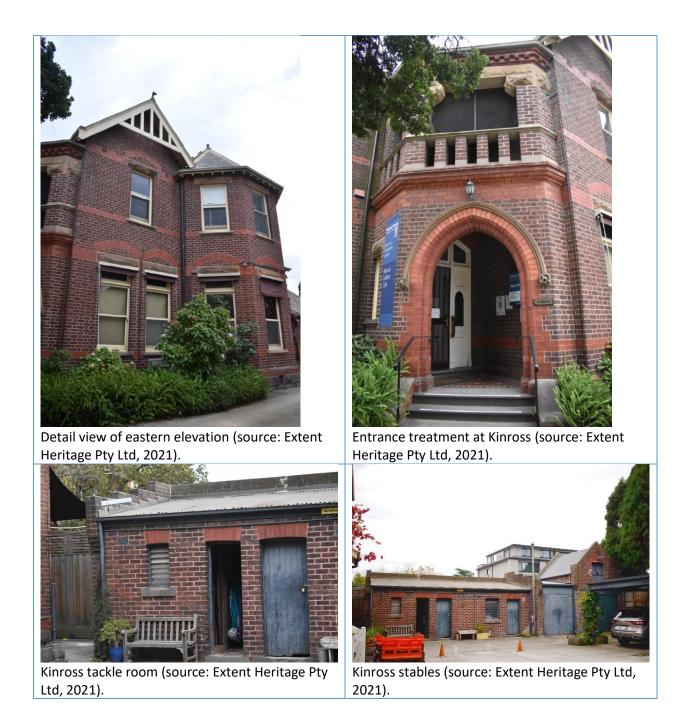


1962 century hall and childcare (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Eastern elevation of Kinross (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).

Northern elevation of Kinross (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).





Overview of nave and altar from church narthex (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of church nave from altar (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



View of arcade (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of timber vaulted ceiling and trusses (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detail view of the Ferguson & Urie stained glass clerestory window (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detail view of 1979 organ situated at church narthex (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).

Authors

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