

Heritage Citation – Individual Place

Heritage Place: St Peter's Catholic Church

Address: 581 Toorak Road, Toorak

HO Reference: HO763

Citation status: Final

Date Updated: 24 October 2023

Designer: Ole Henry Jorgensen (church) and Mathieson & Gibson (stained glass windows)

Year of Construction: 1933

Builder: Unknown



Photograph of St Peter's Catholic Church (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Location map and extent of 581 Toorak Road, Toorak.

Heritage Group: Religion

Key Theme: Community culture

Heritage Type: Church

Key Sub-theme: Worshipping

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Remove from the curtilage of HO143 Montalto Avenue / Stradbroke Avenue / Clendon Road / Toorak Road Precinct and include on the HO as an individually significant place in its own right; internal controls recommended in relation to the ceiling, organ, windows, stone baldacchino and layout.

Controls:	<input type="checkbox"/> External paint colours	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internal alterations	<input type="checkbox"/> Tree controls
	<input type="checkbox"/> Victorian Heritage Register	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporated Plans	<input type="checkbox"/> Outbuildings and fences exemptions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Prohibited uses may be permitted	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Heritage Place	

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The property at 581 Toorak Road, Toorak (otherwise known as St Peter's Catholic Church), is significant. Specifically, the built form, scale, detailing, layout, internal ceiling, interior arcade and stone baldacchino, and organ of the 1933 Interwar Gothic Revival church is of local heritage significance, as well as the nave and tower base that was completed in 1965. The landscaping, and later alterations and additions to the property are not significant.

How is it significant?

St Peter's Catholic Church is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Stonington.

Why is it significant?

St Peter's Catholic Church is historically significant as an Interwar Gothic Revival church that was erected following the continued growth of the Catholic denomination in an area formerly dominated by wealthy Protestants. Its construction coincided with the expansion of the Catholic school system within the area, and took place following the erection of Loreto Mandeville Hall and St Kevin's College in Toorak. The stone baldacchino is also historically significant as one of the first in the country at the time. It is of further historical value as a feature purchased using community funds donated by influential Catholic figures such as Sir Frank Gavan Duffy, a prominent Australian judge and the fourth Chief Justice of Australia. (Criterion A)

St Peter's Catholic Church is aesthetically significant as a visually prominent Gothic Revival church with landmark value in Toorak. Designed by architect Ole Henry Jorgensen, key features contributing to its aesthetic value include its distinct barrabool stone, well anchored form, broad parapeted gable front featuring a stained glass window designed by Mathieson & Gibson, as well as its stone dressing emphasising fenestration forms and decorative detailing. The interior of the church is also of special aesthetic importance for its timber lined and vaulted ceiling, arcade, layout, organ, clerestory moulded windows, lancet arched windows, and stone baldacchino, all of which contribute to the ecclesiastical setting of the church. (Criterion E)

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	<i>Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history</i>	St Peter's Catholic Church is historically significant as an Interwar Gothic Revival church that was erected following the continued growth of the Catholic denomination in an area formerly dominated by wealthy Protestants. Its construction coincided with the expansion of the Catholic school system within the area, and took place following the erection of Loreto Mandeville Hall and St Kevin's College in Toorak. The stone baldacchino is also historically significant as one of the first in the country at the time. It is of further historical value as a feature purchased using community funds donated by influential Catholic figures such as
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		Sir Frank Gavan Duffy, a prominent Australian judge and the fourth Chief Justice of Australia.
<i>B</i>	<i>Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>C</i>	<i>Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>D</i>	<i>Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>E</i>	<i>Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics</i>	St Peter's Catholic Church is aesthetically significant as a visually prominent Gothic Revival church with landmark value in Toorak. Designed by architect Ole Henry Jorgensen, key features contributing to its aesthetic value include its distinct barrabool stone, well anchored form, broad parapeted gable front featuring a stained glass window designed by Mathieson & Gibson, as well as its stone dressing emphasising fenestration forms and decorative detailing. The interior of the church is also of aesthetic importance for its timber lined and vaulted ceiling, arcade, layout, organ, clerestory moulded windows, lancet arched windows, and stone baldacchino, all of which contribute to the ecclesiastical setting of the church.
<i>F</i>	<i>Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>G</i>	<i>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</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.
<i>H</i>	<i>Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.</i>	This place does not meet this criterion.

Description

• Physical Analysis

St Peter's Catholic Church is built in an Interwar Gothic Revival style. The structure is characterised by highly textured barrabool stone blocks of varying sizes. The distinct colour of the stone structure is contrasted by the lighter-coloured stone dressing, emphasising the fenestration forms and façade detailing. The lower sections of the base of the church are emphasised by a darker bluestone course. The church has an asymmetrical plan with the nave of the church oriented to a north-south axis. A single transept to the rear of the church extends from the east elevation. The nave presents a gabled form at the front façade with a rounded apse. The roof form corresponds with the nave with a gabled front end and a hipped roof over the apse. The roof of the church is clad in hipped Marseilles tiles. The roof ridge is partially capped with terracotta and metal ridge capping.

The church tower is located to the front of the nave. It is adjoined to the main church via a single storey connection where the primary timber double gothic arched doors are located. The tower features a lancet on the ground level. A wider and shorter louvred gothic arched window is centralised on the upper level. A red painted metal lantern with a conical roof and cross finial was added to the tower in 2020. The lantern houses electrically operated bells. The church features distinctive tapered buttresses, capped with a sharp pyramid cap extending over the roof. The buttresses include two lower string courses that run along the façade of the building. Forming the corners of the tower and located interspaced along the length of the nave, the buttresses provide a repetitive and strong horizontal detail that emphasises the form of the church.

The front façade of the nave facing south addresses Toorak Road. A single storey polygonal narthex, or antechamber, projects from the front façade. The narthex features three lancet windows on each face which is highly distinguished from the main body of the church with its usage of the light stone dressing along the upper section. The hipped roof of the narthex is partially obscured by the flat parapet and gable capped projections of the corner buttresses that extend halfway up the roof. The foundation stone is located at the lower course at the front of the narthex. Single lancet windows flank the narthex at the ground level on the main nave gable façade. The façade is dominated by a large centered single gothic arched window. The window features detailed stained glass, stone tracery and quoining. A small lancet vent window is located under the apex of the façade. A budded cross stone finial caps the top of the gable roof.

The east transept features similar detailing and finishes as the nave. Along with the tower, it forms a raised semi-enclosed open space laid with stone pavers. The east transept and apse have external access doors to the courtyard and back of the church.

A second smaller single-storey chapel was constructed in 2020 out of polished stone located on the west elevation of the nave. The west chapel addition sits relatively flush with the elevation.

The church interior features a Bevington & Sons organ, a stone baldachino and altar.

The church is set relatively close to the street. The street front boundary is demarcated by a low wrought iron palisade fence. The fence is supported on a low textured bluestone base. The main entrance is centred and flanked by two taller bluestone piers. There is a modern car gate entrance with rendered brick piers at the right of the front fence, leading to a paved parking area. The front courtyard

consists of a granite paved walkway around the church and lawn beside the front fence. There is a cast iron statue on a natural stone pedestal located in front of the tower in the courtyard. The rear of the church forms the north boundary with Dalriada Street. It has been relandscaped to include a playground and garden space.

St Peter's Catholic Church is considered to be in good condition. The church building has undergone several major additions and alterations. This includes the recently added west chapel and tower lantern. The grounds of the church have also been subdivided to include a retirement village and early childhood centre. The remaining open spaces around the main church have been heavily relandscaped since 2017. The church would be considered in good condition and with moderate integrity.

- ### Alterations and Additions

- Nave and tower base completed (1965).
- Section of roof between the nave and transept clad in corrugated sheet metal.
- Sections of the terracotta ridge capping replaced with metal ridge capping.
- Major refurbishment works (from 2017).
- Church grounds relandscaped (from 2017).
- New car gate and piers added (2018).
- Parking area added (2018).
- Front area relandscaped (2019).
- Two mature trees in the front area removed (2019).
- Chapel added to the west of the nave (2020).
- Glass lantern added to the tower (2020).
- Large rear window by Geoffrey Wallace installed (2020).

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**

Construction of St Peter's Catholic Church began in 1933 as a replacement for a smaller chapel built in the same location in 1912 (*The Age* 1933, 15). The church was designed by Ole Henry Jorgensen and constructed in Barrabool stone. Jorgensen (1889-1978) was a well-known architect who is recognised for his work for the Catholic Church, including Xavier College chapel (1927-1934). His uncle, Robert Schreiber, was an architect and Ole went into partnership with him around 1914 under the name of Schreiber and Jorgensen. Around 1930 it appears that Robert Schreiber retired from the practice leaving Ole to practice under his own name (EMHS n.d).

The church was built for the Catholic Parish in the charge of Reverend W. Ebsworth due to the continued growth of the clergy within the surrounding area. The church community helped raise funds for the construction of the church and the Chief Justice of Australia and Lady Gavan Duffy and Miss Fisher donated £800 for the purchase of a stone baldachino and altar. The baldachino was one of very few within Australia at the time. The church reportedly cost £10,000 and the foundation stone was laid by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne Doctor Mannix in 1933. The church was blessed and opened by the Archbishop of Melbourne on Sunday 4 November 1934 and featured stained glass windows by Mathieson & Gibson and Brooks, Robinson & Co (*Advocate*, 1934, 10). Due to a shortage of funds, only part of the nave and sanctuary had been erected at the time of its opening (*The Age* 1933, 15). As a result, the existing 1912 chapel was subsequently used as a temporary nave.

In 1965, the remainder of the nave and tower base were constructed to a simplified design, and further renovations in 2020 included the addition of a glass lantern to the tower and a single-storey chapel to the west of the nave (Maidment 2021). Other contemporary buildings that have added around the church include a retirement village early learning centre. The building continues to function as a Catholic church.

Comparative Analysis

Erected in 1933 to designs by architect Ole Henry Jorgensen and later completed in 1965 to a more simplified design, St Peter's Catholic Church is an Interwar Gothic Revival style church that recalls the type of stone based Gothic Revival churches typically erected during the late Victorian period. While Jorgensen was a well-known architect who worked with his uncle under the name of Schreiber and Jorgenson, his only other known church design that has heritage protection is the Renaissance Revival style Xavier College Chapel at 135 Bakers Road, Kew (Boroondara City HO4). As a result, the following comparative analysis draws from Interwar Gothic Revival churches from both within and outside the municipality more generally.

The only comparative example within the municipality is:

- **St Mary the Immaculate Conception Church and Presbytery (87-91 Manning Street, Malvern East) (HO419).** Erected in 1920-23 to designs by architects Purchase & Teague, St Mary the Immaculate Conception Church and Presbytery is directly comparable to St Peter's Catholic Church as an Interwar Gothic Revival church comprised of barrabool sandstone blocks. As with St Peter's Church,

it is pared back in detailing and is distinct from the elaborate detailing observed in late Victorian Gothic style churches. Other comparable features include its lancet arched stained glass windows, broad parapeted gable front and incorporation of a square tower. It has a stronger massing and is more intact than St Peter's, and is also more restrained in terms of ornamentation by virtue of its monochromatic features and absence of pinnacles.

Comparable examples outside the municipality include:

- **St Mark's Anglican Church (1 Canterbury Road, Camberwell) (Boroondara City HO483).** Erected in 1924 to designs by noted architect Rodney Aslop, St Mark's Anglican Church is an Arts and Crafts Gothic style church that compares to St Peter's Catholic Church in terms of style and form. Similarities include its asymmetry, use of prominent stained glass arched windows, a square tower flanking its end, and a dominant parapeted gable front. It differs through its distinct tall broached spire, restrained use of decorative devices, and incorporation of Arts and Crafts architectural features.
- **Uniting Church (8-10 Noel Street, Ivanhoe) (Banyule City HO182).** Designed in 1927, the Uniting Church is comparable as an Interwar Gothic style church that makes use of ornamented lancet arch windows, visually prominent window sills and mouldings, and a dominant parapeted gable front defined by the central window. As with the above examples, it is a more abstracted and restrained example of the Interwar Gothic style, demonstrating the more stripped back approaches to the idiom that were taking place during the interwar period.

Compared to other Interwar Gothic Revival churches, St Peter's Catholic Church is a well ornamented example of the style that more closely recalls the elaborate detailing and decorative devices observed in late Victorian Gothic Revival designs. However, it draws clear similarities through its anchored massing by virtue of its broad parapeted gable front and adjoining square tower. It is distinct from the majority of Interwar Gothic revival churches in terms of its use of barrabool sandstone blocks, with the only other comparable example of this feature being St Mary the Immaculate Conception Church and Presbytery.

A comparative analysis of the St Peter's Catholic 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 an earlier period than the St Peter's Catholic Church, it shares analogous Gothic derived internal features, including lancet arched windows and a distinct 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 Aloysius 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 and imposing lancet arched arcade. 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 with hood moulds and timber lined ceiling. Unlike the Uniting Church however, it does not feature timber trusses.

As the above examples have shown, the St Peter's Catholic 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, visually prominent stone baldacchino and use of interior window hood moulds.

References

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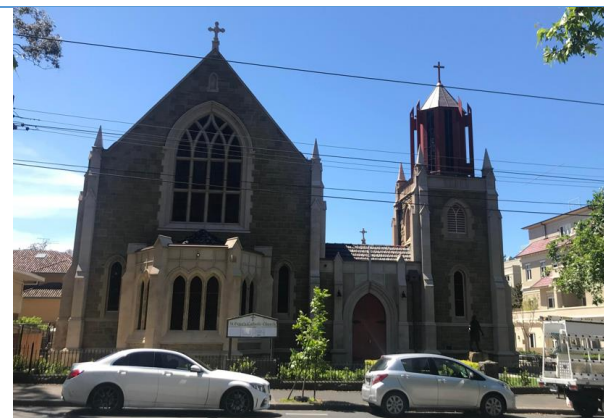
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The Age. 1933. 'New Catholic Church', Toorak. 18 December, 10.

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



View from Toorak Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



View of front and side elevation from Toorak Road (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of 2020 glass tower addition (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2021).



Detail of parapeted gable front and arched window (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



View of façade and main entrance door (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



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



Overview of nave, altar, stone, baldacchino and clerestory windows (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of altar, stone, baldacchino and clerestory windows (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



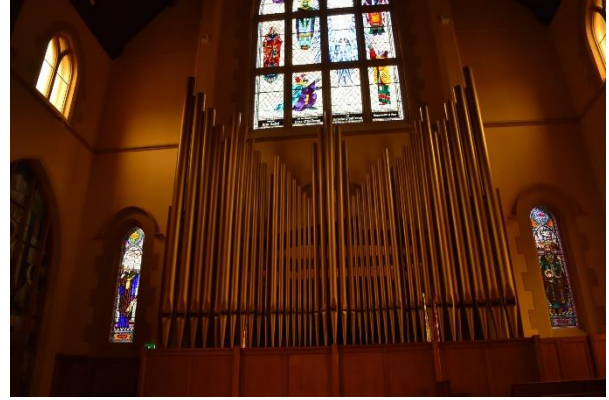
Detail view of timber lined and vaulted ceiling (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of lancet arched windows with hood moulds running the length of the nave (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Overview of narthex, organ and clerestory windows (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).



Detail view of organ (source: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022).

Authors

Former citation prepared by: Context Pty Ltd, 1993. *Note: the building was included in precinct citation for HO143.*

Updated citation prepared by: Extent Heritage Pty Ltd, 2022 (Vivian Lu, Gabrielle Harrington and Reuel Balmadres).

Quality assurance review conducted by: Corinne Softley.