MOTHER OF GOD CATHOLIC CHURCH

Address 56 Wilfred Road, Ivanhoe East

SignificanceLocalConstruction Date1957PeriodPostwarDate InspectedJanuary 2021



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

Mother of God at 56 Wilfred Road, Ivanhoe East – a Roman Catholic Church – is significant. It was designed in 1956 by Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell for an eponymously named new parish that covered Ivanhoe East and constructed the following year. John Mockridge was likely the primary designer, as was usual practice in the firm.

The significant sections of *Mother of God* are its lozenge-shaped plan/form, narthex and original flat-roofed ancillary wing (west and part south elevation). Significant elements are the gable roof, slate cladding, ridge vent, concrete frame, copper crosses, flat roof (concrete slab), the cantilevered section of the porch roof, pair of tapered porch columns, remnant (or covered) tiling to porch floor, barrel vaulting (west elevation), concrete-framed window walls (including mullions and muntins), all stained glass, exposed concrete-cased steel framing, wall panels of silica bricks, and all original openings (rectangular slots and cruciform windows).

Internally, the exposed black-matt painted steel beams and timber-lined ceiling are significant.

The arrangement of the front garden – driveway, triangular lawn and placement of a central tree (not the planting itself, which is a replacement) – as well as the nearby Atlas Cedar (*Cedurs atlantica 'Glauca'*) and rear sunken courtyard (southwest) are original landscape elements that contribute to the setting of *Mother of God*.

Later additions are not significant.

How is it Significant?

Mother of God is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Banyule.

Why is it Significant?

Mother of God is of historical significance as the earliest modernist church constructed in the municipality and the first religious commission by the then young postwar architectural practice of Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell. It represents a noteworthy juncture in the design oeuvre of this well-regarded architectural firm, which went on to be responsible for a number of other notable 'modern' churches in Victoria and an important event for the local Roman Catholic community. The construction of Mother of God is illustrative of Ivanhoe East's suburban energetic consolidation in the postwar period as well as the pronounced modernist undercurrents latent in this development. Its nonconventional character is highly evocative of the necessity felt by the church and congregation to respond to the rapidly shifting and different socio-cultural landscape of the mid-1950s with a new built image of their faith. Father Bernard Joseph Geoghegan, who was appointed the first parish priest, was instrumental in its development. (Criterion A)

Mother of God is of aesthetic significance as a generally intact, distinctive instance of 'modern' church design. Its progressive architects, Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, took bold advantage of novel postwar construction techniques (steel framing) and materials (precast concrete, silica bricks) to convey a modernist expression, chiefly through its lozenge-shaped form, exaggerated gable and dramatic but welcoming cantilevered porch, then elements all unfamiliar for places of worship in Victoria. Christian architectural traditions were not completely eschewed, with the utilisation of slate cladding, highlighting of mullions and muntins, colourful stained glass, and employment of cruciform openings in the design of the church demonstrating contemporary interests in integrating simplified, abstracted ecclesiastical elements and symbols; resulting in a balance between stability and provocation. The interplay of expressive modernity and traditional continuity is indicative of the first phase of 'modern' postwar suburban church design in Victoria. (Criteria E)

Description

Mother of God is a large church that occupies the majority of its gently sloping kite-shaped corner allotment. The building is situated at a moderate setback from Wilfred Road (north) and slightly below the street level of Robinhood Road (east). In the west and south, the property is bordered by private residences. The triangular front garden is characterised by an area of lawn with a centrally planted tree (existing is a replacement) and bisected by a driveway of pre-cast concrete panels (initially 'Lilydale Topping'). Other original landscaping includes the tall Atlas Cedar (*Cedurs atlantica 'Glauca'*) situated northwest of the facade and a small sunken courtyard garden in the southeast corner, compromised of brick paving and planter beds. A non-original timber paling fence extends along the south and west perimeter.

The church consists of several distinct volumes. The key components are the principal form (nave and sanctuary) with attached narthex (north) and ancillary wing, which runs most of the west elevation and part of the south. The small volume to the east elevation provides access to and from the sunken courtyard is also original. Other projections from the main footprint are later additions (see below).

The main volume – comprising the nave and sanctuary – has a lozenge-shaped plan and form. This bold geometry is most visible and best appreciated from the east (Robinhood Road). The lozenge roof form, clad in its original slate, tapers to a gable at each end and has an elongated original ridge vent. Surmounting the apex of both gable ends are copper crosses. The concrete frame, painted white, is most evident to both side elevations, where it includes boxed gutters. The frame also defines the edge of the façade. The north-facing gable end – traverse to Wilfred Road - has a stained-glass wall of green, blue, red, orange with three narrow cantilevered canopies (in a stepped configuration).

Mother of God's façade (to Wilfred Road) features a narthex (a vestibule/antechamber) situated well below the gable end. It has a flat concrete slab roof initially sheeted with asbestos felt (which may remain). The narthex roof extends to the side cantilevering upwards over the footpath to create a canopied porch to Robinhood Road. This extended roof includes four plastic dome skylights, which are original. The porch has been partly enclosed with glazing and double timber doors. Its original floor of 'Carborundum' (silicon carbide stone) panels with contrasting 'English grey-blue quarry tiles has been carpeted over, although a small strip remains evident in front of the tapered concrete columns.² It is possible that this tiling survives beneath the carpet.

Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchel, 'Garden Layout', Memorial Church of the Mother of God, 21 August 1957, drawing no 382/77 in Collection of architectural drawings from the firm Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell, SLV, YLATD 16

Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, 'Porch 1. Paving Setout', Memorial Church of the Mother of God. E. Ivanhoe, 9 August 1957, drawing no 382/76 in Collection of architectural drawings from the firm Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell, SLV, YLATD 16

Despite these modifications, the porch – at the time of construction, an ultramodern flourish – remains readily interpretable within the place's design schema.



Mother of God from opposite Robinhood Road, the skillion-roofed volume right of frame is a later addition (porch out of frame)

Extending along the west and part of the rear (south) elevations of the nave and sanctuary is a return wing (one room in width). It was designed to accommodate separate vestries for the priests, boys and women, as well as the 'Chapel of Our Lady' and toilets. This wing is roofed in the same manner as the narthex, except that it features tunnel (barrel) vaulting (four) at its midsection with projecting concrete mullions that terminate at the ground level and large arched windows (permitting light to the chapel). The front part of the wing's western section, behind the narthex, has been replaced by a skillion-roofed and tan brick addition. There is an original section of perforated brickwork to the rear of the south wing (airflow for laboratories).

The flat-roofed volume attached to the southern portion of the east elevation is an original component of the design; however, it underwent some modification during the earlier stages of planning and was initially envisioned with a curved stone feature wall. It includes a porch entered via recessed timber-framed, glazed double-leafed doors with toplight (south face) and enclosed the organ console and cleaner cupboard.

A small skillion-roofed, tan-brick volume has been built to the east elevation in line with the porch's piers. There is a similarly designed addition attached to the (south) elevation behind the sunken courtyard garden.

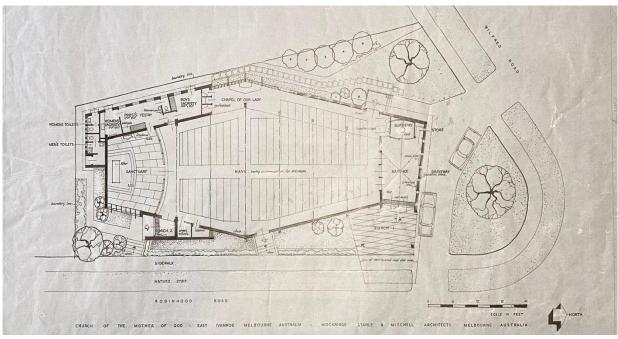
Mother of God is constructed of a steel frame (welded on site), cased in precast concrete. The infill walls – recessed well back from the framing to emphasise its expression – are of pink-fawn silica (cement 9 in. by 4½ in. by 3 in.) bricks in a stretcher bond course.³ The floor is presumably a concrete slab. The designers, Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, were quick to embrace postwar advances in construction techniques and materials, such as the steel frame and truss systems and precast concrete, recognising their cost and time effectiveness and capacity to create large, unhindered interiors and a vast array of forms/spatial experiences. The light toned brickwork also appear to be part of an effort to harmonise the church with its immediate residential context.

³ 'Church of the Mother of God East Ivanhoe, Victoria: Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, Architects', *Architecture and Arts*, December 1957, p29

The north wall of the narthex displays five rows of alternating rectangular slots with stained glass infill (some windows are divided into panes, others three with an openable middle pane). At the lower centre is a metal plaque.⁴ The slot windows were carried through to the front part of the west wing but have been mostly deleted by the skillion-roofed addition.



View to porch, from Robinhood Road



Resolved original floorplan, undated but likely 1957

(Source: Collection of architectural drawings from the firm Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell, SLV, YLATD 16)

^{&#}x27;+Church of the Mother of God+ The Archbishop of Melbourne Most Reverend Daniel Mannix Blessed and Place this Stone Eleventh Day of November 1956 Father Bernard Geoghegan PP'

The upper part of the east elevation's middle four bays is punctured by rows of small cruciform openings with clear glass infill. There is also a concrete-famed section of window wall at the southern end of the east elevation with 'randomly' spaced muntins and stained glass. The ground-floor opening near off centre in the east elevation is original but the double door is not.



South (rear) elevation with later addition skillion volume in the foreground and section of window wall with 'random' mutin bars on right of frame

The interior of *Mother of God* was not inspected and is known to have undergone a succession of modifications. However, based on contemporary photographs in the public domain, some elements designed or specified by Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell remain.⁵ These include the exposed steel roof beams, painted matt black and timber-lined ceiling. The plastered walls and vertical timber-lined dado are also apparent. In the recent past, the Hermann Hohaus-designed and produced timber altar crucifix was also evident (relocated to the side of the altar war), as were his Stations of the Cross bas-relief panels (both sidewalls).

Until the Second World War, the preponderance of churches constructed in Victoria were historicist in style, chiefly drawing from British antecedents. After the lifting of building restrictions and increased availability of materials/labour, a small number of pareddown, innovative churches began to appear in the early 1950s.

From about the middle of the decade, an increasing number of new churches – like Mother of God – adopted the language of architectural modernism in their new geometries and avoidance of conventional ecclesiastical reference. Yet, while the aim was to convey an authentic image of modernity, traditional design was not eschewed entirely in most cases at this phase. As demonstrated by the subject place, 'modern' places of workshop in the 1950s still often sought a level of continuity with pre-war idioms. Accordingly, established elements such as the longitudinal plan, semi-circular sanctuary, a pitched roof, insistent verticality, stained glass, emphasised mullions and muntins, and cruciform openings were all utilised to reveal the building as a place of worship, albeit in a simplified and abstracted manner.⁶

For instance, see 2013 images of Melissa Webb at *Starkitecture*, http://starkitecture.blogspot.com/2013/07/sneaking-up-on-mother-of-god.html, accessed 10 February 2021

Philip Goad, 'Churches', in Goad and Julie Willis, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp185-87

History

Context

The City of Banyule covers the unceded Country of the Wurundjeri-willam people, who have inhabited and managed its landscape for thousands of generations and maintain an ongoing cultural connection. The lightly wooded grasslands of what became known as 'Ivanhoe' were quickly targeted for sheep runs and by timber-cutters from the 'illegal squatter camp (est. 1835) downstream of the *Birrarung*/Yarra at Melbourne. However, as part of the 'Heidelberg' district in the Parish of Keelbundora, this area passed rapidly into private hands via an auction in Sydney Town in 1838.

Over the following decade, a patchwork of 'prestige' estates emerged, along with a surveyed township – *Warringal* (possibly 'eagle's nest'), later 'Heidelberg' – on the river's west bank. ¹⁰ Productive river flats, and the demands of the gold diggings further afield, encouraged market gardening, orchards and (gradually, due to soil exhaustion and flooding) dairying; activities mostly undertaken by tenant farmers. ¹¹ This perceived rural idyll enticed *plein air* artists to the district during the 1880s, fixing the 'Heidelberg School' within Australia's artistic consciousness. ¹²

Ivanhoe – its name stemming from Archibald Thom's 'Ivanhoe Estate' – remained a sparsely populated agricultural area until Melbourne's 'Land Boom' in the late 1880s. 13 'Picturesque' terrain, varied outlooks and the high repute of the broader district drew often well-off newcomers. By the turn of the century, 'Beautiful Ivanhoe' was routinely portrayed as a 'fashionable', 'exclusive locality' of 'model homes'. 14 An improved railway connection to Melbourne in 1901 supported further middle-class growth, instigating 'four decades of slow and relatively affluent suburban sprawl' in the vicinity of Ivanhoe, Eaglemont, and Heidelberg train stations. 15

During the interwar years, suburban Ivanhoe solidified, although its southern and eastern reaches remained primarily locked up by the expansive 'Hartlands', 'Charterisville', and 'Chelsworth' estates. ¹⁶ To navigate the complexities that accompanied the subdivision of these areas (sloping land, curving streets, views) in the postwar period and galvanised by the swelling influence of modernism, many of the new and generally moneyed proprietors sought the services of an architect. ¹⁷ By the early 1960s, distinct enclaves of upmarket, modernist design culture were apparent in the southern reaches of Ivanhoe and Ivanhoe East, with the aesthetic and lifestyle reverberations of the modern movement also shaping infill development in the more established environs of the locale.



View near Heidelberg in Victoria, pen and ink drawing, circa 1858 (Source: Eugene von Guérard, National Gallery of Victoria)

- Context, Banyule Thematic Environmental History, October 2018, pp15-20, available online
- James Boyce, 1835: The Founding of Melbourne & The Conquest of Australia, Black Inc., 2011, pxi
- Keelbundora stems from a European rendering of Kulbundora the name of the eldest son of the important Wurundjeri ngurungaeta (essentially 'head man') Billibellary. ('Suburban Native Names', Argus 28 April 1906, p5). One of the earliest manifestations of local governance in the Port Phillip District (1840), the fluctuating borders of municipal Heidelberg mirrored its growth, as it was reformatted into a Road District (1860), Shire (1871) and then City (1934). It was amalgamated as the City of Banyule in 1994.
- Donald S Garden, Heidelberg: The Land and Its People 1838-1900, Melbourne University Press, 1972, p13
- Robert P Whitworth, Bailliere's Victorian Gazetteer, F F Bailliere, 1879, pp237
- Context, *Banyule Thematic Environmental History*, sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.5, and 2.3.10; and Janine Rizzetti, 'Heidelberg', in Richard Broome et al, eds., *Remembering Melbourne* 1850-1960, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 2016, p282
- Thom's estate designation was inspired by a novel of the same name by Sir Walter Scott (1819).
- lvanhoe & Alphington Progress Society, Beautiful Ivanhoe: the suburb of model homes and scenic charm, Model Studio, 1900, SLV
- lvanhoe Station opened in 1888; however, inefficiencies in the Heidelberg-Melbourne railway line initially bedevilled growth.
- lvanhoe grew from roughly 2,000 residents in 1913 to nearly 8,000 by 1933 (Victorian Year Books, Australian Bureau of Statistics).
- Don Garden, 'Ivanhoe', eMelbourne, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, July 2008

Site-specific

The subject land derives from Portion 2 of the Parish of Keelbundora, a roughly 420-hectare holding purchased (along with portions 1 and 3) by Thomas Walker in 1838. A Sydney-based Scottish banker and philanthrope with an eye for marketable land across the colony, Walker's intention in the Port Philip District was speculative from the start. He commenced subdividing his acquisitions as early as mid-1839 to enormous profit.¹⁸

In the resulting sales, Portion 2 was carved up into multiple large parcels. The subject land was incorporated into the eastern reaches of a roughly 215-hectares property – a combination of portions 1 and 2 of the Parish of Keelbundora. It was purchased by the well-heeled Captain George Brunswick Smyth and christened the 'Chelsworth Estate'. His respectable 1860s homestead, overlooking the *Birrarung*/Yarra, is now utilised as the Ivanhoe Golf course clubhouse (HO185). By the late 1870s, most of the estate was occupied by tenant farmers.¹⁹

Around 1900, the majority of the Cheslworth Estate was acquired by Philip Champion de Crespigny, an official for the Bank of Victoria, and William Lawson Davidson, an accountant.²⁰ Their survey was responsible for establishing much of the existing road layout in the area bound loosely by Studley Road (north), Marshall Street (west), Hopetoun Grove (east), and the river. A series of subdivisions occurred up until the First World War. In 1913, Carl Otto Marschner, an Ivanhoe-based importer, acquired the triangular block now bound by Wallis Avenue, Wilfred Road, and Robinhood Road (originally View Street) – a parcel including the subject land.²¹ Marschner organised its subdivision into differently sized allotments, advertised under the banner of the 'Warwick Estate':

No district has made such remarkable advancement in recent years than this beautiful spot [*Ivanhoe*], which has been aptly named the Garden Suburb of Melbourne. The railway returns evidence the wonderful increase in traffic year by year. A large quantity of land has been subdivided, and so far, every subdivisional sale has been a marked success. The Warwick Estate is situated south from the Lower Heidelberg road, is very high, and commands beautiful views. The new boulevard, which will run along the river through to Melbourne passes immediately in front of the estate.²²

The rate of sales from the wider estate was slow and continued into the postwar period. However, the first sale in 1917 was of the kite-shaped allotment at the intersection of Wilfred and Robinhood Road (now 50 and 56 Wilfred Road), which encompassed the subject place. The buyer was a foreman, Percival Herbert Austin.²³ Soon after, he constructed a residence at the centre of the double allotment.²⁴



Late 1920s photograph across Ivanhoe East from Maltravers Road with the junction of Lower Heidelberg and McArthur roads (East Ivanhoe Village) visible in the centre – Mother of God Church would be constructed out of frame left. (Source: Cyril Cummins, A pictorial history of Heidelberg Since 1836, Heidelberg Historical Society, 1982, p71)

- W Joy, 'Walker, Thomas (1804-1886)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1967, available online
- Garden, Heidelberg: The Land and Its People 1838-1900, pp27-28, 41, 92
- ²⁰ Certificate of Title, vol 344, folio 777 (note the front title has largely perished, making the date of transfer indecipherable)
- ²¹ Certificate of Title, vol 3784, folio 741
- ²² 'Ivanhoe', *Herald*, 26 February 1914, p5
- ²³ Certificate of Title, vol 4015, folio 924
- 24 Review of Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria

Austin's dwelling, along with the interwar house of John W Bainbridge, a Department of Agriculture official, that was situated opposite Robinhood Road (since demolished) were some of the earliest dwellings in the immediate area.²⁵



1931 aerial photograph of the rough centre of Ivanhoe East Austin's house, then occupying the subject place, is circled in dashed red (Source: Landata, Project no 1931, Run 17, Frame 3328)

In 1951, new owners subdivided the corner allotment, creating the subject allotment.²⁶ A couple of years later, in January 1956, the Roman Catholic Trusts Corporation for the Diocese of Melbourne purchased the subject property, at which time Austin's residence was demolished.²⁷

Behind the decision of the Diocese to acquire the corner site was the rapid suburban transformation of Ivanhoe East over the late 1940s and early 1950s, which equated with a growing flock that outstripped existing religious facilities. The activist English immigrant, Father Bernard Joseph Geoghegan (1894-1977), then the inaugural priest of the fledgling (established 1940) Immaculate Conception Parish, appears to have played a principal role in advocating and planning for a new church and parish for the burgeoning locale of Ivanhoe East. Both the former and latter were to be known as 'Mother of God'. Wews of a new church had been in public circulation as early as 1954, with the Catholic weekly newspaper, *The Advocate*, reporting:

As a result of the meeting held at the home of Mr. Frank Galbally, Withers-street, East Ivanhoe, recently, the forty or so present unanimously decided that a church should be erected in the vicinity to meet the needs of the Catholics of this rapidly growing residential suburb who find that they are too remote from the churches at Heidelberg and Ivanhoe. Plans for the new building are in the course of preparation and as

²⁵ 'Mr. J. W. Bainbridge', *Age*, 9 August 1940, p10

²⁶ Certificate of Title, vol 4015, folio 924

²⁷ Certificate of Title, vol 8103, folio 611

The wider growth of Banyule's Roman Catholic community, including its increasing middle-class complexion from the interwar years, and the impact of southern European (particularly Italian) postwar immigration (challenging the monolithic Irish-Catholic character of the church), is discussed in the *Banyule Thematic Environmental History* (Context, October 2018, pp42-3)

The Ivanhoe area initially fell within the boundaries of the Heidelberg Parish (established 1851). In 2005, Banyule's three postwar Catholic parishes (St Bernadette's, Immaculate Conception, Mother of God) were formally consolidated into the 'Mary Mother of the Church – Ivanhoe Parish'.

soon as they are finalized, the church will be commenced. It will be erected at the intersection of Maltravers-street and Ormond-road. Father J. Geoghegan, P.P., Immaculate Conception parish, Ivanhoe, is in charge of the district embraced by the proposed church.³⁰



1954 aerial photograph, with the undivided subject property, still occupied by Austin's residence, circled in red (Source: Landata, Project no 174, Run 15, Frame 75)

Evidently, the later purchase of the subject property superseded the site noted in the *Advocate*. The identity of the architect/s noted in the article is also not known. Nonetheless, by at least early 1956, Fr Geoghegan (likely aided by a building committee) had engaged the young, progressive practice of Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell. *Mother of God* – titled 'Memorial Church of the Mother of God' on the drawings – was to be the firm's first religious commission. The commemorative aspect of this title was to be conveyed in the plaque to the narthex, dedicating the building to those that died during the world wars (and specifying the architects); however, its wording does not appear to have been ever installed (see existing plaque).³¹

In the mid-1950s, such a decision to 'go modern' was still bold, only becoming more typical (particularly for new suburban parishes) later in the decade as Victoria witnessed a veritable surge in church construction that continued into the early 1970s. A myriad of factors likely underpinned such a determination, including issues of economy and the reforming Liturgical movement, and a desire to appeal and remain relevant to younger generations and new families by adopting a 'modern' architecture – one more in character with the swiftly modernising and different landscape of 1950s Australia.³² The British architect, Edward Mills, captured this influential aspect in the design of postwar religious building in his much-publicised 1956 book, *The Modern Church*: 'If we do not build churches in keeping with the spirit of the age we shall be admitting that religion no longer possesses the same vitality as our secular buildings'.³³

In general, the Christian churches were 'expansionist in outlook' across the postwar years,³⁴ assured in their capacity to meet mainstream contemporary desires for social stability and cohesion, a renewed focus on home and the nuclear family, and

New Church for Ivanhoe East', Advocate, 1 April 1954, p2

^{&#}x27;Church of the Mother God – This Church is Erected to the Memory of Those Australians Who Gave Their Lives During World War I and II – 15 September 1957 – Architects Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell' (*Amended Set out of Lettering*, undated, drawing no 382/79A', SLV, YLATD 16)

The 20th-century international Liturgical movement called for liturgical and theological reforms, culminating in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council of 1962-65 (Vatican II).

Edward D Mills, *The Modern Church*, Praeger, 1956, p15

David Hilliard, 'Popular Religion in Australia in the 1950s: A Study of Adelaide and Brisbane', *Journal of Religious History*, vol 16, no 2, December 1988, p235.

trepidation towards moral decline and international tension.³⁵ Church authorities and local lay leadership routinely perceived the building of modernist churches as essential (and exciting) activities – a fundamental investment in their spiritual claim to the expanding footprint of the suburbs and highly visible stake in a coalescing postwar civic realm.³⁶

The foundation stone for *Mother of God* was blessed by Archbishop Mannix with much fanfare on 11 November 1956. The *Advocate* carried a detailed description of the church, then under construction:

The church will be a steel framed building with the structural members clothed in pre-cast concrete to facilitate speedy erection and precision finish. Infill walls will be of pink-fawn Colortone bricks and the roof is to be of slate.

The architects, Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell, have pursued an unusual lozenge form which was suggested by the wedge-shaped site. The exaggerated perspective produced by this shape will lead the eye directly to the high altar. Extensive use of plain stained glass will be made in the large window over the entrance, in the lady chapel, and in the large window at the side of the sanctuary which will flood this area with light and form an interesting pattern on the painted brick altar wall. Subdued general light will be provided by panels of small cruciform windows high up in the east wall. The church which is designed to seat 450, will sit on a concrete mat to be covered with lino tiles.

Rich colour will be introduced on the plastered walls whilst dado and ceilings will be in hardwood lining boards waxed in their natural colour. Pews also will be constructed of this timber. Italian glass mosaics will be used to sheath four columns which occur between the nave and the aisle.

The Lady Chapel, which is part of the nave, will be emphasized by the barrel vaulting of the ceiling, and plastic domes in the flat roof will flood the baptistry and the centre of the narthex with light. A priest's vestry, boys' sacristy and women's sacristy for flower arranging are also provided.³⁷



November 1956 photograph of the foundation stone blessing *Mother of God's* steel frame visible left of frame (Source: 'Parish History Project', *Mary Mother of the Church*, undated, available online)



Archbishop Mannix (mitra hat) and clerics bless *Mother of God's* foundation stone

(Source: 'Parish History Project', *Mary Mother of the Church*, undated, available online)

The appointed contractors for the church were the prominent Melbourne building firm of Clements Langford Pty Ltd (1868-1960s), with the total construction costs reported as £40,000 – a substantial sum in line with the middle-class complexion of the congregation and area.³⁸ Another £10,000 was expended on furnishing *Mother of God*.³⁹

The first mass was celebrated at *Mother of God* in September 1957. Archbishop Mannix, again in attendance, praised Fr Geoghegan's for the 'beautiful church' and 'magnificent site', while also hinting at a note of unease from another (unnamed, imaginably conservative) clerical speaker with the modern nature of the design.⁴⁰

The Age carried a photograph of the 'New Roman Catholic Church at East Ivanhoe' in October (reproduced below).

Graeme Davison, 'Religion', Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, *The Cambridge History of Australia*, vol 2, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp227-28

As noted by Richardson, the 'far-reaching influences of modernity' (individualism, female participation in the workforce, new avenues for self-improvement, etc) gradually came to compete with the centrality of the church to Australia and fuelled a rising secularisation (*The untold story of modernism*, pp63-4).

New Church at East Ivanhoe', Advocate, 8 November 1956, p3

³⁸ Cross-Section, December 1956, no. 50, np; and November 1957, no. 61, np – The University of Melbourne, digitised items

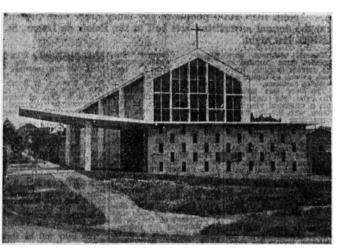
^{39 &#}x27;Beautiful Church on Fine Site at East Ivanhoe', *Advocate*, 26 September 1957, p7

Beautiful Church on Fine Site at East Ivanhoe', Advocate, 26 September 1957, p7

A few months later (November), the clinker-brick Tudor revival-style residence opposite the church at 63 Wilfred Road was purchased as the presbytery.41

Fr Geoghegan was appointed parish priest at the formal constitution of Mother of God in January 1958. 42 While the broadranging religious, social and religious activities of this church have not been researched in-depth, a phrase common in the 1950s and 1960s was the 'seven-day-a-week' church, which speaks to the vigour of congregational life in this period and the myriad of happenings that occurred in suburban buildings like Mother of God.





(Above) Mother of God church and entrance hall (Source: Age, 12 October 1957, p8)

(Left) Fr Geoghegan (rear) photographed conducting the first mass at the Mother of God Church, 1957

(Source: 'Parish History Project', Mary Mother of the Church Catholic Parish Ivanhoe, available online)

The polemical Cross-Section, a newsletter prepared by the Department of Architecture at the University of Melbourne, had published a sketch of Mother of God in late 1956, during its construction. Its brief coverage highlighted Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell's design as an uncommon departure from church design, which it castigated as 'architecturally, the most backward building-type' in Australia' ('the artistic sacrilege rests with the church committees, notorious for being "Sunday architects').43



Sketch of Mother of God, presumably from the office of Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell (Cross-Section, December 1956, no. 50, np, The University of Melbourne)

The modernist enthusiast Peter Wille (1931-71) photographed *Mother of God* – north and west elevation – during construction.

⁴¹ The Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe: A Brief History, Catholic Parish Ivanhoe, undated, refer to parts 1 and 4, available online

⁴² The Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe: A Brief History, part 4

⁴³ Cross-Section, December 1956, no. 50, np, The University of Melbourne



View to frontage and along west elevation, during construction (Source: Peter Wille, undated, SLV, no a22359)



View to west elevation, during construction – note barrel vaulting

(Source: Peter Wille, undated, SLV, no a22359)

The Melbourne-based *Architecture and Arts* journal, which editorialised in support of modern design, published an in-depth article on *Mother of God* in its December 1957 edition:

This Roman Catholic church was completed in September.

It is a steel-framed building with precast concrete column casings and gutters painted white. Panel walls are pink-fawn silica (cement 9 in. by 4½ in. by 3 in.) bricks and the main roof is slate. Concrete slabs sheeted with asbestos felt roof the lower areas and barrel vaulting defines the Lady Chapel.

Located in a high-class residential area requiring special permission to build, the church has been designed as far as possible not to obtrude on its surrounding houses. The plan shape was adopted in order to take full advantage of the unusual and restricted site and to give all worshippers a clear view of the altar. The exaggerated perspective produced by the slowly rising springing line (of the roof) further dramatises the white-painted altar wall.

The church seats 450. It also contains a Priest's Vestry, Boys' Sacristy and a Women's Sacristy for flower arranging, etc.

The confessionals have been planned so that they do not project into the nave, and the electronic organ is installed in a recess near the sanctuary.

The building cost about £A40,000, exclusive of furnishings.

Consulting Engineers, J. L. & E. M. Daly, Melbourne.

Builders, Clements Langford Pty. Ltd.

Timber dado, pews and ceilings are of Australian mountain ash treated with a white filler and satin plasticised finish.

Side walls of the nave are painted deep blue-green and the altar walls is white painted bagged brickwork. Exposed steel roof beams are painted matt black and the walls and ceilings of the Lady Chapel are white. Italian glass mosaics in grey-green, blue-green and copper clothe the columns to the Lady Chapel, which has a mahogany altar matching the "floating" Stations of the Cross panels, which also mask the regulation inlet vents. As yet unfinished, the Stations will have bas reliefs in Australian mountain ash now being carved by Hermann Hohaus, a New Australian sculptor, who also carved the Crucifix. 44

Several photographs of church's exterior and interior taken by the noted architectural photographer, Wolfgang Sievers, accompanied the *Architecture and Arts* article. Some are reproduced below.

^{44 &#}x27;Church of the Mother of God East Ivanhoe, Victoria: Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, Architects', Architecture and Arts, December 1957, p29



Mother of God from Robinhood Road, Wolfgang Sievers (Source: Architecture and Arts, December 1957, p28)



Mother of God from Wilfred Road (Source: Architecture and Arts, December 1957, p28)

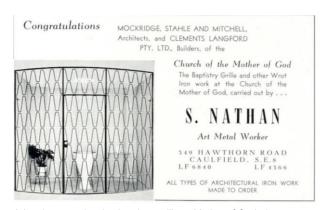


Arrangement of original altar, since modified, and rail (removed) (Source: Architecture and Arts, December 1957, p49)

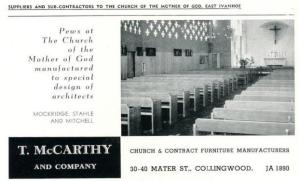


Original nave showing 'starburst' light fittings (replaced) and steel beams (Source: www.ivanhoecatholics.com/parishhistory.htm)

The *Architecture and Arts* article, along with the copious archived drawings related to *Mother of God*'s construction, illustrate the 'total design' approach increasingly adopted by modernist architects in the postwar period, with Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell responsible for nearly a myriad of aspects at the place, including much of the original internal furnishing, ritual objects and landscaping. The commissioning of the modernist German-born sculptor Hermann Hohaus (1920-90) to design/handmake the altar crucifix and Stations of the Cross panels (of native timber) speaks to contemporary efforts in integrating art and architecture.⁴⁵



Advertisement showing baptistry grille at *Mother of God*, since removed (Source: *Architecture and Arts*, December 1957, p58)



Advertisement of timber pews at Mother of God, still extant (Source: Architecture and Arts, December 1957, p58)

Mother of God was Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell's first completed religious commissions. Its generally positive critical and public reception appears to have been important for the development of the office and gave rise to additional church building projects, including in Banyule (see Comparative).

The 'Mother of God Primary School' opened in 1963 on recently acquired land opposite the new church (across Robinhood Road).⁴⁶

In response to Vatican II, liturgical alterations were undertaken in 1968 and included the raising of the sanctuary floor to create a mass-facing altar – itself renewed – as well as the carpeting of the floor. Further modifications, overseen by the locally-based architect, Vito Cassisi, occurred in 1987. These resulted in the removal of the baptistery grille, internal division of the nave with timber-framed glazing and the enclosure of the porch.⁴⁷

Hohaus later prepared two bronze Madonna and Child sculptures at the Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell-designed Mary Immaculate Church

The parish school was closed at the end of 2017.

The Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe: A Brief History, pp19-20



Close-up of cantilevered porch, mid-1980s - soon after partly enclosed with glazing, mid-1980s Note original floor of white Carborundum (silicon carbide stone) panels and 'English' grey-blue quarry tiles The mature tree central to the triangular front garden (background) has since been replaced (Source: courtesy of Graeme Butler)

Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell (1948-83)

The Melbourne-based architecture practice of Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell emerged as leading practitioners of an ascetic yet refined and humane interpretation of the modern movement over the postwar period.⁴⁸ The range of their work was wide but is chiefly associated with residential, ecclesiastical and educational designs, both in Victoria and the ACT. As noted by the architectural historian Philip Goad, their important mid-century contribution has been 'significantly under-researched', and their principal designer, John Mockridge, should be considered one of the State's 'pre-eminent architects of the 1940s' and 'one of the outstanding designers of the 1950s'.49

John Pearce Mockridge (1916-94), James Rossiter ('Ross') Stahle (1917-2000), and George Finlay Mitchell (circa 1916-2006) founded the practice in 1948, after a collective stint at Buchan Laird & Buchan. All were relatively young, returned service members who had attended the University of Melbourne Architectural Atelier during the late 1930s - then an incubator of architectural experimentation in Melbourne.⁵⁰ The partnership's dynamics emerged quickly and proved potent:

While all [the] partners collaborated on basic design decisions, early on in their association, each found his forte in the burgeoning practice. Mitchell handled relationships with clients and officialdom. Mockridge, at his drawing board, slaved over the elegant details that were the signature of the new firm's work, while Stahle, the administrator, supervised staff benevolently and building contracts meticulously.⁵¹

The firm's initial string of houses and embrace of the new structural and material possibilities of the postwar period established its strong modernist credentials.⁵² Beyond the readily identifiable 'modern' imagery of their buildings, Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell are also distinguished for the contextual sensitivity of their design work and response to 'New Empiricism', a term coined

⁴⁸ Winsome Callister, 'Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell', in Philip Goad and Julie Willis, eds, The Encyclopedias of Australian Architecture, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp461-62.

⁴⁹ Goad paraphrased in David Yencken, 'A Tale of Two Motels: the times, the architecture and the architects', La Trobe Journal, no 93-94, September 2014, p154, available online

⁵⁰ Julie Willis, 'The Melbourne University Architectural Atelier, 1919-1947', Journal of Architectural Education, vol 58, no 3, February 2005, p13

⁵¹ Neil Clerehan, 'Schools were 'in' for designer', Age, 5 July 2010

⁵² The practice's early work featured prominently in the special 1954 issue of Architecture in Australia alongside other leading postwar architects (Harry Seidler, Yuncken Freeman Brothers, Roy Grounds, Hassell and McConnell).

in Europe during the late 1940s to describe a more humanist interpretation of the modern movement.⁵³ Their ecclesiastical design was avant-garde, particularly in its examination of geometrical plans and shapes.⁵⁴ Notable places of worship by the practice beyond Banyule include St Faith's Anglican Church, Burwood, 1956-58 (VHR H2254), Whitley College and Ridley College Chapel at Parkville, 1962-65, and the multifaith Religious Centre at Monash University, Clayton, 1967-68 (VHR H2188).







Left to right, Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell (Source: Architecture and Arts, February-March 1953, p17)

Thematic Context

Context, Banyule Thematic Environmental History, October 2018:

- Theme 5: Suburban development
- Theme 6: Community and cultural life

Comparative Analysis

There are nine churches included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay in Banyule.⁵⁵ Of these, only one dates from the second half of the 20th century. Its details follow:

• St Bernadette's Church, 89-91 Bond Street, Ivanhoe (HO181) – a modernist Catholic church designed by Robert O Ellis and constructed 1961-62. It has a prow-like form and curved sidewalls of cream brick with concrete structural elements. Some design components, particularly the elliptical tower and random window configuration (sidewalls), reflect the influence of Le Corbusier's seminal Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp (1955). St Bernadette's has a traditional interior, consisting of a long nave and remote sanctuary.

As noted, *Mother of God* was the first of three distinctive, modernist places of worship constructed in the Ivanhoe area for the Catholic Church. Alongside *St Bernadette's*, the other is *Mary Immaculate Church* at 2-6 Waverley Avenue, Ivanhoe (1961-62), also designed by Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell.⁵⁶ Situated on a corner site, *Mary Immaculate* has a kite-shaped nave capped by a pair of triangular roof planes clad in blue Cordova tiles and is constructed of dark-grey, rough-faced concrete bricks. Notable to the southern plane is a steel-framed triangular spire clad in copper, surmounted by a cross. At the time of assessment, a number of alterations and additions were being undertaken that will compromise its original aesthetic.

In the municipality, Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell were also responsible for designing the small chapel at Ivanhoe Grammar School (1981).⁵⁷ It has a slate-clad domed roof with a cross at the apex and appears to be constructed of light-tinted concrete blocks with sections of window walls.

St George's Anglican Church at 47 Warncliffe Road, Ivanhoe East (chiefly 1963-64) – designed largely by the noteworthy Swisstrained émigré architect Frederick Romberg, then of Romberg and Boyd – is also recommended for a HO by this Study. It is

Mockridge himself later highlighted as influential the work of Californian William Wurster and Richard Neutra alongside Miles van der Roche and Le Corbusier. (Mockridge interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 1973, sounding recording, NLA, Bib ID 2327182)

Refer to collection 'Records of the architectural practice of Mockridge Stahle and Mitchell, ca. 1962 – ca. 1985', SLV, MS 12496

⁵⁵ HO14, HO78, HO86, HO88, HO108, HO115, HO181, HO182, and HO183

Refer to 'Mary Immaculate Church', Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Division 3 of the Heritage Act 2017, 17 November 2017, available online

The chapel is located adjacent to the east side of The Ridgeway, roughly mid-way between Latham and Rose streets, but is largely obscured by fencing and foliage. See Norman Day, 'School Chapel', *Age*, 15 December 1981, p10

situated east of Mother of God and incorporates a section of a late interwar and 1950s hall. Romberg's main modernist complex is relatively grand and unique, distinguished by its cuboid form, strict geometric footprint with prominent courtyard and unusual melding of urban expression with vernacular detailing.

There are several other known instances of church design from the second half of the 20th century in Banyule.58 Of these, only Greensborough Baptist Church (former) is believed to date from the 1950s; however, its clinker brick walls and terracotta tile-clad gable roof reflect an instance of the continuation of traditional/conservative design in the postwar period. Other modernist designs of potential note - namely, Bread of Life Uniting Church, All Saints Anglican Church, St Martin of Tours Catholic Church, and St Mary's Catholic Church - all date from the 1960s/1970s. While individualistic and of potential heritage significance, their designs reflect a more established phase of 'modern' ecclesiastic design when compared to Mother of God.

Mother of God is the first definitive instance of postwar modernist church design in Banyule. More broadly, it is classifiable as an early example of 'modern' church design in Melbourne.59

Together with St George's Analican Church, the subject place is a key non-residential example of the postwar modern movement in Ivanhoe East, a largely postwar locale with a relatively high proportion of modernist architecture.

Intactness/Integrity

Generally intact

Previous Assessment

- Ian and Roslyn Coleman (with Eleanor Bridger and Joanna Wills), Twentieth Century Churches in Victoria: A Study for the Historic Building Council, January 1996 - Mother of God is identified as 'Secondary Significance'
- RBA Architects + Conservation Consultants, Banyule Heritage Study 2020: Stage 1 report, Banyule City Council, August 2020 - High priority, recommended for Stage 2

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls Yes (brick walls)

Internal Alteration Controls Yes (exposed matt-black steel roof beams and timber-lined ceiling)

Tree Controls Yes (Atlas Cedar, front garden)

Outbuildings and/or fences No

Greensborough Baptist Church (former), 520 Greensborough Road, Greensborough (1950s); Bread of Life Uniting Church, 321 Lower Heidelberg Road, Ivanhoe East (1961, Bates Smarts and McCutcheon, proposed for demolition); All Saints Anglican Church, 1 Main Street, Greensborough (circa 1966, Blyth and Josephine Johnson); Living Faith Church (formerly Methodist), 35-37 Grimshaw Street, Greensborough (Alexander Harris & Associates, 1966); St Martin of Tours Catholic Church, 2 Silk Street, Rosanna (architect unknown, late 1960s/early 1970s); St Francis Xavier Catholic Church, 84 Mayona Road, Montmorency (1965); and St Mary's Catholic Church, 210 Grimshaw Street, Greensborough (Max Chester, 1971).

Refer to Ian and Roslyn Coleman (with Eleanor Bridger and Joanna Wills), Twentieth Century Churches in Victoria: A Study for the Historic Building Council, January 1996

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent of the heritage overlay is outlined below.



Recommended extent of heritage overlay (Source: Nearmap, depicting December 2019)