

ST LAURENCE'S CHURCH AND PRIORY

122-140 Buxton Street

St Laurence's Church was erected at the corner of Hill and Buxton streets in 1867-68, a time when this part of North Adelaide was largely undeveloped. Even at the time of the Smith Survey in 1880, many surrounding town acres lay vacant. The choice of site was criticised because of its distance from the hub of North Adelaide, but it gave improved access to a place of worship for the Catholics of Bowden and Hindmarsh. The building is therefore of historical importance both to the city and surrounding suburbs.

The church represents the increased importance and stature of the Catholic community in South Australia at a time when independent and non-conformist congregations were still in the ascendant. Its significance was enhanced by the association with the Order of the Dominican Fathers of South Australia who arrived in 1898. The building itself is a distinguished if simple design by Wright, Woods and Hamilton. The first section was erected by the builder Michael McMullen who was responsible for the design and erection of many Catholic buildings.

The foundation stone of the church of St Laurence Martyr was laid on 10 March 1867 by Bishop Shiel.



(CD Ref 1347/39) *South Australian*

The plan was to build a cathedral-like structure. Financial difficulties curtailed the original £12,000 scheme and contributed to the lengthy construction period. The church dedication was performed on 10 January 1869 again by Bishop Shiel. The

Register, 11 January 1869 commented upon the reduced scale of construction, observing that, ' . . . the nave only is finished, the portions which remain to be added being the transepts, chancel or sanctuary, tower, and sacristy. When entirely completed the church will be a good specimen of the early Gothic Order of architecture'. The cruciform included a tower which would contain a complete belfry. The walls were of rubble Glen Osmond stone with Tea Tree Gully stone dressings. The new building occupied about a third of the area of the originally designed building. A temporary gallery was constructed for the choir. 'The windows are alternately plain and coloured. The latter, we understand being the gift of the clergy and others who have interested themselves in the undertaking.' The altar, designed by the architects, was of polished cedar. The roof principals were supported by stone caps, ' . . . which, when funds permit will be carved for the purposes of embellishment'.

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Despite this rather kindly description of the church as it might have become, it remained unfinished for several years. The Dominican Fathers next erected the priory and then completed the church, although not in the form originally intended. In 1909 plans consisted of a double porch with a large arch in the centre, six confessionals thrust out between buttresses on the eastern and western elevations, and from the north wall a



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(CD Ref 2017/44)

completely new complex of sanctuary, side chapels and sacristies. Electric light was installed and the pipe organ was built below the large south-facing window. The completed church was blessed in February 1910. Edward John Woods was the architect and the contractors were Ligertwood and Park. The present altar was erected in 1926, and to mark the Golden Jubilee of the order in Australia two side alters were set up in 1948. In 1948-49 the church was consecrated and renovated.

The building is an excellent example of a parish church consistently detailed and constructed, and although lacking the grandiose scale of the original design, its impact is impressive. The rock-faced sandstone dressings provide a pleasing foil to the bluestone walling. The building, divided into buttressed bays, is dominated by the substantial and steeply pitched roof. The interior is spacious, the high hammer beam roof and diagonal matchboard

ceiling being a notable feature. The nave is impressive, but the stone truss supports remain uncarved.

St Laurence's and its priory on the west are landmarks with major streetscape importance. Their scale in relation to surrounding development guarantees that their dominance and impressive character in this residential setting will continue.

St Laurence's Church had been completed almost thirty years before Archbishop O'Reilly invited Father Joseph Hickey in Ireland to send Dominicans to found the Order of Preachers in his diocese. Three Irish Dominican Fathers, Robert William Spence, Malachy Headly and Bernard Larkin arrived in Adelaide in late 1898. Father Spence was chosen as the foundation's superior because of his previous experience in building a priory and in restoring a church at Black Abbey in Kilkenny, Ireland. This experience was useful for on arrival, the Fathers' first project was the building of a similar priory next to St Laurence's.

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The new priory's role in the community was most important to the local Catholic population which at the time was approximately 700:



(CD Ref 2017/49)



(CD Ref 2015/49)

Father Larkin recalled the need of Catholic education so pressing in Adelaide at the opening of this century, and the need of intensive religious instruction to compensate for the lack of a completely Catholic system of education.

The Dominican Fathers were much in demand and were asked to care for the whole diocese, travelling as far as Mount Gambier to give missions. Their own parish was divided into three districts with each Father being responsible for one part. The three districts were approximately the North Adelaide district, the Prospect district, and beyond to the Kilburn area. Father Larkin later described how valuable was visitation for maintaining communication between laity and clergy, and as a means of bringing back the wayward and making converts.

The priory is of considerable architectural and historical note, being designed by E.J. Woods who was responsible for many prominent Anglican and Catholic buildings. This is an unusual and distinctive example of the extended 'return veranda villa', with high quality construction using squared random coursed sandstone with relieving arches over openings, and quoins with draughted margins. The steeply pitched roof, clustered chimneys, stepped gables and windows with mullions and transoms are in distinct contrast to the Italianate villas which characterise much of this area of North Adelaide. The building has an ecclesiastical appearance appropriate to the adjacent Gothic Revival church of St Laurence.

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ACA, Assessments, *Digest of Proceedings*, 18 May 1908, 10 May 1909, 13 October 1919, 23 May 1921, Smith Survey 1880; Byrne, E, *History of the Catholic Church in South Australia*, 1914; *St Laurence's Priory*, 1893-1973, pp. 6-7; *South Australian Register*, 11 March 1867, 11 January 1869; Woods Bagot, *Ledger of Commissions*.

The text in this Information Sheet was copied from the **Heritage of the City of Adelaide: An Illustrated Guide**, (1996). The photographs contained in this Information Sheet are a selection of those held by Heritage Services, in digital format.

The property described in this Information Sheet is included in the Register of State Heritage places. A heritage listing does not mean or imply right of access by the public to such properties.

The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.

Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.



CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

The City Heritage Register - Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	ST. LAURENCE'S CHURCH	Building No 24/0107-2
Address	126 Buxton Street, North Adelaide; (on land 121-139 Hill Street and 122-140 Buxton Street)	CT 612/76

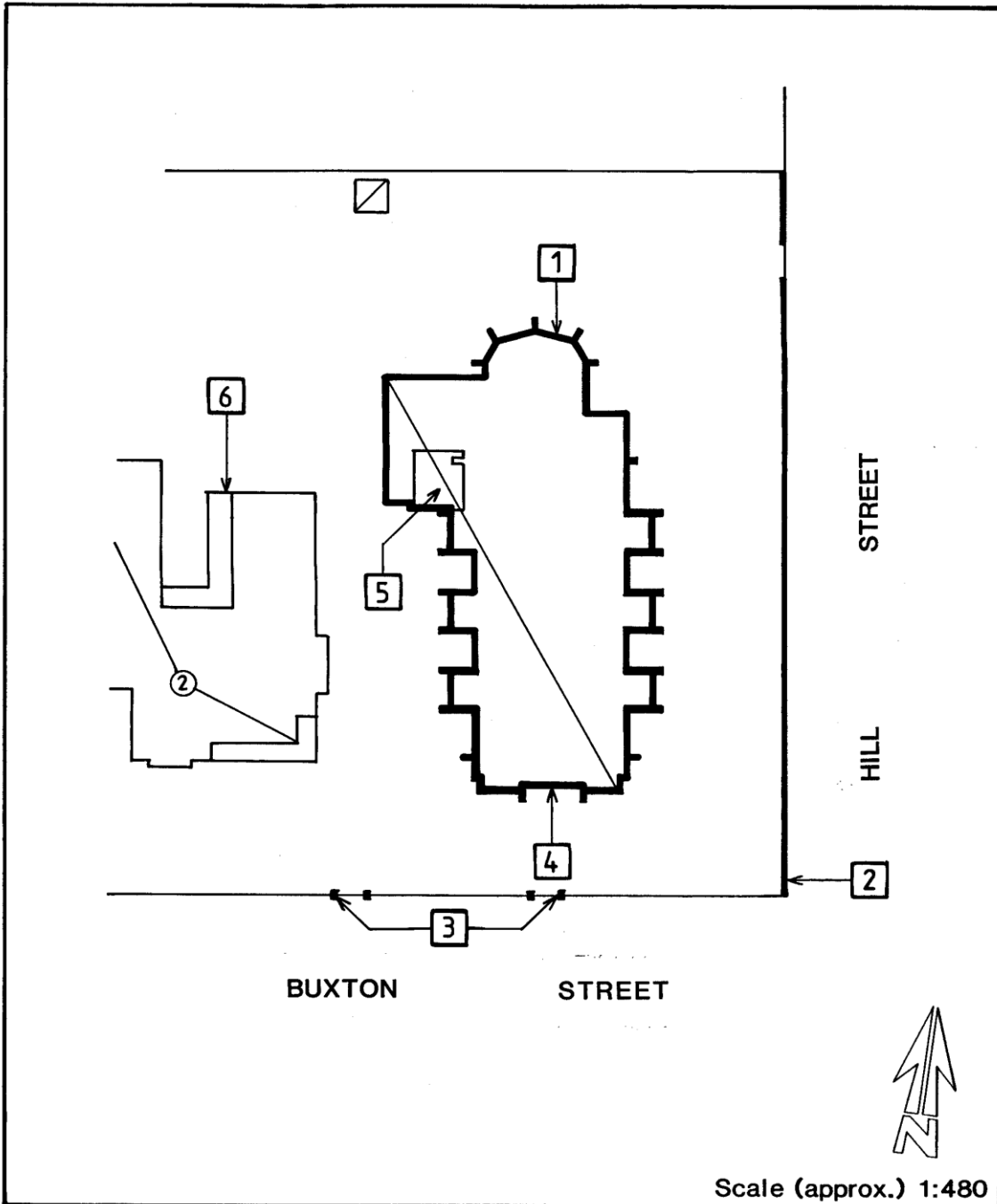


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NOTES:

1. Roughly squared bluestone with rock faced sandstone quoins and sandstone and stucco detailing.
2. Rendered limestone with brick pillars and coping.
3. Brick pillars.
4. Note: Tracery and leadlight windows.
5. Sympathetic infill.
6. Note: Priory also listed.



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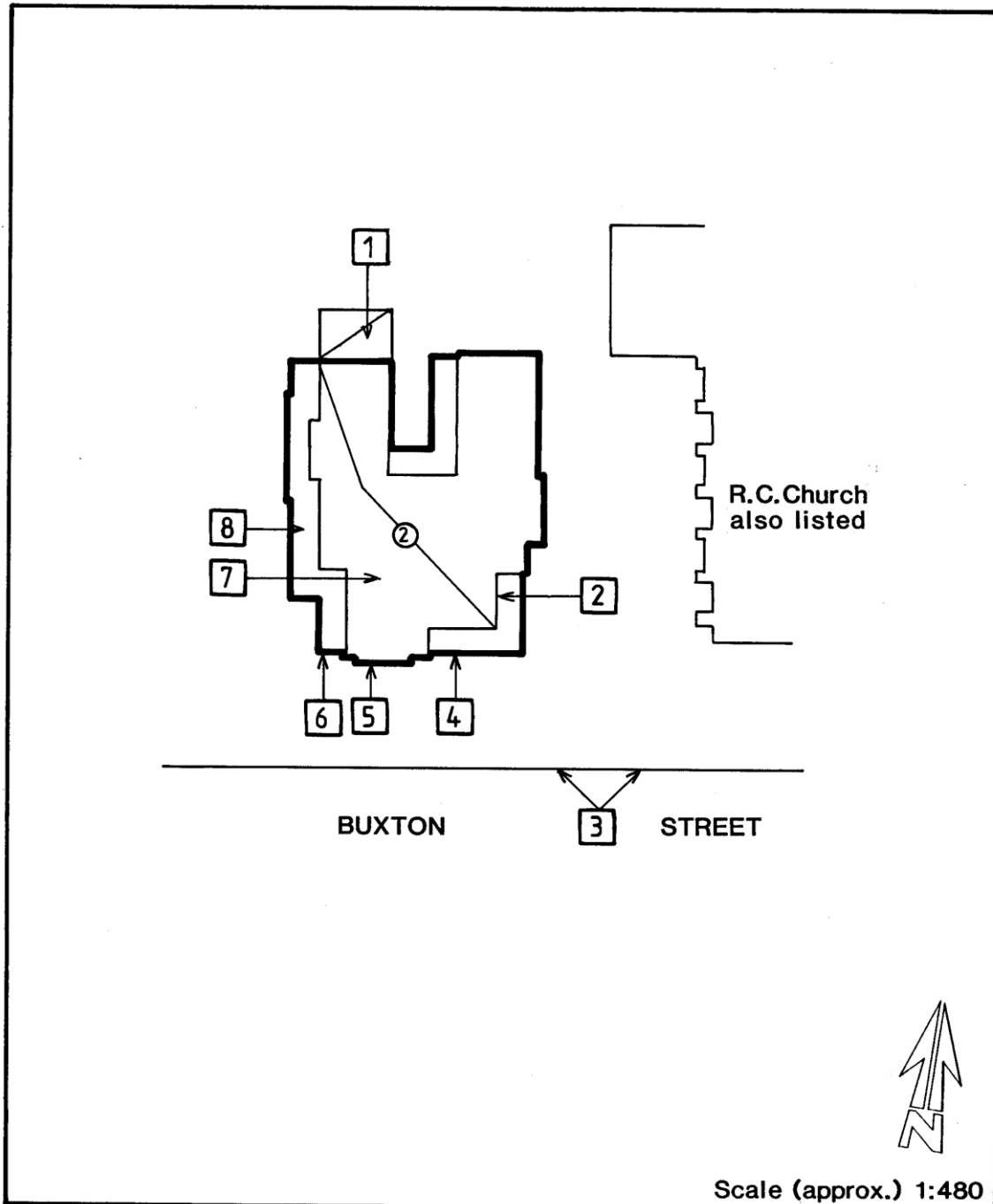


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NOTES:

1. Rendered addition.
2. Squared tooled sandstone with stucco enrichment and bluestone plinth.
3. Note: Gate piers.
4. Veandah/balcony with cast iron balustrades, friezes, spandrels.
5. Rendered bay window.
6. Shingle roof.
7. Small balcony enclosure.