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Cobram Church PRECINCT

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COBRAM CHURCH PRECINCT

LOCATION

Precinct Boundaries and Map

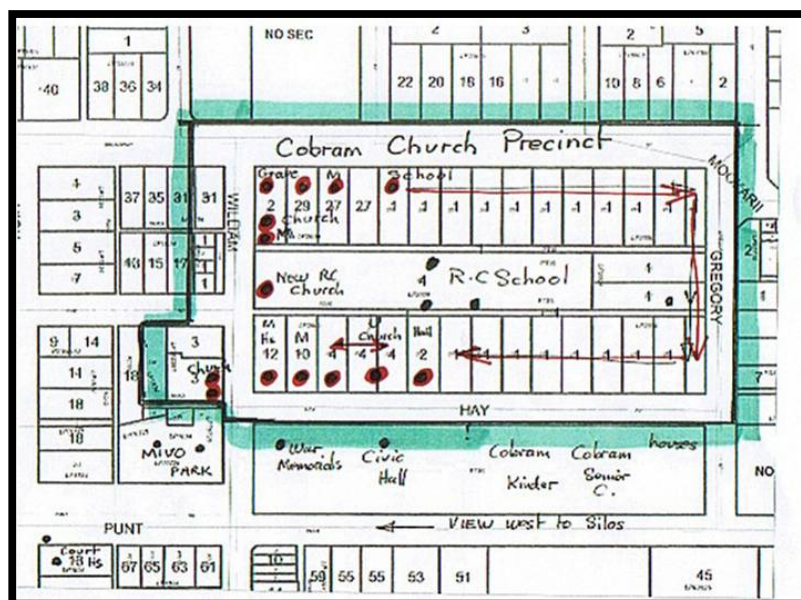


FIG. 1. Map of Cobram Church Precinct.

Culturally significant places (17) are shown by the red dots in the map above.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2004

The Cobram Church Precinct includes the whole of the block bounded by Broadway Street, Gregory Street, Hay Street and William Street and extends to the west side of William Street to include 31 Broadway Street and south to the Uniting Church and Red Cross Hall, William Street marked (as number 9) on the map below.

1. Old St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church
2. Catholic Manse/Presbytery
3. St Joseph's Sisters of Mercy Convent
4. New Roman Catholic Church
5. Catholic School No. 1152.
6. Houses – Manses and Presbytery.
7. Presbyterian Church (Uniting Church, Hay Street)
8. Irvin Hall
9. Wesleyan Church and Hall (Uniting Church and Red Cross Hall, William Street)

COBRAM CHURCH PRECINCT

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historical Context

The Church Precinct is dominated by the large number and size of buildings and areas associated with the Roman Catholic Church in Cobram and St Joseph's Catholic School. However, it also houses the first purpose built church extant in Cobram, the Uniting (formerly Methodist/Wesleyan) Church. It was constructed twenty-two years before the next church in this precinct. The Uniting (formerly Presbyterian) Church and Irvin Hall, manse and presbytery on Hay Avenue and the former Methodist/Wesleyan Hall on William Street are also important places within the precinct.

Prior to the erection of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, services were held in the Grant and White foundry. Before the construction of the first Roman Catholic church, Mass was celebrated in the Mechanics Institute hall. Cobram was within the parish of Yarrawonga and the names of priests associated with the early history of the parish included Frs Kennedy, Madden, Byrne and Tobin. Cobram received its first resident Catholic priest in 1922 with the investiture of Fr Peter Ellis. At this time the growth of Cobram district was continuing from the previous decades of the twentieth century, particularly with the advent of irrigation schemes. By 1922 the area irrigated was 'slightly over one thousand acres' with 'up to six cuts' of lucerne and an average yield of seven tons of hay per acre. Grant and Stewart's flour mill churned out '100,000 bags in a normal season'.ⁱ The growth of the educational and religious facilities were on a par with the economic development of the district and the population growth this allowed.

The Catholic population of St Joseph's Cobram Parish rose from 706 in 1951 to over 2000 in 1965. An assistant priest was appointed in 1963 and the new Catholic Church is testament to the growth in the Roman Catholic population from that period. Similarly the post war period was a time of expansion for the school. In 1961 St Joseph's Catholic School had 380 pupils, compared to the 65 who had attended its first year in 1922.ⁱⁱ

The Church Precinct thus dates to the town's major period of growth in the early twentieth century and has remained a significant social, religious and educational centre of the town and its Roman Catholic, Wesleyan/Methodist, Presbyterian and Uniting Church communities.

It is also significant to note that the Wesleyan (Methodist) and Presbyterian churches are also within the Church Precinct on land proximate to the Catholic structures, an important marker of the religious harmony of the community in comparison to many other areas at the time, when division between Catholic and Protestant communities was often great.

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Extant Heritage Places

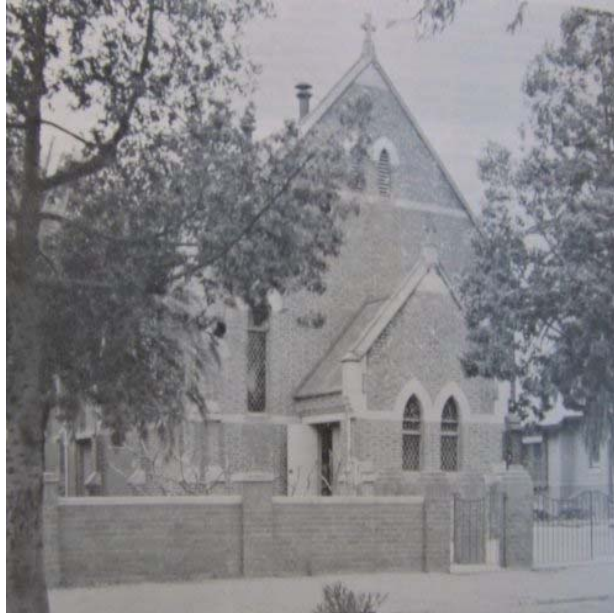


Fig. 2 St Joseph's Catholic Church, c. 1960s
Source: Martindale.

Old Roman Catholic Church 1911 (St Joseph's)

The seven acre site which forms the basis of the Church and School precinct was purchased by Fr Madden in 1908. At a meeting after mass in March 1910, the congregation resolved to build 'a large and handsome edifice, one worthy of a people who have always liberally assisted towards the erection of churches in neighboring districts and waited so long for their own.'ⁱⁱⁱ Twenty two gentlemen donated £420 towards the project that day, with a further £50 donated by local businesses. Bishop Reville laid the foundation stone for the original church on 19 March 1911. The builder was J. Broderick of Footscray and the architect Tobias Kelly C.E. The church was opened and blessed on 29 October 1911. The event was described in *The Cobram Courier* with a detailed description of the building on 2 November 1911:

Rev. Father Gannon, who is conducting the mission, preached a fine sermon, basing his remarks upon the text: "A house has been prepared, not for man, but for God." The building, which is erected on the highest part of the town, was commenced about the first of this year and finished in June, the foundation stone being laid by Bishop Reville on Sunday, 19th March. The dimensions of the structure are as follows: - Interior of main building, 60ft x 28 ft.; chancel, 18ft x 16ft; vestry, 16ft x 16ft, porch, 8ft x 11ft. The design of the chapel is Gothic throughout, and it bears a very imposing appearance, its height (37ft from basement to ridge, exclusive of crosses) serving to make it one of the most prominent landmarks in town. The external brick walls of the main building, which are 19ft high to the eaves, are relieved with five lead-light windows on both sides, each window having diamond shaped panes, while the brickwork encircling them is adorned with cement facings. There are three main exits, which allow of ample egress. The exterior of the porch, chancel and vestry are attractive and set off the main building to best advantage [and] rests on a solid foundation of reinforced concrete [...] Entering the

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building by the porch, which is floored with mosaic tiles, the visitor sees a very capacious interior, the space from the Murray pine floor to the dome of the elliptical shaped ceiling being 25ft, while the white plastered walls give an appearance of greater breadth than the interior really possesses. The spacious chancel is, however, the attraction of the place, and the eye lingers here on the altar rails and the beautiful appointments of the altar, and then the gaze wanders to the very handsome treble windows of stained glass, which were inserted in memory of the late Mrs Mary Dunn, and depict the "Crucifixion". The body of the church is occupied with 34 substantial kauri seats, which are arranged on both sides, each one being built to seat 8 persons.

The construction of the church cost £1475 and was remarkable at the time for the sum being fully subscribed ahead of the laying of the foundation stone, which, Bishop Reville claimed, was 'unique in the history of the Roman Catholic church, or any church for that matter'.^{iv}

Grave and Monument 1954

The grave in the grounds of the old church is that of Fr Ellis who served as priest for 32 years from 1922 and was buried beside the church in 1954.

Presbytery 1924

Fr Ellis lived in the sacristy of the old Catholic Church until the presbytery was built in 1924 .

Convent of the Sisters of Mercy 1922 and St Joseph's School No.1152. 1922

These two sites are inextricably connected. Both St Joseph's Catholic school and the convent were opened in 1922 by Archbishop Mannix. The school commenced with 65 pupils. The grand opening of the twin sites took place on 9 March 1922, with 'Cobram en fete' with 'a grand carnival, Queen's coronation and concert in connection therewith'.^v Around four thousand people flooded the town, greeting Mannix at the railway crossing and leading his Rolls Royce in procession through 'the principal streets of the town' accompanied by the full Cobram Brass Band and seventy-five mounted horsemen. They also raised a record £4000 on the day in tribute to he whom the *Cobram Courier* feted as 'the champion of democracy'. This reference to the archbishop's role in defeating the conscription referenda and advocacy for workers and Catholics may well be indicative of the strong labour tradition that seemed to prevail in the district in the early twentieth century. In his speech, Mannix complemented the new buildings as 'an ornament to the town, and a credit to the people of Cobram'.^{vi} At the opening of the school he outlined his vision for the establishment:

Fortunately they secured the services of the Sisters of Mercy, who would be able to go amongst the people doing good amongst all classes. There would eventually be a boarding school, but the first thing was to provide a school which would work in such a way as to do good to the whole of the community. They could send their children there and receive as good an education as in any part of the world. The girls would have the benefit of a Catholic education and the boys would receive a polish that is not at present given in the educational establishments of the state.^{vii}

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The school was run by the Sisters of Mercy, who were invited to Cobram by the Bishop of Sandhurst in 1921. As a result of the construction and the growing population attached to it Cobram was formally declared a parish late in 1922. According to Sister Ignatius:

Here, as in the other towns of the Goulburn Valley Catholics have been successful in choosing good sites for their buildings. Church, presbytery, convent, and parish school lie side by side in spacious areas, and each presents a handsome exterior. The convent is a very superior building, both in point of size and attractiveness.

[The Cobram Convent was geographically] the last of the Mercy Houses in the Goulburn Valley...the sisters teach music, commercial subjects and give other primary instructions asked for, but the income derived from these is small...Yet it is amazing to note the interior and exterior beauty of their convent, which they care for themselves.^{viii}

The population expansion of the post war boom in the 1950s led to the construction in 1956 of a new school building in Market Street. The school returned to the old site in 1959 with renovations and addition to the old buildings by J. A. MacIntyre for a cost of £5000 to accommodate more pupils and teaching staff. In 1965 the convent was home to eight Sisters of Mercy, with 500 students. This growth compared with a mere 130 students in 1950.^{ix}



Fig. 3 Convent and School at Cobram 1922.
Source: *Cobram Courier* 1922.

New Roman Catholic Church 1985

This growth in the population during the post war period continued into the 1980s and necessitated the construction of a new church to accommodate a growing congregation. The older church was retained for various church activities.

Wesleyan Church 1889 and Wesley Hall 1956 (Uniting Church, William Street)

The Uniting Church was opened on 4 August 1889 with a 'grand tea and concert' and a sermon by Rev. H. Hadley. The *Courier* noted the church's 'acoustic properties favourable to music' and Rev. Hadley promoted the Wesleyans as 'friends of all and enemy of none'. The church interior included 'a handsome organ' donated by T. Gedye. The builder was J. McCullagh.^x

A parsonage was added in 1954 and Wesley Hall (weather board) was built in 1956.^{xi}

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Fig. 4 Wesleyan Church(1889) and Wesley Hall (1956) in William Street, c.1960s
Source: Martindale.

Presbyterian Church 1912 and Irvin Hall 1958 Uniting Church, (Hay Street)

The Presbyterian building committee contracted T. Miles of Tatura to build the new church in 1912 at a cost of £1475. The foundation stone was laid on 18 September 1912 by Rev. J. Mathew, former head of the Presbyterian Church in Australia and 'a leading scholar and poet in the state' before a crowd of 200 people.^{xii} The design was by the architects Laird and Buchan of Geelong and the construction cost of £1500 included seats and fencing. The building process from inception to completion took 18 months, with £500 raised by the first meeting and £800 by the town in total. The land for adjoined the Catholic Church and school, and was testament to the good relations between the faiths in Cobram, as Rev. Buntine related, 'the committee decided to purchase an adjoining block which was owned by the R. C. denomination. Arch Priest (*sic*) McCarthy met them in a very brotherly spirit, and let them have the land at considerably less than its market value.'^{xiii}

The Irvin Hall was the gift of the Irvin family in 1958. Miss Irvin was also the chief benefactor for the construction of the new manse in 1963.



Fig. 5 Presbyterian Church (1912) and Irvin Hall (1958) in Hay Street c.1960s.
Source:

Houses 1954 and 1963

The house adjacent to the

William Street Uniting Church is likely to be the parsonage erected in 1954, while that adjacent to the Hay Street church is likely to be the 1963 Presbyterian manse.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

List of culturally significant places

1. Old St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church
2. Catholic Presbytery
3. St Joseph's Sisters of Mercy Convent
4. New Roman Catholic Church
5. Catholic School No. 1152.
6. Houses Manse. Presbytery.
7. Presbyterian (former) Church (Uniting Church, Hay Street)
8. Irvin Hall
9. Wesleyan (former) Church and Hall (Uniting Church and Red Cross Hall, William Street)

Urban Design

Layout and Orientation

Cobram Church precinct follows a typical grid road and allotment layout and the early buildings are aligned with the grid, which was also a typical process and this forms a strong part of the visual character of the area. These building and street alignments are an important setting of this precinct. The 1985 Catholic Church and carillon (2002) are exceptions to the dominant character.

Views and Significant Foci

Significant views within the precinct include all the views, including views to the rear of the former Presbyterian church, (an example is seen in Fig6) to the churches, carillon, halls, school, manse, presbytery, and convent from Broadway, High, and Hay Streets as well as views from across the school playing fields and parklands adjacent. The tall carillon is a significant focus in the precinct.



Fig 6 View to rear of former Presbyterian Church from William Street.

Fig 7 Carillon and Eucalyptus street trees in William Street. [The trees were removed soon after these photographs were taken].



Source: Figs. 6, 7 & 8 Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd 2005.



Fig. 8 View to rear of St Joseph's Catholic School from Hay St.

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Trees



Significant trees include the Spruce and Peppercorn trees in the grounds of the timber Uniting Church, some trees on the Catholic Church properties in William Street (see Fig 7).

FIG. 9 Mature exotic trees at 3 William Street.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2004

Culturally Significant Places - Details

There are several culturally significant structures in the precinct which reinforce the religious theme of this precinct.

There is a strong dominant physical characteristic using Gothic style architecture constructed with unpainted red brickwork, and decorated with unpainted concrete details. The earliest (1889 weatherboard Gothic church) and the most recent buildings (1985 concrete block Catholic church and 2002 carillon) are exceptions to this strong character.

1922 Federation Gothic, St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and fence. DB 240



Figs. 10, & 11. St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2003.



The Federation Gothic design is formed with a steeply pitched gable roof clad in galvanised corrugated iron and superbly crafted red brickwork with contrasting bands of unpainted concrete at the sill level of the narrow lancet windows, impost level on the porch and in the apex of the gable end. The

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cross, buttress angles, gable coping, and pointed arches are accented with unpainted concrete render. The matching red brick and concrete render fence completes the fine architectural composition. The combination of red brickwork and unpainted concrete render was typical in the Federation period and produces a dignified edifice. The diamond leadlight using cathedral glass creates a delightful ambience inside the church. A bluestone foundation stone is visible at the base of the front elevation.



Fig 12: 1954 grave of the Very Rev. P W Ellis:

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2003.

The 1954 grave of the Very Rev. P W Ellis is constructed of light and dark polished granite with the statue above and located in the front grounds of the church.

1924 Catholic Presbytery DB 240

The design of the residence compliments the church by the use of a grey roof and red and grey walls. The lower walls, balustrades and chimneys are constructed of unpainted red bricks. Contrasting decoration of unpainted cement rendered capping on the balustrades, chimneys and piers, as well as unpainted rough



stucco upper walls is a strong feature. As is the low slung hipped roof extended to form deep shady verandahs. The paired timber columns along the verandah edge support the low slung slate roof. It is an unusual and fine example of an Inter-War bungalow style residence and a rare and intact example of the use of slate in Cobram.

Fig 13. View showing the close proximity of the manse to the church.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd 2003.



Fig. 14 Former Convent building and fence. DB 240

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2005

The Inter-War Gothic building is a delightful design which has resolved the residential and religious uses with a respectful adaptation of the bungalow style and Gothic styles using the dominant red brick material of the adjacent church for the walls and (more recent) fence. The gable roof is clad in red-orange Marseilles tiles which contrasts without being

overpowering and gives the building a homely character. The unpainted cement render decorative architectural features have been painted white and more recently in a buff colour. While the paint is

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attractive, the original design was more in harmony with the dignified and architecturally correct unpainted finish.

Figs 15 & 16. 1922 St Joseph's Catholic School and convent

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd 2005



The photograph on the left illustrates the Gothic design of the convent. It has similar design features as the school, including the unpainted red brick walls, unpainted cement render trim at sill level and around the pointed arch windows and doorways, and gable roofs clad in red-orange Marseilles roof tiles. Alterations and additions have been made to the school, as illustrated in the photograph on the right. Although the window form and size have changed to allow more natural light, the design has respected the historic harmony of the original buildings and used red brick walls, and gable roofs clad in red-orange Marseilles tiles. The historic photograph in Figure 3 shows a picket fence along the Broadway Street boundary.

Uniting Churches

Figs, 17 & 18. 1912 Federation Gothic former Presbyterian Church. DB 245

Source; Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2003



The red brick church with galvanised iron roof cladding originally had unpainted cement render decorative features, as was the architectural style of the period, which is still visible on the old Catholic church in this precinct.

This building is a fine example of the work by highly regarded Geelong architects Laird and Buchan and it has very distinctive features which are seen in other buildings by them at this time.

These include the Alexander

Homes in Ryrie Street, Geelong, particularly the entry porch with battered buttresses and the Art Nouveau decorative finials. The founder, John Angus Laird was an active member of the Presbyterian Church in

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Geelong and a member of the Freemasons and it is likely that he obtained the commission through his personal contacts in these organisations. The manse and the Irvin Memorial Hall sit either side of the church. They are typical examples of the architecture of the period in which they were built. The manse is primarily of historic and social significance rather than aesthetic significance. They harmonise with the church to the extent that they are constructed of red-orange unpainted brickwork with grey roof cladding and are smaller than the church, which allows the latter to dominate the view, and they are sited such that there is a good amount of space between them, allowing the architecture of each era to be seen separately. It is visually more appropriate to site new buildings such as the manse further from the street boundary than the established culturally significant place, so that its position in the streetscape is the most dominant.



Figs. 19 & 20. Manse and low red brick fence: Showing close way that the manse , being forward of the Church, makes it more dominant in the streetscape.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2005

Irvin Memorial Hall 1958. DB 245



Figs. 21, 22 & 23. Irvin Memorial Hall and detail of entry with foundation stone. Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2003

Designed by the architect Keith Reid, it is a typical example of a hall designed in the Post-War Melbourne Regional style indicated by the simplicity and lightness of the design. This is achieved with a simple geometric plan, low pitched gabled roof with wide eaves, a narrow edge to the roof, long unbroken roof line and large areas of glass with regularly spaced timber mullions.

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Memorial Gates and fence. DB 245.

The aesthetically and scientifically significant memorial gates and plaques on the red brick fence are constructed of hand made and individually designed wrought iron with brass plaques.

Figs. 24, 25 & 26. Memorial Gates and plaques attached to the red brick fence as seen in Figs 19 and 20 above.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2003



Wesleyan (former) Church 1889 and Red Cross Hall, William Street) DB 244

The church is highly significant as the earliest extant church in Cobram. It is a modest example of the Federation Gothic style and is a rectangular timber structure with a steeply gabled roof clad in galvanised corrugated iron and matching entry porch. Some reversible alterations have occurred, such as the pointed arch doorway to the porch, the timber finial and flying timber gable end. These features are visible in the historic photograph in Fig. 4, as is the historic fence still extant along the Hay Street boundary. The brick hall has historical and social significance.

Figs. 27 & 28 1889 timber church and early fence and gate.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2003



Director: Lorraine Huddle B.Architecture (Hons) *Melb.* ICOMOS

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New Roman Catholic Church (1985) and Carillon (2002). DB 243



Figs. 29, 30 and 7. Roman Catholic Church and Carillon.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd 2003.

The church and carillon are primarily of historical and social significance. They are constructed in the style and materials of the 1960s and create a significant visual impact in the precinct. They contrast with the harmonious Federation and Inter-War architecture of the majority of the significant buildings because they use lightly toned concrete blocks. The building is set at an angle to the street layout and there are no boundary fences, whereas the older buildings are aligned with the street and their allotment boundaries. This is emphasised by the low red brick boundary fences. The design of this complex, therefore, is significantly out of character with the rest of the precinct.

The majority of the culturally significant buildings are Federation or Inter-War in design, and are rectangular, single storey with steep hipped or gabled roofs, and positioned parallel to the rectangular shaped allotments. They are either constructed of timber or unpainted red brick walls, with roofs clad in galvanised corrugated iron or slate. They are mostly bounded by low fences of red brick, some with concrete capping. The timber church has a low cyclone wire fence with wrought iron gate. The post war buildings are typical architectural examples of the era of their construction but are primarily of historical and social significance and represent the continuity of the area for religious purposes.

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STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE^{xiv}

Cobram Church Precinct

The other culturally significant places within the precinct, not specifically mentioned in this documentation are listed in Appendix xx and are documented in the accompanying database. The history and description that precedes this Statement of Cultural Significance is the source of the evidence for the statement below.

The Cobram Church precinct is **aesthetically** significant at the **LOCAL** level (AHC criterion E1). The precinct retains significant views, within the precinct, to the imposing red brick Federation Gothic Catholic Church and Convent and former Federation Gothic Presbyterian Church, the diminutive timber former Methodist church, the 2002 carillon, which cumulatively reinforce the historic late nineteenth century and early to mid twentieth century country town religious values and setting of the precinct and its associated religious structures. These views occur along Broadway, William and Hay Streets and are particularly prominent when viewed across the parklands and school playground. The built form of all of its significant buildings includes hipped and gabled roofs with generous setbacks. The church buildings are good examples of their architectural type and provide important architectural integrity and focal points to the precinct. The interior of the churches are also aesthetically significant particularly for the interior spaces and intact detailing.

The aesthetic character of the precinct is formed by the majority of the culturally significant buildings being Federation or Inter-War in design, and are rectangular, single storey with steep hipped or gabled roofs, and positioned parallel to the rectangular shaped allotments. They are either constructed of timber or unpainted red brick walls, with roofs clad in galvanised corrugated iron or slate. They are mostly bounded by low fences of red brick, some with concrete capping. The timber church has a low cyclone wire fence with wrought iron gate. The post war buildings are typical architectural examples of the era of their construction.

The Cobram Church Precinct is **historically** significant on a **local** level for its strong and continuing association with the religious and cultural life of the community. (AHC Criterion A.4) The Precinct is particularly associated with, but not limited to, the historical development of the Roman Catholic community in the early twentieth century and interwar period. (AHC Criterion A.4) It is historically significant for Cobram's earliest extant purpose built religious structures for the Wesleyan Church (1889), Catholic Church (1911) and Presbyterian Church (1912) and also contains sites associated with important individuals in the historical development of religious life in the town. (AHC Criteria A.4 and H.1).

The coexistence of Catholic, Wesleyan and Presbyterian churches on this historically contiguous site is testament to the religious harmony that existed between denominations which was a distinctive feature of Cobram's religious and cultural development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Cobram Church Precinct thus forms a particular and significant component of the heritage of Cobram.

The Precinct is **historically** significant on a **local** level for its strong and continuing association with the educational life of the community throughout the twentieth century, illustrating also the early association of religion and education in the state. (AHC Criteria A.4)

The Cobram Church Precinct is **socially** significant on a **local** level as it valued by the local community for its religious, spiritual, cultural, educational and social associations. (AHC Criteria G.1)

The Cobram Church precinct is **scientifically** significant at the **LOCAL** level (Criteria C2, F1). The materials and workmanship in the significant buildings are technically important and increasingly rare examples in Cobram.

Overall, Cobram Church Precinct is culturally significant at the LOCAL level.

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- i *Argus*, 8 August 1922.
- ii Statistics from *Welcome to Cobram*, 1961 and Martindale, *The Plains Turn Green* 1965.
- iii *The Cobram Courier*, 28 March 1910.
- iv *Cobram Courier*, 2 November 1911.
- v *Cobram Courier*, 16 March 1922.
- vi *ibid.*
- vii *ibid.*
- viii Sister Ignatius, *The Wheel of Time*, 1956, p.215-16.
- ix Martindale, p.40.
- x *Cobram Courier*, 6 August 1889.
- xi Martindale, p.37.
- xii *Cobram Courier*, 26 September 1912.
- xiii *Ibid.*
- xiv Definitions used are from the Burra Charter 1999; historical themes relate to the Principal Australian Themes – Australian Heritage Commission; criteria for Locally Significant places are from the Australian Heritage Commission and in the case of State Significant places, from Heritage Victoria; levels of significance used are State and Local, which directly relate to the two legislative authorities who administer the protection of heritage places, the State Government and Local Government respectively.