

# Abbotsford Convent National Heritage Listing

---



## Summary Statement

The former Convent of the Good Shepherd complex, including a rare laundry, is an outstanding example of a place which demonstrates Australia's social and welfare history, especially in regards to the role of religious and charitable institutions in this history over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Convent's variety of programs and facilities in their institutional and ecclesiastical context are significant aspects of place which strengthens its historic value.

Operating over more than one hundred years from 1863 to 1974, through the social traumas caused by the great Depression, two World Wars and other social upheavals, the Convent provided shelter, food, education and work for tens of thousands of women and children who were variously impacted by poverty, neglect, disadvantage or other forms of social exclusion or insecurity. The Convent also formed part of Victoria's early juvenile justice system.

The former Convent place has retained buildings and spaces demonstrating a range of former institutional and ecclesiastical functions including the residential and training mother house of a major religious order, a chapel, a women's refuge, a reformatory for young offenders, an industrial school complex for neglected and disadvantaged children, a catholic day school, a working farm and large industrial laundry. The remnant laundry buildings are rare in Australia.

The place demonstrates models of care implemented by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and the historic course and pattern of these models through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Institutionalised welfare over this period was eventually abandoned as a care model throughout Australia by the 1960s and 70s. The Apology to the Forgotten Australians in 2009 highlighted the trauma experienced by children in institutions throughout Australia. The Forgotten Australians connection with this place is part of its significance.

Abbotsford Convent has outstanding heritage significance to Australia because of its very high capacity to demonstrate the welfare history and patterns of social change associated with institutionalisation. It informs our understanding of Australia's welfare history and the social changes which shaped the distinctive models of care evident within the Convent over more than 100 years.

The impact on large numbers of people who were admitted to benevolent institutions continues today. As a result Abbotsford Convent is a valuable physical record which can explain the personal histories of individuals and is also a valuable record for on-going generations who are seeking to understand the past which has impacted on their family. In particular Abbotsford Convent is able to inform the stories and experiences of women and children.

The overall lack of surviving material culture relating to the residential care of Forgotten Australians also increases the heritage value of the laundry buildings. Given the intactness of the laundry within its institutional setting, its significance as a marker of conditions associated with the Forgotten Australians and its rarity at least nationally, the laundry complex is considered to be of high significance.