

Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance under Part 3, Division 3 of the *Heritage Act 2017*

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Name	Former Aboriginal Church of Christ
Location	258 Gore Street Fitzroy, City of Yarra
Provisional VHR Number	PROV VHR H2393
Provisional VHR Category	Registered Place
Hermes Number	1709
Existing Heritage Overlay	City of Yarra, HO334 (Within a precinct)



Former Aboriginal Church, 2019

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE HERITAGE COUNCIL:

- That the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ be included as a Registered Place in the Victorian Heritage Register under the *Heritage Act 2017* [Section 37(1)(a)].

This report contains images and names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are deceased.

STEVEN AVERY
Executive Director

Recommendation Date: 15 July 2019

Advertising Period: 19 July 2019 – 16 September 2019

This recommendation report has been issued by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria under s.37 of the *Heritage Act 2017*. It has not been considered by the Heritage Council of Victoria.

EXTENT OF NOMINATION

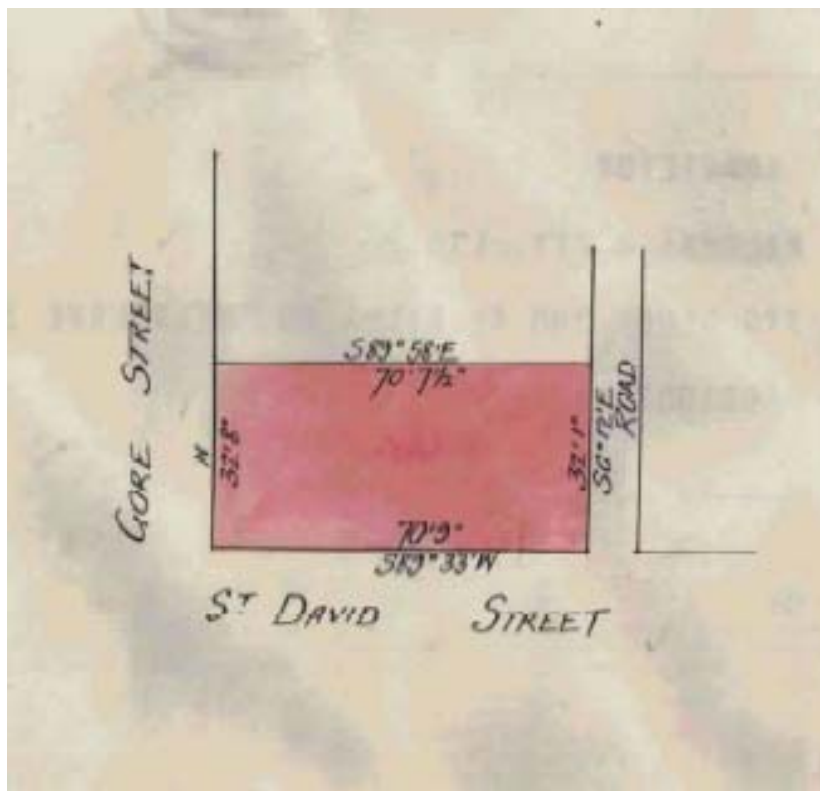
Date that the nomination was accepted by the Executive Director

1 November 2018

Written extent of nomination

The entire property.

Nomination extent diagram

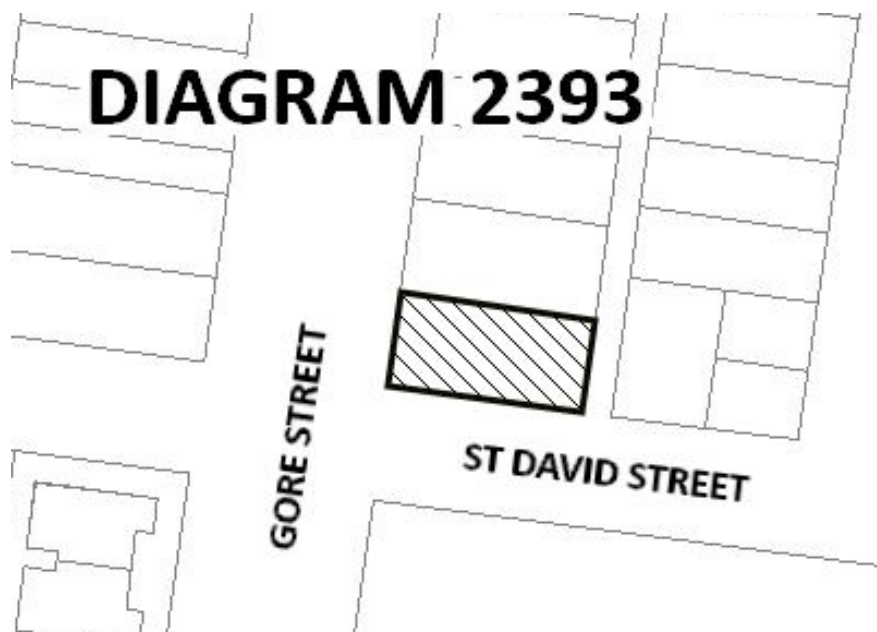


Is the extent of nomination the same as the recommended extent?

Yes.

RECOMMENDED REGISTRATION

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2393 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 687539.



The recommended extent of registration of the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ in the Victorian Heritage Register affects the whole place shown on Diagram 2393 including the land and the church building (exteriors and interiors).

RATIONALE FOR EXTENT

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is located on a corner site at 258 Gore Street Fitzroy, and occupies most of the cadastral block. The cadastral block is sufficient to protect the cultural heritage significance of the place.

AERIAL PHOTO OF THE PLACE SHOWING PROPOSED REGISTRATION



Name: Former Aboriginal Church of Christ
Hermes Number: 1709

BACKGROUND

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ was nominated for inclusion in the VHR by a member of the Aboriginal community. It has been assessed in accordance with the Heritage Council of Victoria's 'Flowchart - Shared Values Processes for VHR Nominations'. Feedback was received from the nominator, the Office of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

WHAT IS AT THE PLACE?

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is located on a corner block which slopes away to the east. It is a simple brick structure (rendered on the western and southern elevations) on a painted bluestone base and is rectangular in plan with a corrugated iron gable roof. The main elevation faces west and has a centrally located entrance door, with windows on either side. The gable end is defined by a border of decorative brickwork (now painted) intersecting with a centrally located round, or rose, window above the entrance door. The external walls of the front (western) and side (southern) elevations are of roughcast from the window sills upwards, while the lower walls are smooth rendered. The side or southern elevation has five evenly spaced arched windows with an arched doorway between the two eastern-most windows. A smaller window and door are located at the eastern end. The northern and eastern walls are un-rendered red brick. The eastern elevation also has a gable end with pairs of arched windows to the upper level and three square windows with new metal frames at the lower level. The northern elevation abuts the adjacent property boundary and has no openings. Internally, the place is currently undergoing construction for conversion into a residence. It is partially completed with most of the building retaining an open, hall-like space with a bathroom and kitchen on the lower level. (April 2019)

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE PLACE?

The building known as the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is located at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy. It was constructed in the 1860s as a church hall for the Bible Christian Church located at 278 Gore Street, Fitzroy. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Aboriginal population in Fitzroy increased due to the removal of people from the missions and reserves under the *Aborigines Protection Act (1886)* and the declaration of World War II when Aboriginal families moved to Melbourne to be closer to their enlisted husbands and sons. In the 1940s, Doug Nicholls, footballer, pastor, activist and later, governor of South Australia established the Aboriginal Church of Christ at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy. Doug and his wife Gladys ran church services, bible schools and a youth club and also provided social and community services. They were also strong campaigners for Aboriginal rights and initiated many protests and campaigns at a time when most Aboriginal people did not even have the right to vote. Many Aboriginal political and social justice groups and organisations emerged from the gatherings at Pastor Doug's church. It has been described as 'the place where the contemporary or modern Aboriginal movement all started.'

WHO ARE THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS/REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTY(IES) FOR THIS PLACE?

There is currently no Registered Aboriginal Party for this area. The place is important to the traditional owners and other Aboriginal groups from across Victoria and other States and Territories.

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT?

The place known as the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy including the land and the church building (exteriors and interiors).

HOW IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is of historical and social significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion G

Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is historically significant as the Aboriginal Church established by Pastor (later Sir) Douglas Nicholls, footballer, activist, pastor, and governor of South Australia. It played an important role in the emergence of social service organisations and the development of the twentieth century Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria and was a place of worship, community assistance, support and activism. Leaders of the twentieth century Aboriginal rights movement, and many Aboriginal organisations emerged from this place. [Criterion A]

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is socially significant and resonates with the Victorian Aboriginal community as a place where families and individuals with shared experiences came together for support and assistance. It has become a symbol of the emergence of the Aboriginal rights movement in the twentieth century. [Criterion G]

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is significant for its association with its founder Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls. Pastor Doug made a strong and influential contribution to the Aboriginal rights movement and social justice for Aboriginal people. Pastor Doug attracted a large congregation and galvanised the Aboriginal community in the fight for human rights. Together with his wife Gladys, he created a place of community and strength from which contemporary Aboriginal services and organisations evolved. [Criterion H]

RECOMMENDATION REASONS

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDING INCLUSION IN THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER [s.40]

Following is the Executive Director's assessment of the place against the tests set out in *The Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Thresholds Guidelines (2014)*.

CRITERION A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION A

The place/object has a *CLEAR ASSOCIATION* with an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life in Victoria's cultural history.

Plus

The association of the place/object to the event, phase, etc *IS EVIDENT* in the physical fabric of the place/object and/or in documentary resources or oral history.

Plus

The *EVENT, PHASE, etc* is of *HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE*, having made a strong or influential contribution to Victoria.

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has a clear association with the twentieth century Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria. The Church was established by Pastor (later Sir) Doug Nicholls, footballer, activist, pastor, and governor of South Australia (1976-77). It is an early example of an organisation which was initiated and controlled by the Aboriginal community. It was a place of worship but also a place of community assistance, support and activism at a time when most Aboriginal people did not even have the right to vote.

The association is evident in documentary resources and oral history. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has changed use and although the association is not directly evident in the physical fabric, the place is a powerful symbol of the fight for Aboriginal rights.

The Aboriginal rights movement is of historical importance to Victoria and has made, and continues to make a strong contribution to Victoria.

Criterion A is likely to be satisfied.

STEP 2: STATE LEVEL SIGNIFICANCE TEST FOR CRITERION A

The place/object allows the clear association with the event, phase etc. of historical importance to be *UNDERSTOOD BETTER THAN MOST OTHER PLACES OR OBJECTS IN VICTORIA WITH SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME ASSOCIATION*.

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is acknowledged and valued for its association with Pastor Doug Nicholls and the Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria. It is also acknowledged and valued as a place of congregation and community. The external form of the place remains in much the same state as it did during its use as the Aboriginal Church and provides a physical reminder of the Aboriginal community's fight for equality, social justice and recognition. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has become a powerful symbol for Aboriginal people as a place from which the

twentieth century Aboriginal rights movement emerged. It allows the association to be understood better than most other places in Victoria with substantially the same association.

Criterion A is likely to be satisfied at the State level.

CRITERION B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION B

The place/object has a *clear ASSOCIATION* with an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, custom or way of life of importance in Victoria's cultural history.

Plus

The association of the place/object to the event, phase, etc *IS EVIDENT* in the physical fabric of the place/object and/or in documentary resources or oral history.

Plus

The place/object is *RARE OR UNCOMMON*, being one of a small number of places/objects remaining that demonstrates the important event, phase etc.

OR

The place/object is *RARE OR UNCOMMON*, containing unusual features of note that were not widely replicated

OR

The existence of the *class* of place/object that demonstrates the important event, phase etc is *ENDANGERED* to the point of rarity due to threats and pressures on such places/objects.

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has a clear association with the emergence of Aboriginal social service organisations and the development of the Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria. The association is evident in documentary resources and oral history, but is now less directly evident in the physical fabric of the place. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is uncommon as a place associated with the emergence of Aboriginal social service organisations, the development of the Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria and the work of Pastor Doug Nicholls. These values and the cultural heritage significance of the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ are better considered under Criteria A, G and H.

As a place of worship and congregation, the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is one of hundreds of similar places throughout Victoria of various denominations and is not rare or uncommon in this class.

Criterion B is not likely to be satisfied.

CRITERION C

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION C

<p>The:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visible physical fabric; &/or • documentary evidence; &/or • oral history, <p>relating to the place/object indicates a likelihood that the place/object contains <i>PHYSICAL EVIDENCE</i> of <i>historical interest</i> that is <i>NOT CURRENTLY VISIBLE OR UNDERSTOOD</i>.</p>

Plus

<p>From what we know of the place/object, the physical evidence is likely to be of an <i>INTEGRITY</i> and/or <i>CONDITION</i> that it <i>COULD YIELD INFORMATION</i> through detailed investigation.</p>

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is no longer used as a church. Its significance lies in its association with the Aboriginal rights movement and Pastor Doug Nicholls and its ability to represent this through its location and external form. The physical fabric, documentary evidence and oral history of the place is well known and understood. It is unlikely that the place contains physical evidence of historical interest that is not currently visible or understood.

Criterion C is not likely to be satisfied.

CRITERION D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION D

<p>The place/object is one of a <i>CLASS</i> of places/objects that has a <i>clear ASSOCIATION</i> with an event, phase, period, process, function, movement, important person(s), custom or way of life in Victoria's history.</p>

Plus

<p>The <i>EVENT, PHASE, etc</i> is of <i>HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE</i>, having made a strong or influential contribution to Victoria.</p>

Plus

<p>The principal characteristics of the class are <i>EVIDENT</i> in the physical fabric of the place/object.</p>
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Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has a clear association with the Aboriginal rights movement which is of historical importance to Victoria. The place can be considered in the class of church halls, but its association with the Aboriginal rights movement is best considered under Criterion A. It demonstrates the principal characteristics of a church hall through its simple architecture comprising a rectangular plan with a gable roof and central entrance to the front elevation, and an open space internally.

Criterion D is likely to be satisfied.

STEP 2: STATE LEVEL SIGNIFICANCE TEST CRITERION D

The place/object is a *NOTABLE EXAMPLE* of the class in Victoria (refer to Reference Tool D).

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is not a notable example of the class of church hall in Victoria. There are many similar buildings throughout Victoria and the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has no physical attributes which elevate it above similar places.

Criterion D is not likely to be satisfied at the State level.

CRITERION E

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION E

The *PHYSICAL FABRIC* of the place/object clearly exhibits particular aesthetic characteristics.

Executive Director's Response

As a nineteenth century church hall, the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ demonstrates particular aesthetic characteristics through its form, scale, decoration and materials.

Criterion E is likely to be satisfied.

STEP 2: STATE LEVEL SIGNIFICANCE TEST FOR CRITERION E

The aesthetic characteristics are *APPRECIATED OR VALUED* by the wider community or an appropriately-related discipline as evidenced, for example, by:

- *critical recognition* of the aesthetic characteristics of the place/object within a relevant art, design, architectural or related discipline as an outstanding example within Victoria; or
- wide public *acknowledgement of exceptional merit* in Victoria in medium such as songs, poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, publications, print media etc.

Executive Director's Response

The aesthetic characteristics of the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ are appreciated by the community but there has been no critical recognition or wide public acknowledgement of those characteristics.

Criterion E is not likely to be satisfied at the State level.

CRITERION F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION F

The place/object contains *PHYSICAL EVIDENCE* that clearly demonstrates creative or technical *ACHIEVEMENT* for the time in which it was created.

Plus

The physical evidence demonstrates a *HIGH DEGREE OF INTEGRITY*.

Executive Director's Response

There is no physical evidence that the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ demonstrates creative or technical achievement for the time in which it was created.

Criterion F is not likely to be satisfied.

CRITERION G

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 people as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION G

Evidence exists of a community or cultural group.
(A community or cultural group is a group of people who share a common interest, including an experience, purpose, belief system, culture, ethnicity or values.)

Plus

Evidence exists of a strong attachment between the *COMMUNITY OR CULTURAL GROUP* and the place/object in the present day context.

Plus

Evidence exists of a time depth to that attachment.

Executive Director's Response**The community or cultural group**

The Aboriginal community of Victoria comprises multiple traditional owner groups who identify with particular areas of Victoria. These separate groups also identify as a community who share the common experience of colonisation, dislocation and dispossession of lands, as well as similar belief systems and culture.

Evidence of a strong present day attachment

The Aboriginal rights movement evolved in response to the effects of colonisation and racism. There is a strong attachment between the Aboriginal community and the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ as a place important in the development of the Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria. It was a meeting place, community gathering place, and a place of support. It was the place where activities around activism, human and social rights and community services emerged and expanded. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is no longer used as a church, however the attachment between the place and the Aboriginal community remains. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is a symbol of the fight for equality, recognition and social justice for Aboriginal people which continues today.

Time depth

Pastor Doug Nicholls began holding church services at the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ in the early 1940s. The church closed in the 1970s but the attachment between the place and the community remains strong.

Criterion G is likely to be satisfied.

STEP 2: STATE LEVEL SIGNIFICANCE TEST CRITERION G

Evidence exists that the social value resonates at a State Level,
that is across the 'broader Victorian community'.
*(‘Resonance’ means the extent to which the social value of a place/object
can be demonstrated to exert an influence. The social value must resonate beyond a particular local,
social or cultural community into the ‘broader Victorian community’).*

Plus

Evidence exists that the social value is part of an event or story that contributes to Victoria’s identity.

Executive Director’s Response

Pastor Doug Nicholls formed the Church of Christ Aboriginal Church at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy in the 1940s and it quickly became known as one of the major gathering places for Aboriginal people in Melbourne. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ resonates with the Victorian Aboriginal community as a place where families and individuals from across Victoria came together through shared experience for support and assistance. The attachment continues today as the building has become a symbol of the emergence of the Aboriginal rights movement in the twentieth century. It also resonates with the broader Victorian community for its association with Pastor Doug Nicholls and the development of the Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ was nominated for inclusion in the VHR by a member of the Aboriginal community and the nomination is supported by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. It is a powerful symbol for Aboriginal people today as a reminder of ‘how little they had and how hard they fought’.

Criterion G is likely to be satisfied at the State level.

CRITERION H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria’s history.

STEP 1: A TEST FOR SATISFYING CRITERION H

The place/object has a *DIRECT ASSOCIATION* with a person or group of persons who have made a strong or influential *CONTRIBUTION* to the course of Victoria’s history.

Plus

The *ASSOCIATION* of the place/object to the person(s) *IS EVIDENT* in the physical fabric of the place/object and/or in documentary resources and/or oral history.

Plus

The *ASSOCIATION*:

- directly relates to *ACHIEVEMENTS* of the person(s) at, or relating to, the place/object; or
- relates to an *enduring and/or close INTERACTION* between the person(s) and the place/object.

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has a direct association with its founder Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls, footballer, activist, pastor and later, governor. Pastor Doug made a strong and influential contribution to the course of Victoria's history through his contribution to the Aboriginal rights movement and social justice. The association is evident in documentary and oral history and in the physical fabric of the place, which has not changed externally since its use as Pastor Doug's Aboriginal Church.

Criterion H is likely to be satisfied.

STEP 2: STATE LEVEL SIGNIFICANCE TEST FOR CRITERION H

The place/object allows the clear association with the person or group of persons to be *READILY APPRECIATED BETTER THAN MOST OTHER PLACES OR OBJECTS IN VICTORIA*.

Executive Director's Response

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has a strong association with the legacy of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls. It allows the association with Pastor Doug to be readily appreciated better than most other places in Victoria. Pastor Doug attracted a large congregation and galvanised the Aboriginal community in the fight for human rights. Together with his wife Gladys, he created a place of community and strength from which contemporary Aboriginal services and organisations evolved.

Criterion H is likely to be satisfied at the State level.

PROPOSED PERMIT POLICY

Preamble

The purpose of the Permit Policy is to assist when considering or making decisions regarding works to a registered place. It is recommended that any proposed works be discussed with an officer of Heritage Victoria prior to making a permit application. Discussing proposed works will assist in answering questions the owner may have and aid any decisions regarding works to the place.

The extent of registration of the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ in the Victorian Heritage Register affects the whole place shown on Diagram 2393 including the land and the building (exteriors and interiors). Under the *Heritage Act 2017* a person must not remove or demolish, damage or despoil, develop or alter or excavate, relocate or disturb the position of any part of a registered place or object without approval. It is acknowledged, however, that alterations and other works may be required to keep places and objects in good repair and adapt them for use into the future.

If a person wishes to undertake works or activities in relation to a registered place or registered object, they must apply to the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria for a permit. The purpose of a permit is to enable appropriate change to a place and to effectively manage adverse impacts on the cultural heritage significance of a place as a consequence of change. If an owner is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that Heritage Victoria be contacted.

Permits are required for anything which alters the place or object, unless a **permit exemption** is granted. Permit exemptions usually cover routine maintenance and upkeep issues faced by owners as well as minor works or works to the elements of the place or object that are not significant. They may include appropriate works that are specified in a Conservation Management Plan. Permit

exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.38 of the Heritage Act) or after registration (under s.92 of the Heritage Act). It should be noted that the addition of new buildings to the registered place, as well as alterations to the interior and exterior of existing buildings requires a permit, unless a specific permit exemption is granted.

Conservation management plans

It is recommended that a Conservation Management Plan is developed to manage the place in a manner which respects its cultural heritage significance.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

This place is included in the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR). The *Heritage Act 2017* and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* are separate pieces of legislation. It should be noted that satisfying the requirements of one Act may not satisfy the requirements of the other. Under the *Heritage Act 2017* permits are required for any works or activities which alter the place or object, unless a permit exemption is granted. This applies to all parts of the registered place including fabric associated with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values. Please contact Aboriginal Victoria to understand the requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Other approvals

Please be aware that approval from other authorities (such as local government) may be required to undertake works.

Archaeology

There is no identified archaeology of State level significance at this place.

Executive Director Recommendations for Exempted Works or Activities (Permit Exemptions)

It should be noted that Permit Exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.38 of the Heritage Act). Permit Exemptions can also be applied for and granted after registration (under s.92 of the Heritage Act).

Under s.38 of the *Heritage Act 2017* the Executive Director may include in his recommendation categories of works or activities which may be carried out in relation to the place or object without the need for a permit under Part 5 of the Act. The Executive Director must not make a recommendation for any categories of works or activities if he considers that the works or activities may harm the cultural heritage significance of the place or object. The following permit exemptions are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the Former Aboriginal Church.

General Condition 1

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

General Condition 2

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

General Condition 3

All works should ideally be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

General Condition 4

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

General Condition 5

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authority, where applicable.

Specific Permit Exemptions

Building Exterior

- Patching, repair and maintenance which replaces like with like.
- Replacement or upgrading of air conditioning systems, water and sewerage systems, security systems, ducting, wiring, antennae, aerials etc.
- Removal of redundant external services such as hot water services and wiring.
- Installation or repair of damp-proofing.
- Painting of previously painted surfaces.
- Replacement of roof sheeting on a like for like basis.
- Removal or replacement of post-1950s doors and windows.

Building Interior

Completion of works which comply with City of Yarra Planning Permit PLN13/0056. A permit is required for any works which are not included in the endorsed plans.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

Local Government Authority	City of Yarra
Heritage Overlay	Yes HO334 (South Fitzroy Precinct)
Heritage Overlay Controls	External Paint: No Internal Controls: No Trees: No
Other Overlays	No
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register	Yes (VAHR 7822-1600)
Other Listings	No
Other Names	Gore Street Church Aboriginal Church of Christ Bible Christian School

HISTORY

The traditional land owners

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ, like all places in Victoria, is located on land traditionally owned by Aboriginal people. Prior to the establishment and development of Melbourne, Aboriginal people lived on and cared for the land. Colonisation and the subsequent appropriation of land resulted in the dispersal and death of thousands of Aboriginal people across Victoria. In the mid nineteenth century, most of those who survived were moved to government or mission run stations

and reserves. The enforcement of the *Aborigines Protection Act*, informally known as the 'Half Caste Act' in 1886 meant that those who were not of full Aboriginal parentage were no longer permitted to stay on the stations, but were expected to assimilate into the broader society. This broke up families and those who had been removed from the stations were not permitted to return, even to visit family. During the 1920s, the few people remaining on stations or reserves were moved to Lake Tyers. Others ended up in Melbourne, and in Fitzroy in particular.

Fitzroy in the 1930s and 40s

The Aboriginal population in Fitzroy further increased with the declaration of World War II when men enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and were posted around Melbourne. Their families moved to be close to them, and also to work in war related industries. Many came from Cummeragunja including William Cooper and Doug Nicholls. By the 1950s, Fitzroy supported a community of more than 300 Aboriginal people and was not only the largest Aboriginal community in Victoria, but also the social and political hub of Aboriginal Melbourne, much like Redfern in Sydney. From the early 1940s, the church at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy run by Pastor Doug Nicholls and his wife Gladys was an important meeting place.

The building at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy

In 1859, the Bible Christian Church constructed a church at 278 Gore Street, Fitzroy (City of Yarra Heritage Overlay HO334) at the northern end of the block in which the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is located. By 1865, the Bible Christian Church had constructed a church hall at the southern end of the block. It was this building which became the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ. It was initially used as a church hall, a school and in the late 1890s, a Templars Lodge. By 1920 it was being used as a Church of Christ Sunday School and in the late 1920s, an Infants Room was added to the rear of the building.

In 1943, Doug Nicholls leased the hall at 258 Gore Street from the Church of Christ. It is possible that he initially leased the Former Infants Room at the rear of the building, and later leased the entire building. Together with his wife Gladys, he established the Church of Christ Aboriginal Mission, also known as the Aboriginal Church of Christ. Aboriginal people living in Melbourne and those visiting from the country gravitated to Pastor Doug's church. They gathered on Sundays to hear the gospel preached, followed by gatherings on Sunday night. There was also a youth club, and Gladys taught Sunday school, undertook fundraising, managed the finances and was committed to working towards the rights of women. She became Secretary of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Council and was the Victorian State President in the 1970s. Both Doug and Gladys also provided welfare support and became strong campaigners for Aboriginal rights and justice. 258 Gore Street became the focal point of this work, and a community hub for Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal political and welfare groups and organisations emerged from the people who met at Pastor Doug's church. It has been described as 'the place where the contemporary or modern Aboriginal movement all started.'

Churches of Christ

The Churches of Christ emerged from an early nineteenth century movement with origins in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Most of the churches in Victoria emerged from the United Kingdom movement. The Churches of Christ Federal Aborigines Mission Board Incorporated (FAB) was established in 1942. FAB purchased the church hall at 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy in the 1950s to further advance the ministry of Doug Nicholls, and in later years, Aboriginal churches with Aboriginal pastors were established in most states of Australia. In 2013, Indigenous Ministry Australia was established within the mission and the overseas aid arm of Churches of Christ, Global Mission Partners (GMP) continues today.

Sir Douglas Ralph Nicholls (1906-1988)

Doug Nicholls, a Yorta Yorta, Baraparapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Jupagalk and Wergaia man, was born on 9 December 1906 at Cummeragunja Aboriginal Station, on the Murray River in New South Wales. At the age of fourteen, under the New South Wales *Aborigines Protection Act (1909)*, he had to leave and find work, and took a job with dredging teams on the Murray River. He was a gifted sportsman and played Australian rules football, trying out unsuccessfully for Carlton in 1927 before signing with the Northcote Victorian Football Association team. He competed for five seasons and was named 'best and fairest' twice and played in three grand finals. He was also a professional runner and a boxer with Jimmy Sharman's travelling boxing show. In 1932 Nicholls joined the Fitzroy Victorian Football League team where he played fifty-four games over six seasons.

In the same year, William Cooper, Nicholls' great-uncle who had also grown up at Cummeragunja founded the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL). Nicholls acknowledged that 'William was the contact that brought me back to our people. Everything comes back to William Cooper ... he fired me to follow through'. Nicholls was a foundation member of the AAL and spoke at the National Day of Mourning speech in Sydney on 26 January 1938. In 1941, he enlisted with the Second AIF twenty-ninth Battalion but was discharged the following year to assist police with the Aboriginal community living in Fitzroy.

Following his mother's death in the early 1930s, Nicholls had begun attending the Northcote Church of Christ, where they had worshipped together. By the 1930s, he had become a strong advocate for his people within the Churches of Christ ministry in Victoria. During a trip across the Nullarbor with the Fitzroy football team in 1935, Nicholls was so concerned for the people living there that he approached the Perth office of the Churches of Christ, leading to the establishment of church services, education and medical assistance at the Norseman Reserve, Western Australia. Nicholls began holding religious services and providing support from a house in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, (probably from the home of Alice and John (Jack) Connolly at 234 Gertrude Street). In 1942, Nicholls' brother Howard died, and Nicholls married his widow, Gladys. In 1945, Nicholls was ordained as a Church of Christ pastor and together Doug and Gladys ran religious services and welfare work from 258 Gore Street, Fitzroy (the Former Aboriginal Church).

Pastor Nicholls initiated and was involved in many protests and campaigns including the impact of the Woomera rocket range on the people of the Warburton Ranges and initiating 'Aboriginal Sunday' in 1943 when prominent singers, footballers and others were invited to the church on the Sunday before Australia Day. This evolved into the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week. He was also involved in the formation of, and a field officer for the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League.

Pastor Doug Nicholls was appointed MBE in 1957, OBE in 1968 and knighted in 1972. He was appointed Governor of South Australia in 1976, but due to ill health he relinquished his governorship on 30 April 1977 after hosting Queen Elizabeth during her royal tour. Sir Nicholls died on 4 June 1988 and was given a state funeral and buried in tribal ground at Cummeragunja cemetery.

VICTORIAN HISTORICAL THEMES

02 Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes

- 2.1 Living as Victoria's original inhabitants
- 2.8 Fighting for identity

07 Governing Victorians

- 7.2 Struggling for political rights

08 Building community life

- 8.1 Maintaining spiritual life
- 8.2 Educating people
- 8.3 Providing health and welfare services
- 8.4 Forming community organisations

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is located on a corner block which slopes away to the east. It is a simple brick structure (rendered on the western and southern elevations) on a painted bluestone base and is rectangular in plan with a corrugated iron gable roof. The main elevation faces west and has a centrally located entrance door, with windows on either side. The gable end is defined by a border of decorative brickwork (now painted) intersecting with a centrally located round, or rose, window above the entrance door. The external walls of the front (western) and side (southern) elevations are of roughcast from the window sills upwards, while the lower walls are smooth rendered. The side or southern elevation has five evenly spaced arched windows with an arched doorway between the two eastern-most windows. A smaller window and door are located at the eastern end. The northern and eastern walls are unrendered red brick. The eastern elevation also has a gable end with pairs of arched windows to the upper level and three square windows with new metal frames at the lower level. The northern elevation abuts the adjacent property boundary and has no openings. Internally, the place is currently undergoing construction for conversion into a residence. It is partially completed with most of the building retaining an open, hall-like space with a bathroom and kitchen on the lower level.

Objects integral

There are no identified objects integral to the place of State level significance at this place.

Archaeology

There is no identified archaeology of State level significance at this place.

INTEGRITY/INTACTNESS

Intactness – The intactness of the place is very good. The exterior of the place remains largely unchanged since it was used as the Former Aboriginal Church. Internally, the place has undergone changes for use as offices and as a residence. Further construction works are currently being completed and the place is still readable as an open church-like space. (April 2019).

Integrity – The integrity of the place is good. The place survives in much the same condition externally as it did when it was in use as a church. Changes have been made internally to convert it to a private residence. The cultural heritage values of the place can be read in the extant fabric. (April 2019).

CONDITION

The place is in good condition. The structure of the place is sound. The interior is currently a construction site. (April 2019).

COMPARISONS

Places with Aboriginal values in the VHR

Nerre Nerre Warren, Endeavour Hills (VHR H2348)

Nerre Nerre Warren is of archaeological and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It is historically significant as one of the most important sites in the Melbourne area for Aboriginal-settler interactions in the first years of the Port Phillip settlement. It is the place where the first Native Police Corps was established in 1837 and was its headquarters from 1842-52. Nerre Nerre Warren was also the home station for the Westernport District of the Port Phillip Protectorate 1841-43 and demonstrates the significant role that Aboriginal people played in the settlement and policing of Victoria and the ways in which Aboriginal people experienced colonisation by way of agency and co-option within British imperial policies and processes. It is also significant in the history of the Victorian Police and demonstrates the important and changing role of horses in policing. Nerre Nerre Warren is also of significance for its potential to contain archaeological remains, features and deposits relating to the Native Police Corps, the Westernport District of the Port Phillip Protectorate, and the Dandenong Police Paddocks and Horse Stud Depot.



Nerre Nerre Warren, Endeavour Hills

Tyntyndyer (Tyntynder) Homestead, Beverford (VHR H2353)

Tyntyndyer Homestead was erected between 1846 and 1854 and is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria. It is of historical significance as one of the earliest surviving pastoral station homesteads in Victoria and also as a place of early conflict between Aboriginal people and European settlers in Victoria. Tyntyndyer was established by brothers Andrew and Peter Beveridge. Andrew was killed by Aboriginal people at the nearby station Piangil and the resulting trial led to the public execution of two Aboriginal men, Bobby and Ptolemy. Peter Beveridge later wrote extensively on Aboriginal people based on knowledge gained during his occupation of Tyntyndyer. The place was also important as an Honorary Correspondent Supply Depot for the distribution of rations to the Aboriginal community. Tyntyndyer (Tyntynder) Homestead is of architectural significance as an intact surviving example of an early colonial vernacular homestead in Victoria and as a demonstration of early timber bush construction.



Tyntyndyer (Tyntynder) Homestead, Beverford

The Anglican Church, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust (VHR H1796)

The Anglican Church, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, was constructed in 1878 and is architecturally, historically and socially significant to the State of Victoria. The Anglican Church is a timber church at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Mission built to a design by architect, Leonard Terry. Built by Aboriginal labour, it has been the focus of the Aboriginal Mission since its construction. The Anglican Church is historically significant as a rare example of an Aboriginal mission church which was part of the Aboriginal Reserve system used to control the Aboriginal population of Victoria from the 1860s. It has been used for worship, baptisms, marriages and burials over the past one hundred and forty years and demonstrates the history of European attempts to convert Aboriginals to Christian values. In the period from 1886 to 1923 when Aboriginal people of part European parentage were forbidden to come on to the Reserve and to mix with their relatives, the church was the only permitted meeting place. The Anglican Church is socially significant because of its association for the Aboriginal community in Victoria as a link with the community's past experience on the Aboriginal reserves. It is architecturally significant as a representative work of the prominent Melbourne architects Leonard Terry and for its timber construction. It is a landmark within the village of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust and can be seen from other vantage points across Lake Tyers.



The Anglican Church, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust

Church buildings of the same denomination or of similar architectural style or in the VHR

All Saints Church Hall, Fitzroy (VHR H2172)

All Saints Church Hall was erected no later than 1855 and is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It is of architectural significance as an example of a prefabricated iron building of the early 1850s and as the only known example of an Edwin Maw building in Victoria. It is of historical significance as a rare survivor of a prefabricated iron building imported into Victoria during the early gold rushes. Although the Methodists and other religious groups imported buildings and occasionally entire prefabricated iron churches, there is no historical evidence that this building was imported specifically as a chapel. It is more likely that it was an example of the numerous prefabricated iron buildings imported for general commercial purposes into the colony of Victoria from England and Scotland during the 1850s.



All Saints Church Hall, Fitzroy

The Former Methodist Church, Beechworth (VHR H0523)

The Former Methodist Church, Beechworth was constructed in 1857 and is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It is historically significant as one of the first permanent churches built on the Victorian goldfields, and the first on the Ovens goldfield and demonstrates the rapid development which occurred in the goldfield towns following the discovery of gold in the early 1850s. It reflects the importance of Methodism in Victoria at this time, and the early activities of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in taking their religious message to the gold miners. The Former Methodist Church, Beechworth is architecturally significant as a demonstration of the simple church buildings constructed on the goldfields in the 1850s. It demonstrates the Wesleyan Methodist precept of simplicity in form and economy of construction for their church buildings and its primitive Gothic design relates directly to the church's origins in Scotland.



The Former Methodist Church, Beechworth

Church of Christ, Melbourne (VHR H0455)

The Church of Christ, Swanston Street was constructed in 1863 and is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It is of architectural significance as one of the earlier works of the important Victorian architect Charles Webb, who was responsible for a number of significant works including the Royal Arcade (1869, VHR H0023), the South Melbourne Town Hall (1880, VHR H0217) and the Windsor Hotel (1883, VHR H0764). It is also of importance for its facade which is amongst the most elaborate stuccoed Gothic facades in Victoria. The Church of Christ, Swanston Street is of historical significance for its associations with the early history of the Presbyterian Church in Victoria, in particular the Reverend James Forbes, the first moderator of the presbytery of Melbourne in 1844 and leader in the constitution of the Free Church of Australia Felix in 1847.



The Church of Christ, Melbourne

Places associated with Pastor (Sir) Douglas Nicholls

There is one place in the VHR, Yarra Bank, Speakers Corner (VHR H 1363) which has an association with Pastor (Sir) Douglas Nicholls. Other places associated with Doug Nicholls were identified in the 2008 Darebin City Council Heritage Study. It concluded that the Gladys Nicholls Hostel, Northcote was of potential local significance and the Sir Douglas Nicholls Reserve and Aborigines Advancement League Centre, Thornbury was of potential State significance. The Nicholls family moved to Northcote when Nicholls was appointed curator of Northcote Park while playing in Northcote football team. By the 1950s, Aboriginal people were moving from Fitzroy to new Housing Commission estates in Preston and Reservoir, and Darebin became home to one of the largest Aboriginal communities in Victoria. Health services which had been established in Fitzroy opened branches in the area and new community services were established.

Yarra Bank (Speakers Corner, Melbourne (VHR H1363)

Yarra Bank, also known as Speakers' Corner, is of historical and social significance to the State of Victoria. It is a wedge of parkland on Batman Avenue which has been used since at least the late 1880s as a public meeting place and is historically and socially important for its long associations with the rights of assembly and free speech. The regular Sunday afternoon ritual with hundreds of Melburnians gathering to listen, applaud or jeer was as much a notable part of the city's life as the occasional large meeting on a particular issue. Yarra Bank (Speakers' Corner) was set aside for the purpose of "holding public meetings and discussing questions - religious, educational and others" in 1889 after successful campaigning by Dr William Maloney, medical practitioner, parliamentarian and champion of social democratic reform. Alfred Deakin as Police Minister was responsible for suggesting Flinders Park off Batman Avenue as the site. It has been the site of conflict with

proponents of both sides of issues such as conscription, women's suffrage, socialism and industrial matters clashing, sometimes violently. Pastor (Sir) Douglas Nicholls frequently spoke there, on a particular speakers mound, lobbying for Aboriginal rights. From about 1970 Yarra Bank declined in popularity with the rise in mass communication and the decline of radical political parties. Today, nine stone edged speakers mounds set in a grove of 36 mature elms stand as a silent reminder of a public space once filled with passionate oratory and conflict.



Yarra Bank (Speakers Corner, Melbourne)

The Sir Douglas Nicholls Reserve, Aborigines Advancement League Centre and mural, Thornbury

In 1971, the Victorian Government ceded two acres of the old Glen Iris Brick Company brickworks to the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL), and contributed part of the \$750,000 needed to fund the construction of a new building on the site which was completed in 1982. Following this, most of the remaining brickworks site became the Sir Douglas Nicholls Oval. The transfer of land title to the AAL by the State Government under the *Aboriginal Lands (Aborigines Advancement League) (Watt Street Northcote) Act 1982* and the *Aboriginal Land (Northcote Land) Act 1989* was an important symbol of land rights and was the first freehold land grant to Aborigines in Victoria. The Sir Douglas Nicholls Reserve occupies the western portion of the site and is an open area with a sporting ground in the centre. The place has associations with the broader struggle and survival of the local and Victorian Aboriginal community, their culture and traditions, and the landmark events such as the 1967 referendum. The 'Northcote Koori Mural' on the site was designed by visual artist Megan Evans and was moved from its original position opposite the Northcote Town Hall in 1988. Evans painted the mural with trainee artists Les Griggs, Ray Thomas, Millie Yarran, Elaine Trott, and Ian Johnson with many volunteers.



Aborigines Advancement League Centre



Northcote Koori Mural

The Gladys Nicholls Hostel, Northcote

The Gladys Nicholls Hostel has an association with the early work of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (VAAL), later the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL), and with Sir Doug and Lady Gladys Nicholls. Young Aboriginal people moving to Melbourne stayed with the Nicholls family and in 1958, as the need for accommodation grew, they were instrumental in establishing a girls' hostel. A Hostel Committee was formed in 1956 to raise funds to purchase the former Anglican vicarage at 56 Cunningham Street, Northcote. The building was being converted into a hostel when the VAAL was formed, and the Hostel committee and VAAL merged in 1957. A boys' hostel was opened nearby in 1963, another at Nathalia and a Holiday house at Queenscliff. The League built a new building next to the hostel in 1966, which became a focus of Aboriginal community and political life. The existing hostel building was designed by architect William Nankervill, and opened in 1967. The Gladys Nicholls Hostel continues to provide short term accommodation for Aboriginal families and individuals.



Gladys Nicholls Hostel, Northcote

SUMMARY OF COMPARISONS

Places with Aboriginal values in the VHR

The comparator places were established and managed by British and European organisations as part of the process and effects of nineteenth century colonisation. In contrast, the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ was established in the twentieth century by and for Aboriginal people in response to issues caused by colonisation such as dislocation and dispossession of lands. The Former

Aboriginal Church of Christ was founded by Pastor Doug Nicholls and provided a place where Aboriginal people could meet. It was important not only as a place of worship but also as a place of community assistance, support and activism. Unlike the other places associated with Aboriginal significance in the VHR, the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ demonstrates self-determination and the development of the Aboriginal rights movement in Victoria. This is also demonstrated to some extent by the Anglican Church at Lake Tyers which is located at Lake Tyers Mission (Bung Yarnda). After extended struggles and fights by the original owners of the land, the Gunai/Kurnai people, Lake Tyers was handed back to them in 1970.

Church buildings of the same denomination or of similar architectural style in the VHR

There are many churches and church halls in the VHR. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has been compared to those of the same denomination, or those of a similar scale. Most church buildings are included in the VHR primarily for their architectural significance. The Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is not being recommended for inclusion in the VHR for its architectural significance. Like most churches, it is significant as a place of worship and congregation. However, the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ is also significant as a meeting place for Aboriginal people, for its association with the development of the Aboriginal rights movement in the twentieth century, and for its association with Pastor Doug Nicholls.

Places associated with Pastor (Sir) Douglas Nicholls

The Gladys Nicholls Hostel demonstrates the achievements of Pastor Doug and Gladys Nicholls but unlike the Former Aboriginal Church, which focussed on many aspects of Aboriginal rights and social and community services, the Gladys Nicholls Hostel focussed primarily on temporary accommodation for young Aboriginal people arriving in Melbourne. The Sir Douglas Nicholls Reserve and Aborigines Advancement League Centre also emerged from the work of Pastor Doug. As organisations and places, they reflect the community and activist work of Pastor Doug and are a continuation of his work at the Former Aboriginal Church. Each of these places demonstrates the work of Pastor Doug and Gladys Nicholls and their contribution to the Aboriginal community. Yarra Bend (Speakers Corner) also has an association with Pastor Doug Nicholls, but was shared with many other people lobbying for many separate causes. As a dedicated space, community hub and an early example of an organisation which was initiated and controlled by the Aboriginal community, the Former Aboriginal Church of Christ has become a physical reminder and strong symbol of the Aboriginal community's fight for equality, social justice and recognition in the first half of the twentieth century.

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<https://www.gmp.org.au/about-us/more-about-ima/the-beginnings-of-churches-of-christ-indigenous-ministry>

https://indigenoustrights.net.au/people/pagination/doug_nicholls

<https://walkingmaps.com.au/walk/183> (Fitzroy Aboriginal Heritage Walking Trail)

<https://www.facebook.com/pastorsirdougnicholls/photos> (Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls Facebook page – various photos)

ADDITIONAL IMAGES



2019, Front (western) elevation.



2019, Rear (eastern) elevation.



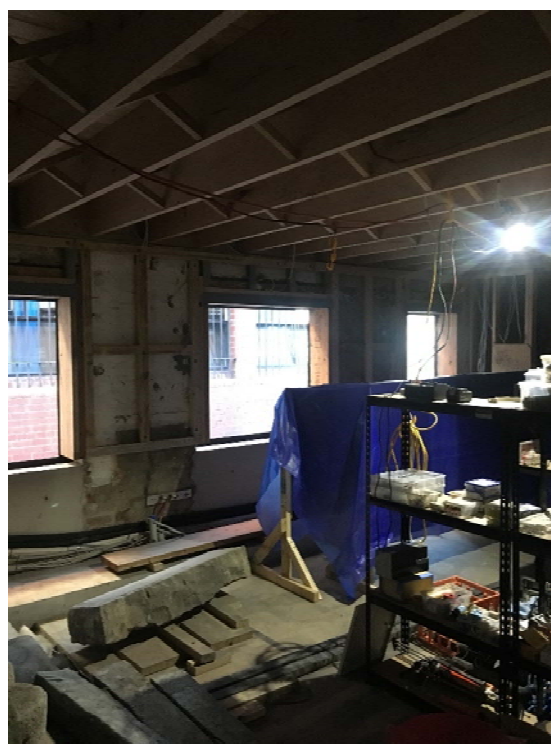
2019, side (northern) elevation.



2019, Side (southern) view. The smaller door and higher window are part of the late 1920s Infants' Room addition.



2019, Looking towards the front (western) elevation



2019, Looking towards the rear (eastern) elevation.



c.1970s, Sir Doug Nicholls and Gladys Nicholls.
Source: National Archives of Australia



1967, Lobbying to include Aboriginal people in the Census
Source: Still image from the Dickson Film



1962, National Aborigines Day, Martin Place, Sydney.
Source: State Library of NSW



c. 1940s/50s, Former Aboriginal Church.
Source: Image from Dickson Film



c. 1940s, Outside Doug Nicholls' Aboriginal Church, 258 Gore street, Fitzroy.
Doug Nicholls is second from the left.
Source: State Library of Victoria



Former Aboriginal Church of Christ signage.
Source: Nicholls family collection



Pastor Doug Nicholls preaching at the Gore Street Church.
Source: Nicholls family collection



Pastor Doug Nicholls preaching at the Gore Street Church.
Source: Nicholls family collection



c. 1940s/50s: Church choir at left and Pastor Doug Nichols at right.

Source: Mavis Thorpe Clark (1972) *Pastor Doug: the story of Sir Douglas Nicholls, Aboriginal leader*



c.1950s, Images of the congregation at the Gore Street Church.

Source, Sir Pastor Doug Nicholls Facebook page



1939, Fitzroy Football Club. Doug Nicholls is at right, front row.

Source: Yarra Libraries



The Bible Christian Church at 278 Gore Street, Fitzroy.



Sculpture of Sir Doug and Lady Nicholls
erected in Parliament Gardens, East Melbourne in 2007.