

Building: Christ Church Anglican Church Complex
Address: 485 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham
 489-471
Significance: Timber Church: B
 Brick Church: A
Melway Map Ref: 48 J9

Building Type: Church
Construction Date: Timber Church: 1888
 Brick Church: 1958
Architect: Timber Church: George Blackburne; Brick Church: Raymond Berg
Builder: Unknown



Intactness:
 G[x] F[] P[]

Condition:
 G[x] F[] P[]

Existing Heritage Listings:

Victorian Heritage Register	[]
Register of the National Estate	[]
National Trust	[]

Recommended Heritage Listings:

Victorian Heritage Register	[x]
Register of the National Estate	[x]
Heritage Overlay Controls	[x]

History

The first Church of England services in Mitcham were held in the local hall.¹ As the population increased, the need for a purpose-built church became more evident. The Christ Church Parish was created in 1888, and a small timber chapel was soon erected on land at the corner of Whitehorse Road and Edward Street. It was designed by architect George Blackburne, a resident of Box Hill who was responsible for many early buildings in Box Hill and environs. The congregation continued to grow, and in 1924, land was purchased in nearby McDowall street for a new church.² The project never went ahead; a vicarage and tennis court were later built on the site, and the remainder of the land was sold in 1954. Fundraising had commenced that year for a new church to be built beside the existing one on Whitehorse Road. The foundation stone was laid on 2 February 1958 by the Bishop of Geelong, and the church was officially opened in June.

The architect for the new church was Ray Berg, né Schmerberg (1913-1988). An RVIA Scholarship winner, he had worked in the office of Leighton Irwin, director of the Architectural Atelier at the University of Melbourne.³ In 1948, Berg was one of a group of architects who were assembled to teach at the university under the first professor of architecture, Brian Lewis.⁴ Berg held the position of Senior Lecturer in the faculty from that time until the early 1960s, and he was considered an important and influential teacher. In the late 1950s, Berg also served as president of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects.⁵ These commitments prevented him from maintaining an extensive private practice, and he built very little in the 1950s. Christ Church was one of his relatively few executed works from this period. Berg also built a house in nearby Mitcham Road in 1955, but it has since been demolished.

Description

Timber Church

The original church building is a simple gabled hall-like timber structure. The walls are clad in weatherboard, and the roof is corrugated galvanised steel. The east elevation has a small gabled porch. Windows are simple pointed arched openings. To the rear of the building is a similarly-scaled hall in sympathetic materials.

Brick Church

Christ Church, Mitcham, is a large, stark rectangular volume with a shallow butterfly roof. The two end walls are face brick. The longer side elevations are each divided into seven bays by a series of steel columns. Each bay is infilled with grey tiled panels, with a clerestory window at the top. The windows have concrete mullions, and contain coloured glass. The building has a tower in the form of a rectangular skeleton frame.

Comparative Examples

Timber Church

Timber Church, St Luke's Anglican Church Complex, 551 Mitcham Road, Mitcham

Significance

Timber Church

The original Christ Church, Mitcham, is of historical and aesthetic importance. It is one of the oldest surviving timber church buildings in the municipality. It is a substantially intact example of a simple ecclesiastical building. Although such timber churches were common in the municipality, most have been demolished as part of later building programs.

Brick Church

Christ Church, Mitcham, is of outstanding aesthetic and historical significance. The design of the building is a rare attempt to move away from the entrenched religious symbolism in most church architecture of the time. It is one of only a very small number of buildings designed by Ray Berg, an important and influential architectural academic. It has previously been identified as one of only six post-War churches in Victoria of sufficient significance to be added to the Victorian Historic Register.⁶

Source

Context Pty Ltd. *City of Nunawading Heritage Survey Project*. 1994. (Graded C+)

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- 1 Diane Sydenham. *Windows on Nunawading*. North Melbourne, 1990. p 229.
 - 2 Ian & Roslyn Coleman. 'Twentieth Century Churches in Victoria.' Unpublished report. Vol I. p 43.
 - 3 J M Freeland. *The Making of a Profession*. Sydney, 1981. p 271.
 - 4 Geoffrey Serle. *Robin Boyd: A Life*. p 104.
 - 5 J M Freeland. *The Making of a Profession*. Sydney, 1981. p 271.
 - 6 Ian & Roslyn Coleman. 'Twentieth Century Churches in Victoria.' Unpublished report. Vol. I, p 16.

