

Short Histories

Use this fact sheet to learn more about St Mary's Cathedral after your visit.

Buildings and Precinct

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (St Mary's) in Victoria Square is at the peak of the highest hill in Perth, shown as Church Square on early plans of Perth, the traditional site for a principal church in Britain and its colonies.

Intended once for an Anglican church and school, it was undeveloped in 1843 when Governor Hutt (1839 to 1846) granted land at the east side for a Catholic church, dwelling and school, and the church (St John's Pro-Cathedral) and convent were built in 1844–48. More land was acquired at the south for the Bishop's Palace (Cathedral House), completed 1856, then the largest building in Perth. In 1859, the square was granted for a new cathedral, which became a renowned landmark on its completion, in 1865. Other than the colonial hospital (1855; later named Royal Perth Hospital), the vicinity was residential, a largely Catholic enclave where much of the property was owned by Catholics and the Catholic Church, including the Benedictines. Successive bishops and archbishops acquired more property, which enabled development of schools at Victoria Square (1846–), Irwin Street (1878–1907), Lord Street (1907–63), St George's Terrace (1894–1962), and Adelaide Terrace (1897–1937); St John of God Hospital, St George's Terrace (1895–99), Hibernian Hall, Murray Street (1902–47) and Victoria Square cottages. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the area became mostly commercial. More recent redevelopment includes high-rise buildings with residential apartments.

St John's Pro-Cathedral (1846), the oldest surviving church in Perth, and the 1871 Convent of the Holy Cross have been restored to their original appearance. Cathedral House and the cottages are little changed externally since the 1930s. St Mary's Cathedral, where major additions (1905, 1930, 2009) retain much of the 1865 building, is the oldest cathedral in Western Australia and a landmark in Perth, although it is very different externally from its appearance in 1865.

1865



Saint Mary's Cathedral 1865, with boundary wall and landscaping.
Courtesy Catholic Archives Office, Archdiocese of Perth, photograph ALB 29 84

1905



St Mary's Cathedral before 1930.
Courtesy Catholic Archives Office, Archdiocese of Perth, photograph ALB 29 107



Cathedral and Crowds on day of Laying of Foundation Stone, 15 April 1926.
Courtesy Catholic Archives Office, Archdiocese of Perth, photograph ALB 29 106

1930



View of St Mary's Cathedral from Cathedral Presbytery Showing Crowd and Dias, 4 May 1930.
Courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 095,044PD

2009



View of St Mary's Cathedral from Cathedral Presbytery Showing Crowd and Dias, 4 May 1930.
Courtesy Catholic Archives Office, Archdiocese of Perth