Immaculate Conception Church, Hawthorn, 1869 - 2019

In the 1850s, a little church school, St Joseph's, was built in Power St to cater for the few Catholics living in the area. Mass was celebrated by priests from inner Melbourne, primarily Fr Madden, and then, by the Jesuits, following their arrival to look after the Richmond Mission.

With an increasing population, pressure was applied to the Jesuits to build something more substantial in Hawthorn. Irishman Michael Lynch, who had acquired the vast expanse of land covering Burwood Rd to Power St, up to Kinkora Rd, to Glenferrie Rd, in October, 1867, offered the prime spot, 800 square metres on the corner of Burwood and Glenferrie Rds for a new church.

Lynch's Paddock circa 1861

Jesuit Fr Edward Nolan enthusiastically took up the challenge of raising funds to commence building the church.

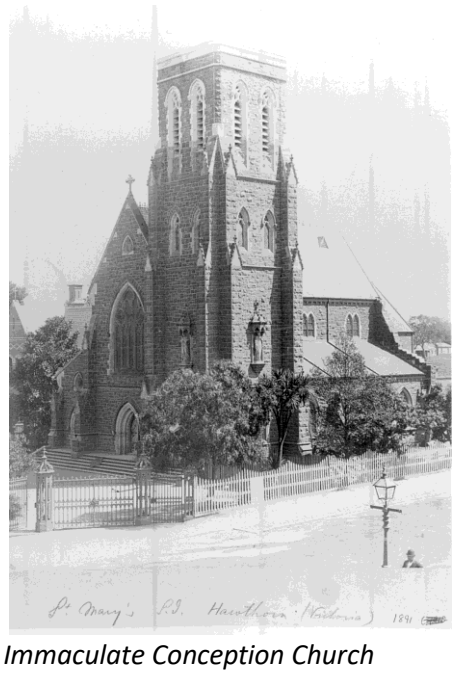
Crouch and Wilson's design

The design of the church by Melbourne Architects, Crouch and Wilson, was accepted, at a cost estimated at 6000 pounds.

The building committee supporting Fr Nolan, comprised high profile Hawthorn and Victorian residents, John O'Shanassy and Charles Gavan Duffy, both to become premiers of the fledgling colony, Michael O'Grady, parliamentarian and first chairman of the city of Hawthorn, and William Henry Archer, to become the colony's Registrar-General, as well as Lynch himself. Fr Nolan had a great aptitude for extracting money from people, which included the broader community, for the project. The foundation stone was laid on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8th December, 1867 and work commenced the following March.

Interior of the Church at opening, October 1869

Fundraising continued apace and the first stage of the church of the Immaculate Conception, comprising nave and side aisles and a tower to 66 feet, was ready for opening 22 months later, on **Sunday October 10th, 1869.** The blessing and consecration by Melbourne's Bishop Goold took place at 8.30am. Pontifical High Mass at 11am before a packed church with an overflow into a marquee in front of the church.

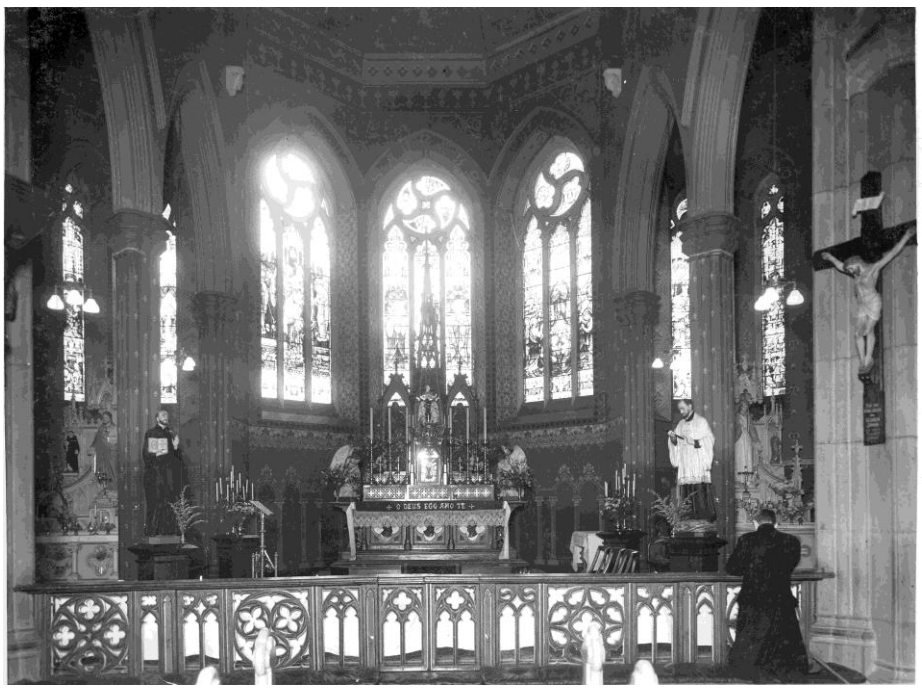


Immaculate Conception Church
First Stage opened October, 1869

Immaculate Conception Church, Hawthorn, 1869 - 2019

Until the 1880s the Hawthorn churches continued to be part of the Richmond Mission. By 1881, it was decided that the Catholic population of Hawthorn was large enough to be made a separate parish, with resident priests. Parish Priest, Fr Oliver Daly SJ, immediately began the building of a presbytery, on the western side of the church. Again aided by the generosity of some of the donors who had been prominent in the building of the church itself, (Sir John O'Shanassy and Patrick O'Brien each donated 100 pounds), support from other religious denominations, and a 5 day bazaar in the Hawthorn Town Hall, the presbytery opened in 1883, at a cost of 2000 pounds.

Hawthorn Catholic Presbytery, opened 1883



The Chancel (Sanctuary) after extensions in 1892

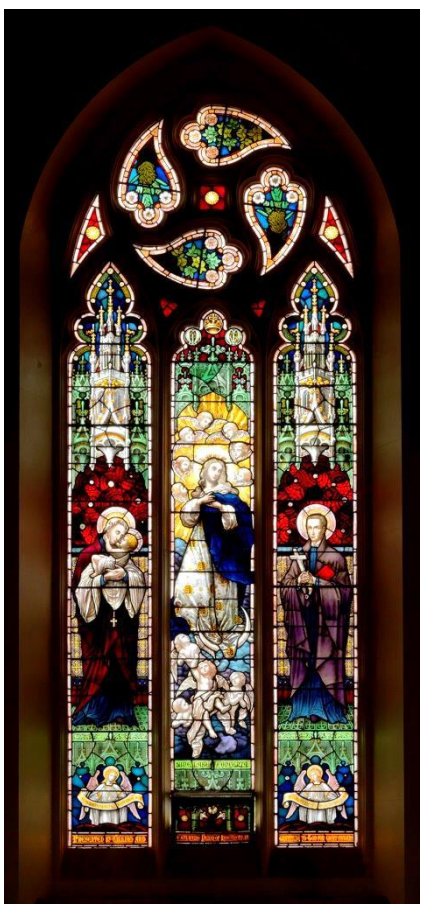
Further Extensions and the 1890s Depression

The 1880s were a time of optimism. Melbourne had recently been called 'Marvellous Melbourne', and the beautiful Exhibition Building opened in 1880.

Accommodation at the new church had now become inadequate and it was decided that extensions were required. A large chancel (sanctuary) was completed in late 1892, allowing the magnificent high altar to be moved back to a new position. Around the same time, the tower was completed and bells installed.

The final cost was 10,000 pounds. Unforeseen was the depression which struck fiercely in the 1890s, leading the parish into severe financial difficulty for several years, but, again with the support of a wonderful community, the debt was gradually brought under control. So much so, that by 1898 the glorious stained glass windows behind the high altar, with the Immaculate Conception as the centrepiece, began to be installed.

The extended Church in 1909

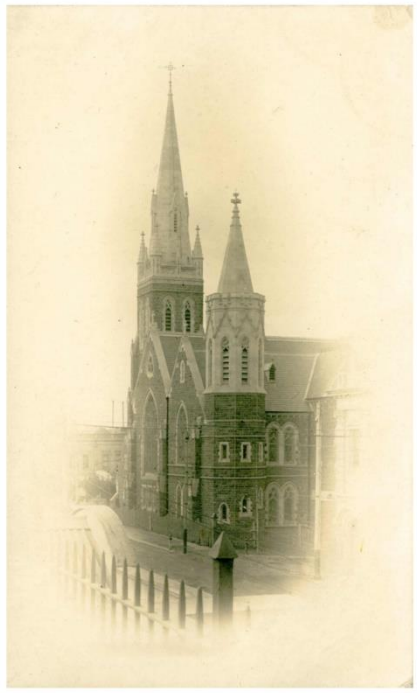


The glorious stained glass window behind the main altar, in 1898

Immaculate Conception Church, Hawthorn, 1869 - 2019

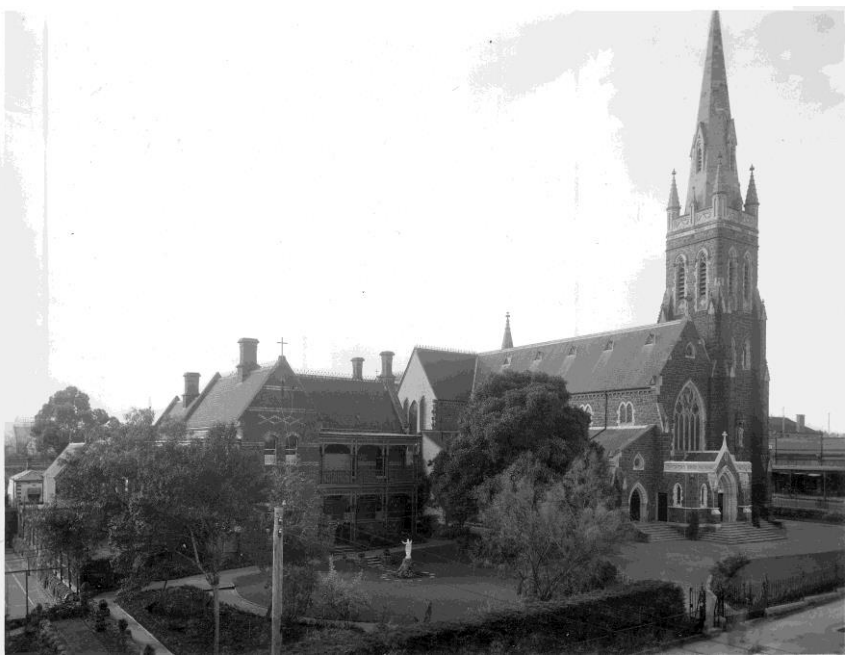
1920s - The Eastern Transept added

Following the Great War, 1914-1918, an appeal was launched to raise funds to complete the eastern transept of the church. This was to coincide with the golden jubilee of the church. The success of the appeal enabled also the spires and choir loft to be completed at a total cost of 16,000 pounds.



Pictured: Spire under construction in 1921

Eastern Transept and spires completed in 1922

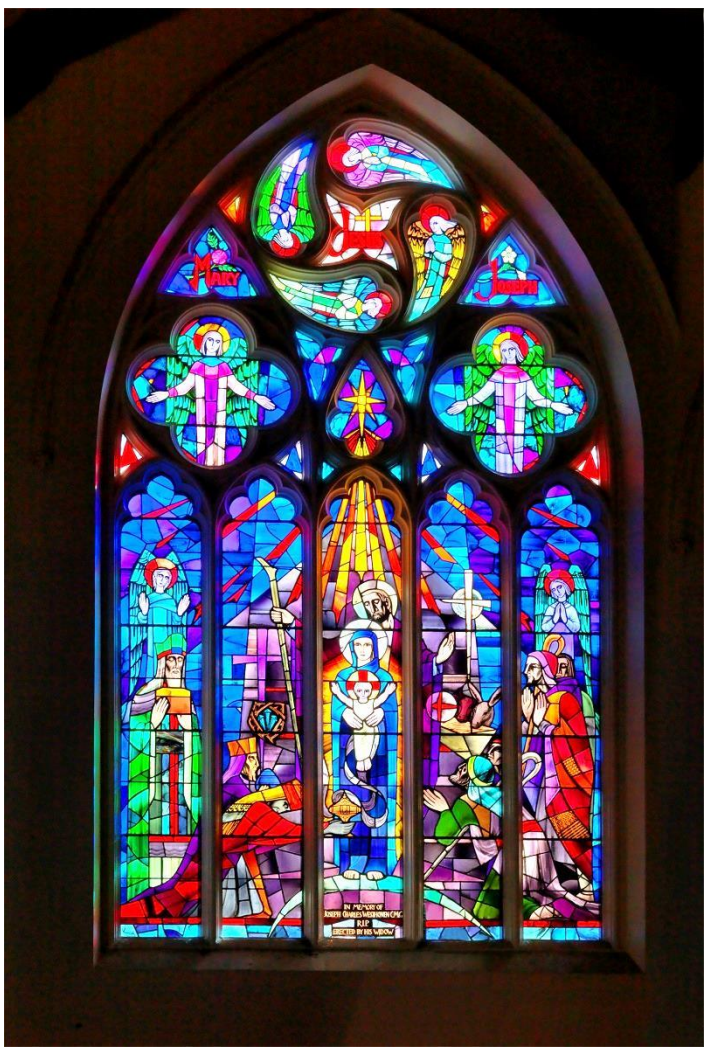


Developments in the 1930s

In the time of Fr. J. S. Bourke as parish priest (1934-1947), the front porch of the church was built in bluestone in 1936. It was designed to reduce the cold wind which blew into the church during winter and to keep local dogs out of the church. Much money was also spent beautifying the church grounds and gardens.

Showing the new front porch and gardens in 1936

By 1960, it was decided the time was right to complete the design of the church, by adding the western transept. Named the Holy Family Memorial Shrine, it commemorated Hawthorn parishioners who gave their lives in wars. The western wall is surmounted by a spectacular stained glass window by Irish artist, Richard King, and dedicated to the Holy Family. It was made possible by a very large endowment by the elderly widow of J. C. Westhoven, who was prominent in fundraising activities back in the 1920s.



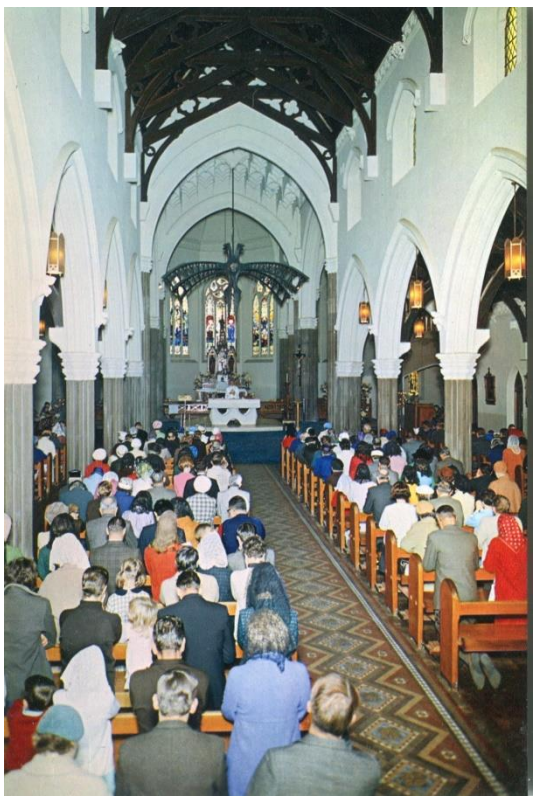
The Western Transept window "Holy Family", by Irish artist Richard King erected in memory of Charles Westhoven CMG by his widow.

Immaculate Conception Church, Hawthorn, 1869 - 2019

Changes following the 2nd Vatican Council

Following the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965), which modernised liturgical procedures in the church, it was decided to redesign the sanctuary and architect Peter Barrowes was commissioned for the job.

What finally appeared was one of the most impressive liturgical spaces in a traditional church in Australia. A new, spacious semi-circular sanctuary reached out well into the body of the nave, and in the middle was placed the present large altar of white Hornsby sandstone designed for Mass to be celebrated with the priest facing the people.



Sanctuary after the redesign following Vatican Council 2

Since the 1960s

Changes to the interior of the church in the last 50 years have been minimal, the most notable being the removal of seating at the rear of the church, making room for a narthex which provides for interaction of Mass-goers following a service or a function in the church.

Narthex (looking south)

The Immaculate Conception Church as it is today, a central landmark in the city of Hawthorn, having served the community for 150 years.

Hawthorn Parish Timeline

1853	First building in the parish (then part of Richmond), St Joseph's school-church, enlarged and improved when Jesuits took over. School under lay administration
1865	The Jesuits take over Richmond Mission, which included Hawthorn, Kew, Camberwell & out to the hills
1867	Michael Lynch presents the land on which the parish church now stands. Foundation stone for ICC laid on feast of the Immaculate Conception
1869	On October 10th, the first part of the church, comprising nave and side aisles, and a tower to 66 feet, was opened and blessed by Bishop Goold before his departure to take part in the first Vatican Council
1879	The organ installed (at a cost of 380 pounds)
1861	Hawthorn becomes a separate parish. Presbytery built
1888	The first St John's School built (on the site of where the Glen Arcade in Glenferrie Road now stands)
1889	FCJ sisters now administer St Joseph's School
1892	The ICC chancel (sanctuary) completed
1911	St John's school moved to permanent site, then numbered 311 Glenferrie Rd
1921	The spire and eastern transept added
1922	Lyndale Secondary College opens under the Brigidine Sisters
1923	• FCJ sisters move out of St Joseph's school. Brigidine sisters take over • E.S. and A. Bank purchased (to become the 'Clubrooms') and adjoining tennis courts acquired
1924	Manresa Hall built
1925	The Marist Brothers take over the new St John's School at 306 Glenferrie Rd
1935	ICC front porch erected
1950	Lyndale school name changed to Kilmaire, meaning 'House of Mary"
1961	Western transept completed
1965	Organ enlarged and rebuilt. Console placed in Eastern Transept
1969	Centenary of the opening of ICC celebrated. Centenary history written
1971	First Parish Pastoral Council established
1976	Marist Brothers leave St John's School. School becomes the one parish primary school, called St Josephs under Brigidine administration. St Joseph's school in Power St closed
1977	St Joseph's Parish School now under lay administration
1989	St Joseph's Hostel built on the site of the tennis courts in Elgin Street
1995	Kilmaire College closes
2004	Parish Centre opened
2011	'Portrait of a Parish' by Fr Paul Duffy SJ published
2014	St Joseph's Hostel closes, residents relocated. Catholic Homes for Elderly buy Old St Joseph's School site
2016	St Joseph's Mews opens. St Joseph's Church renovated