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Name: Scotch Oakburn College, Elphin Campus
Status: Provisionally Registered
Tier: State

THR ID Number: 12033
Municipality: Launceston City Council

Location Addresses

74-78 ELPHIN RD, LAUNCESTON 7250 TAS
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Title References

103209/1
 91494/1
 91494/2
 91494/3

Property Id

3165724
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Oakburn (left) & Methodist Ladies' College (right) Heritage Tasmania, 2019

Lemana Heritage Tasmania, 2019

Oakburn, c.1900 TAHO

Lemana, 1906 Weekly Courier, 7 April 1906

Setting: Scotch Oakburn College Elphin campus is located in the northern Tasmanian city of Launceston, in the suburb of Newstead. The property addresses Elphin Road to the east, part of Claremont Street to the north and is surrounded to the north, west and south by Victorian and Federation period residences. The campus includes what are referred to as the 'Claremont Gardens'; these gardens although now owned by the College are part of the Heritage Register entry for the 'Claremont' property (THR#4093) to the west. Scotch Oakburn College is a particularly fine example of a residence converted to educational premises, surrounded by mature plantings in a suburban setting.

Description: The Scotch Oakburn College Elphin campus comprises the following built elements of interest to this registration:
'Oakburn' (c.1861) is a Victorian Italianate two-storey rendered brick building facing north east, with verandah and terrace balcony on the first floor. Wooden windows, french doors and Italianate verandah brackets are notable elements of the façade. The front reception includes an elaborate timber hall screen with carved coat of arms of the school. Rooms in this portion of the school contain ornate fireplaces made of marble and timber, moulded plaster ceilings, original glass lighting fixtures and joinery. Adjoining to the north is the **Methodist Ladies' College (1886)** addition, a Victorian Italianate three-storey brick and rendered building on bluestone foundations with imposing central tower. The façade is of dark brick with cement rendered stacked quoins, while the rendered tower includes the words modelled in cement 'Ladies College' above the first floor windows. Original interior staircases, cornices, ceiling roses, lighting, fireplaces, dados, doors, decorative finishes and skirting boards contribute to the representative character of the style of the building. The façade of the Oakburn and Ladies' College sections has changed little since the late 19th century.
 At the rear of the Ladies' College building projecting south-west is the former **Dormitory and Classrooms wing (1923)** an inter-war two-storey extension in brick with concrete stacked quoins. Adjacent is the **Dining Hall, Canteen and Kitchen (1935)**. The dining hall contains a pair of fireplaces with elaborate wet cement modelled coat of arms of Launceston, by woodcarver and sculptor WG (Gordon) Cumming (1894-1972). Cumming was also responsible for the plaster wall vents, a carved wooden clock and commemorative panel in the dining room. Original panelling and hardware survive in the dining hall, including a wooden servery with drawers. Original interior staircases, cornices, fireplaces, doors, decorative finishes and skirting boards in this wing contribute to the representative character of the style of the building.

Former Gymnasium Building (1886) is a timber Queen Anne Federation single storey building relocated c.2011 from the Quadrangle.

Mary Fox Performing Arts and Music Centre (1961) is a Modernist building constructed of red brick with broad gabled roof clad in corrugated iron. Full height steel-framed curtain wall glazing dominates the side elevations, formed by subtle projections that create a concertina effect. Each full-length window has a painted masonry sill, the lower sections exhibiting clear glazing. The upper sections are filled with textured and coloured glass of varying sizes in green, amber, orange, light blue, dark blue, red and clear, running in vertical lines. The entrance porch on the northern elevation is dominated by a suite of steps leading to the chapel. A patinated motif with lettering and school crest is located on the eastern elevation of the building.

Lemana (1906) is a detailed Federation brick building, with a high degree of integrity both internally and externally. The building is constructed of tuck-pointed face brickwork with contrasting sandstone projecting gables and ornamental timber valances. The roof is a prominent and important feature with an ensemble of varied roof shapes. A copper turret and octangular bell-cast roof on the tower contrast with terracotta tiles and ridge ornaments manufactured by Symons Bros. of Fairfield, NSW. The eastern and northern elevations are enclosed by an elaborate timber balustrade verandah and tiled mosaic floor.

The interior of Lemana is richly detailed. At the intersection of corridors is an octagonal dome comprising four niches with original light fixtures set into diagonal walls. The centre of the dome contains a stained-glass dome light, above sinuous flowing lines of art nouveau design. Elaborate encaustic tile floors, fretwork screens, detailed plaster ceilings, leadlight windows and intricate fireplaces of varying scale and detail are prominent features. A room addressing the eastern elevation contains an intricately carved Tasmanian blackwood fireplace, inscribed 'cead mille failthe', Gaelic for 'one hundred thousand welcomes'. This is likely the work of woodcarver Hugh Cunningham (c.1858-1945). A blackwood staircase with samples of original art nouveau wallpaper underneath leads to an attic space. Original encaustic floor tiles, cornices, fireplaces, doors, skirting boards and staircase contribute to the representative character of the style of the building.

The stables at the rear of Lemana is a Federation brick building, which has been converted into learning spaces. A central tower dominates the façade, while the roof is clad in terracotta tiles. A central staircase leads to the peak of the tower and original internal timber trusswork is a feature internally.

Scotch Oakburn College Elphin campus **grounds as distinct from the Claremont Gardens**, contains a number of plantings of historic and botanical heritage significance. Some of these plantings may date to the early phase of the site, notably the oak trees lining Elphin Road, provenanced to the private residence Oakburn. A variegated *ligustrum* hedge and bluestone wall address the Elphin Road elevation. At the north-eastern corner of the property is the original Lemana entrance gates, with sandstone pillars, decorative iron gate and *cupressus torulosa* hedge addressing Claremont Street.

Features of limited heritage significance

The registered area also contains the following built features that are not of state cultural heritage significance in their own right. Major external modifications or demolition of these features may have the potential to impact the elements of heritage significance:

Change Rooms, a building located behind the Dining Hall to the south west;

Thornton Lewis Building, a modern structure located behind the main building; and

Swimming Pool, netball court and Elphin Studio & Gallery.

History:

Scotch Oakburn College was created in 1979 as an amalgamation of the long-established Methodist/Oakburn Ladies College and Scotch College. The Methodist Ladies' College was established in the repurposed and extended Oakburn building in 1886, while the Scotch College was formed in York Street in 1901, before moving to its current site on Penquite Road. Just like Launceston Grammar and Broadland House joined forces to form a co-educational institution, so did Scotch and Oakburn in 1979 (Terry & Servant, 2002 *Launceston Heritage Study, Stage 1: Thematic History* p.68).

The residence **Oakburn** was commissioned by widow Eliza Thomson, nee Reibey (1805-1870), the daughter of Thomas and Mary Reibey of Sydney, the latter of whom features on the Australian \$20 note in recognition of having risen from a convicted horse-thief to become one of the most prominent 19th century businesswomen in the Australian colonies.

In 1821 the 17-year-old Eliza Reibey married Thomas Thomson (TAHO, RGD36/1/1/ #497), who it turned out, was terrible with money. Employed as the head of Customs and Treasury in Launceston, Thomson was imprisoned for extensive debts and embezzlement. It left the couple virtually destitute. Mary Reibey, Eliza's mother, covered the couple's debt. After Thomas' death in 1844 Eliza found her financial feet, likely assisted by an inheritance from her wealthy mother in 1855:

(<https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/magazine/galleries/mary-reibey>). Eliza, by now financially stable, acquired property, including the land on which Oakburn now stands

(www.holobooks.co.uk/Tasmanialtinerary23.pdf). The architect of Oakburn is not known. Once constructed, Eliza lived nearby and put Oakburn out for rent:

'TO LET ... *That newly erected residence on the Elphin Road called Oakburn. The house contains four rooms, 19.5 by 17.5, four ditto 15.5 by 12.5, dressing rooms, bath ditto, linen closets, three store rooms, pantry, servants' rooms, and laundry; dairy, scullery and all other convenient outbuildings. Water laid on up the stairs, and in various part of the premises. Large garden, drying green. Three-stall stable, coach-house, etc. Apply to Mrs Thomson, Elphin Rd (Launceston Examiner, 22 March 1862 p.5).*

Eliza's death from asthma on Christmas Day 1870 (TAHO, RGD35/1/39 #1361) meant a change of ownership for Oakburn. The auction notice described the property as: '*that very desirable residence as*

Oakburn, situate on the Elphin Road in Launceston ... containing 21 rooms ... this beautiful mansion is situate in the midst of grounds delightfully laid out as lawn and fruit, flower and vegetable gardens, and which comprise in the whole 2 acres and 20 perches' (The Tasmanian, 23 September 1871 p.16). After a short period owned by businessman Robert Thirkell, who died at the residence, an auction saw Oakburn, and an adjoining allotment sold to Alex Corrie for £3,600 (Mercury, 3 February 1881 p.2). Corrie's ownership coincided with his marriage to Lillian Button in Launceston in 1882 (TAHO, RGD37/1/42 #642). Like Thirkell, Corrie's ownership of the property was relatively short, he subsequently moving to Queensland to pursue stockbroking interests. A sale notice for Oakburn described it as a two-storey brick residence, stuccoed externally with slate roof. The residence comprised 11 rooms, three store-rooms, pantry and bathroom and separate staircase to servants' quarters. The kitchen was fitted with a Flavel's patent Kitchener. Aside from the main house was a wash house, dairy, scullery, coal, wood and other outhouses all under containing cement floors. The façade contained a large verandah and balcony at the front and back verandah. The house had been refurbished with marble fireplaces and servants' bells. The land included coachhouses, orchard, tennis court, greenhouse, fern plantation and fishpond with fountain (Launceston Examiner, 22 April 1884 p.4).

After its purchase by a committee with the intent of setting up a private school, Alex Corrie's architect brother Leslie Corrie (1859-1918) was commissioned to design a northern addition to Oakburn. The 'handsome new building' for the **Methodist Ladies' College** was almost completed by the start of 1886 (Launceston Examiner, 23 January 1886 p.2). The substantial porch reminded a local correspondent of school days gone by in the 'old country' and 'without exaggeration, the building, as a schoolhouse, is quite equal to many of the collegiate institutions in England'. Classrooms, lavatories, kitchens and pantries were located on the ground floor, whilst the student dormitories and staff accommodation on the upper floors (Daily Telegraph, 6 February 1886 p.2).

In 1917 the former private school Horton College at Ross was pulled down, and some of the building materials incorporated in the 1935 additions to the Methodist Ladies' College in Launceston. Eight bricks that once formed part of the college at Ross were laid by school prefects to form a windowsill close to the foundation stone of the Mary Fox jubilee wing, now housing the Dining Hall, Canteen and Kitchen (Mercury, 21 March 1936 p.9). Mary Fox (1877-1962), who had been educated at the Methodist Ladies' College, was headmistress for nearly four decades. Her father William Fox has been the long-time headmaster of Horton College. Mary was a progressive educator noted for her advocacy of women's sport, early childhood and domestic science education. She received an MBE for services to education and sport (Oliver, 2005 p.144). The 1935 additions featured work by sculptor and woodcarver WG (Gordon) Cumming (1894-1972) including the coat of arms of Launceston modelled in wet cement above two fireplaces in the main dining room. The modelling process was highly technical and required attention to detail and fast execution. Cumming's only other example of in-situ wet cement modelling is St John's Church, Launceston (THR #4612). Cumming also made the dining room wall vents, writing to a Launceston City Council seeking further commissions: '... recently I modelled and moulded all the ventilators for the new wing at the Methodist Ladies' College...' (QVMAG, LCC 3 5/5.5 Buildings, Town Hall, 1935-37). Cumming was responsible over five decades for other works commissioned by the school, including carved wooden pulpit, pews, communion table, memorial plaques, lectern and other furniture. After his sudden death the Cumming family found his final commissioned carvings for the Scotch College chapel lying completed on his workbench (<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cumming-william-gordon-9874>).

Growth of the college continued during World War II with the acquisition of **Lemana & Stables** c.1906. The former residence was erected for accountant Matthews Tyson and designed by architect Thomas Searell (c.1855-1938; Weekly Courier, 7 April 1906 p.19). Searell designed the 1894 Tasmanian Exhibition Buildings in Hobart, the National Theatre (THR #3971) in Launceston, Gaiety Theatre & Grand Hotel (THR #5659) in Zeehan and went on to have a career in architecture in New Zealand (The Press, 7 May 1938 p.16). King and Willis note the residence was in the boom style, with a flamboyant sensibility as architects negotiated wealth generated by the mining boom on the West Coast of Tasmania in the latter half of the 19th century (King & Willis, 2016 pp.334-345.).

Tyson was an accountant and commissioned the residence around the time of his retirement. Tyson's second wife, Mary was the daughter of businessman William Hart, who had bequeathed her a considerable sum of money at the time of his death (TAHO, AD960/1/65 p.901). Matthews Tyson passed away at his residence Lemana, Elphin Rd in November 1915 in his 81st year (Examiner, 29 November 1915 p.3). It is clear no expense was spared in the construction, decorating and furnishing of Lemana. Images depict opulent interiors, extensive gardens and substantial stables at the rear of the residence. Its occupants made frequent appearances in social pages, raising money for charity and travelling interstate and overseas. Tyson's widow, Mary died in 1940 (Examiner, 2 December 1940 p.7), leaving generous donations to charity and staff who had worked for her, including her chauffeur (TAHO, AD960/1/65 p.901). The Methodist Ladies' College next door acquired Lemana shortly afterwards (Mercury, 27 March 1941 p.4).

During the late 1950s, faced with growing student numbers, fundraising for the **Mary Fox Chapel and Assembly Hall (later renamed the Mary Fox Performing Arts and Music Centre)** began in earnest. Architectural firm Tandy, Pryor and Rogers were commissioned to design the building that included science laboratories, classrooms and a chapel (Examiner, 27 November 1961 p.7). Thomas Tandy Jnr (1913-1984), who was responsible for the design (Willis & Neale in Goad & Willis, p.681), was a former student and undertook other design work for both the Scotch and Oakburn colleges prior to their amalgamation (Examiner, 10 May 1984). After serving in World War II, Tandy Jnr designed one of the first flat roofed

houses in Tasmania, and became part of a movement that experimented with flexible geometric planning, lightweight structural systems and extensive glazing (King, Neale and Goad in Goad & Willis, p.685). Tandy Pryor and Rogers operated across Tasmania between 1947-1974; the company collection is held at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston.

Today the Elphin Road campus is one of two sites owned by Scotch Oakburn College, an independent co-educational day and boarding school.

References:

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<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/reibey-mary-2583>

Daily Telegraph, 6 February 1886

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<http://www.holobooks.co.uk/Tasmanialtinerary23.pdf>

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King & Willis, 'The Australian Colonies' in Bremner (ed) 2016 *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*, Oxford University Press

King & Willis, 2016 'Mining Boom Styles' in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, edited by Ann Marie Brennan and Philip Goad, pp.334-345. Melbourne, SAHANZ

Launceston Examiner, 22 March 1862; 22 April 1884; 23 January 1886

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Oliver, 2005 'Mary Fox' in Alexander [ed.] *Companion to Tasmanian History*, University of Tasmania Press, 7 May 1938

QVMAG, LCC 3 5/5.5 Buildings, Town Hall, 1935-1937

QVMAG, Tandy Collection

<https://www.soc.tas.edu.au/>

<https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/magazine/galleries/mary-reibey>

TAHO, AD960/1/65 p.901

TAHO, RGD35/1/39 #1361

TAHO, RGD36/1/1 #497

TAHO, RGD37/1/42 #642

Tasmanian, 23 September 1871

Weekly Courier, 7 April 1906

Willis & Neale 'Thomas Tandy Snr and Thomas Tandy Jnr' in Goad & Willis (eds) 2012 *The Encyclopedia of Australian architecture*, Cambridge University Press

Terry, I & Servant, N 2002 *Launceston Heritage Study, Stage 1: Thematic History*, Launceston City Council & Heritage Tasmania

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

The Scotch Oakburn College Elphin campus is of historic cultural heritage significance because of its ability to demonstrate the evolution in education in Tasmania, particularly the development of private education. The main buildings are representative of the broader class of place of 19th century residences converted for educational purposes, while the purpose-built Mary Fox Chapel and Assembly Hall is a fine example of post-war Modernism applied to educational buildings. The dining hall demonstrates the highly technical and detailed work of woodcarver and sculptor, WG (Gordon) Cumming (1894-1972), in three materials: cement, wood and plaster. Scotch Oakburn College, dedicated to the principles of the Methodist and later Uniting Church, has meaning to the wider Launceston community, and particularly former alumni who have been educated on the premises since 1886. The campus has a special association with architects Leslie Corrie (1859-1918); Thomas Searell (1855-1938); Thomas Tandy Jnr (1913-1984) and woodcarver and sculptor WG (Gordon) Cumming (1894-1972), all of whom had an impact of the design of the campus and the wider architectural history of Tasmania. It also has a special association with former student and headmistress Mary Fox (1877-1962), a progressive educator noted for her advocacy of women's sport, early childhood and domestic science education.

Significance:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

The Scotch Oakburn College is of historic cultural heritage significance because of its ability to demonstrate the development of education, and in particular, private education in Tasmania. The repurposing of private homes such as Oakburn as schools, with purpose-built additions and adjacent property acquisitions such as Lemana and the Claremont House gardens is typical of the development of long-established private schools in Tasmania.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

No Data Recorded

- c) **The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.**

No Data Recorded

- d) **The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.**

The Scotch Oakburn campus on Elphin Road is indicative of a broader class of place, that being 19th century private residences repurposed as private schools. Oakburn (in the Victorian style); Methodist Ladies' College (Victorian Italianate); Lemana (Federation); and the Mary Fox Chapel and Assembly Hall (Modernist) all have a high degree of integrity and all display the key characteristics of their respective architectural styles. Lemana includes particularly fine art nouveau detailing internally and externally with highly intact fine plaster, marble, tile and woodwork.

- e) **The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.**

The Scotch Oakburn College main dining room contains two fireplaces adorned with Launceston's coat of arms, the work of sculptor and woodcarver, WG (Gordon) Cumming (1894-1972). Executed in-situ from wet cement, they required not just the ability to work expeditiously, but with artistic merit that only a highly skilled and experienced sculptor could achieve. These fireplaces are among the most complex and technically-accomplished examples of Cumming's work across his long and prolific career.

- f) **The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.**

As a school dedicated to the principles formerly of the Methodist Church, and since the 1970s the Uniting Church, Scotch Oakburn College is of special importance to the Tasmanian community, as an educational institution, boarding school and active organisation in community life. Former alumni have a particularly strong association with the campus, as do many Launcestonians who have ancestors educated at the site, which has been used as a school since 1886.

- g) **The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.**

The Scotch Oakburn College has a special association with architects Leslie Corrie (1859-1918), responsible for the Methodist Ladies' College section; Thomas Searall (1855-1938) for Lemana; and Thomas Tandy Jnr (1913-1984) for the Mary Fox Chapel and Assembly Hall, all of whom had a strong impact on the architectural history of Tasmania. The school buildings also have a special association with the life and work of woodcarver and sculptor WG (Gordon) Cumming (1894-1972) whose commissions for the school spanned almost five decades, and former student and headmistress Mary Fox (1877-1962), a progressive educator noted for her advocacy of women's sport, early childhood and domestic science education.

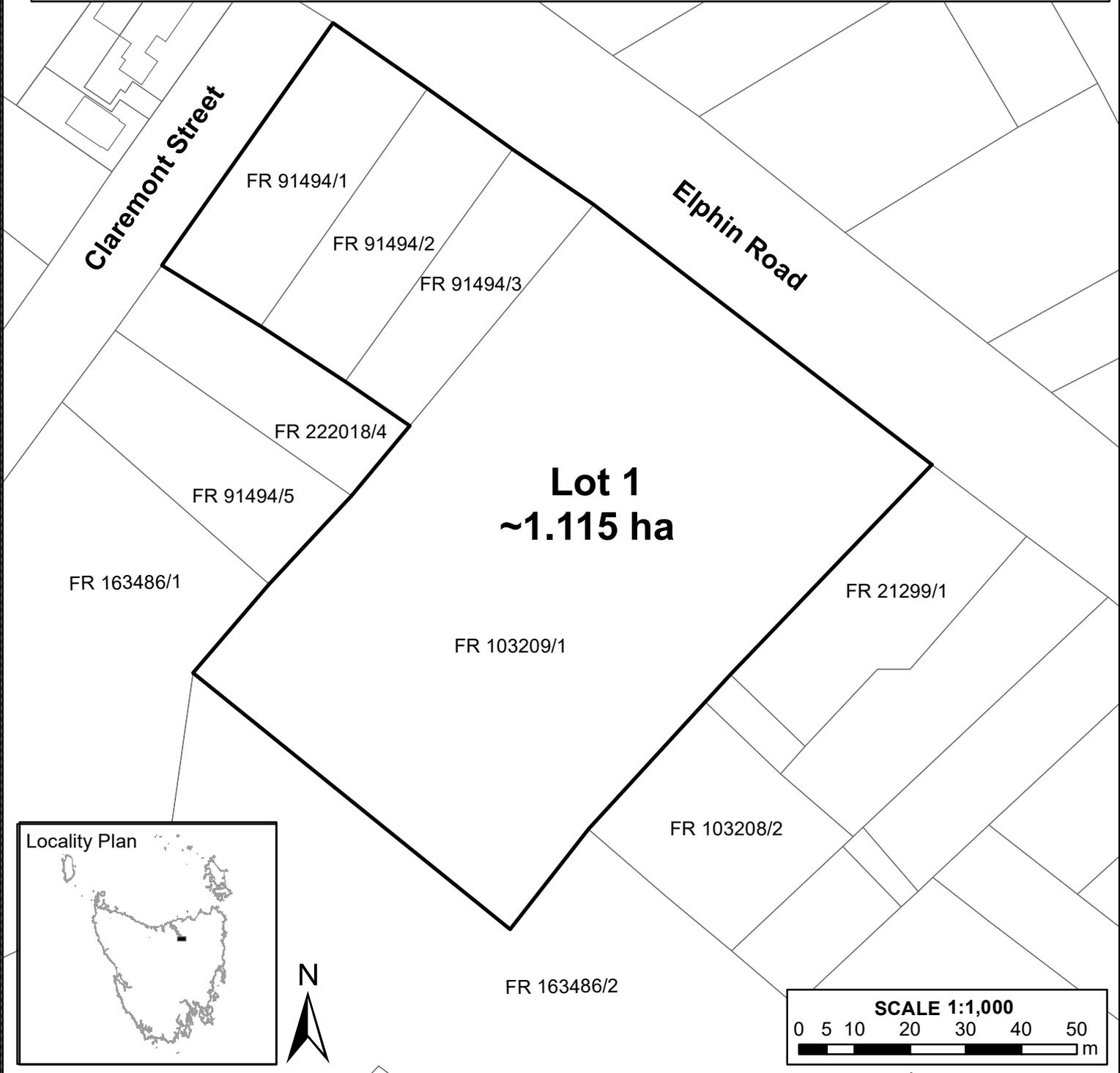
- h) **The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.**

No Data Recorded

PLEASE NOTE This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Note

1. Lot 1 represents the registered boundary for 'Scotch Oakburn College, Elphin Campus', #12033 on the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
2. Lot 1 is the whole of parcels FR 91494/1, 91494/2, 91494/3 & 103209/1 the boundary of which is marked by a heavy black line and described below.
3. All boundaries are parcel boundaries, details of individual land parcel boundaries may be accessed through the Land Information System Tasmania (LIST).



TASMAP: LAUNCESTON - 5041		GRID: MGA94 / ZONE 55		DATUM: AHD		CONTOUR INTERVAL: N/A	
No.	PRODUCTION / AMENDMENT	AUTHORITY	REFERENCE	DRAWN	APPROVED	DATE	 Tasmania
1	Production	THC	12033	AW	A.ROBERTS	30.6.21	

Scotch Oakburn College, Elphin Campus 74-78 Elphin Road, Newstead <small>PREPARED BY HERITAGE TASMANIA</small>	CENTRAL PLAN REGISTER p.p. Surveyor General:  Date Registered: <u>5.7.21</u>	CPR 11058
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