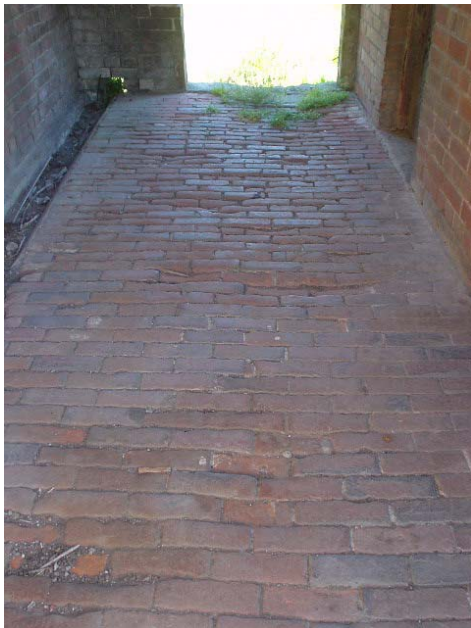


## **HERITAGE ITEM NAME (S): St. John of God Farm Buildings**

(The former Mount Magdala Farm Buildings)



**ADDRESS:** Nash Road, Aidanfield, Halswell

**CCC HERITAGE LISTING:** GROUP 2

**NZHPT REGISTRATION:** NOT LISTED

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER:** Unknown

**DATE OF DESIGN:** Unknown probably c1890

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: Unknown probably from c1890**

**STYLE: Agricultural - utilitarian**

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

Long narrow brick building with raised platform floor opening to a yard enclosed by two brick wings with timber/corrugated iron bays extending to form a U-shape around a central yard. The timber/corrugated iron implement sheds of three bays adjoin this complex.

A timber framed and lined corrugated iron woolshed/shearing shed stands apart from the brick complex.

**SETTING/LANDSCAPE FEATURES:**

- Behind Halswell Residential school, near St. John of God Chapel and the former St. Joseph's Orphanage and the Mount Magdala Cemetery

**SIGNIFICANT FEATURES:**

- Woolshed: unusual fenestration and timber interior
- Granary, adjoining wings and yard: Unusual (for New Zealand) is the 'farm steading',<sup>1</sup> composition of three buildings serving different farm purposes forming a U-shape around a central (today only partially) brick paved yard. The brick wings and timber/corrugated iron extensions from these wings incorporate several bays with brick paved floors.

**CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS/STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:**

Woolshed: timber, corrugated iron

Granary and Wings: brick, timber

Wing Extensions: timber, corrugated iron, brick

Yard: partially brick paved

Implement Sheds: timber, corrugated iron

**ALTERATIONS: Unknown**

**DATE OF REPORT:** 15 December 2006

**AUTHORS:** Jenny May and Helen Brown, (Heritage Management Services)

**ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE VALUES**

**HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The St. John of God farm buildings have high metropolitan and moderate national historic and social significance for their association with *Mount Magdala*, the pioneering Catholic social work institution for the care of women.

This institution was established at Halswell between 1886 and 1888. The farm buildings were integral to the Mount Magdala complex which was founded as a predominantly self-sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> See: Thornton, *G H New Zealand's Industrial Heritage* 1982 p.40 Notable examples exist in pioneer farming establishments particularly in Otago.

community. The complex of farm buildings is significant as the once working farmyard that provided all the food for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the women residents of Mount Magdala and later St. Joseph's Orphanage.

The Roman Catholic priest, Fr. (later Dean) Ginaty who arrived in Christchurch in 1877 was responsible for the establishment of *Mount Magdala*. Fr. Ginaty was in charge of the Christchurch district and also Chaplain to the Christchurch Gaol. In the course of his chaplaincy duties, he met many women whose lives were afflicted by poverty, prostitution, crime and alcoholism. This experience prompted him to seek the establishment of a social and religious institution to care for, rehabilitate, employ and educate such women. Social services were very limited in not only Christchurch, but the whole of New Zealand at this time.

The religious order known as the *Magdalena* or the *Sisters of the Good Shepherd* ran homes for women in locations around the world, the closest being in Abbotsford, Melbourne. Fr. Ginaty travelled to the Abbotsford Convent<sup>2</sup> in 1885 to discuss the possibility of establishing a comparable institution in Christchurch. It was agreed that four Sisters from the Melbourne community would relocate to Christchurch, to staff a 'Magdalena' home there. Fr. Ginaty returned to New Zealand and travelled the country relentlessly campaigning to raise funds for the project. In 1886 Fr. Ginaty purchased the 200 acre property at Halswell known as 'Standard Farm' from George Gould for £8500. The peaceful location in the countryside amid paddocks and trees with an outlook to the mountains was regarded as an ideal location - the site was aesthetically pleasing and also provided ample space for the establishment of vegetable gardens and for the agricultural and farming operations that would provide food for the institution.

The design of the whole Mount Magdala complex was modelled on other Magdala homes around the world and particularly, the Convent of the Good Shepherd, at Abbotsford, in Melbourne.<sup>3</sup> The Abbotsford Convent was a self-sufficient community that occupied a series of Gothic buildings set on a rise amid gardens and paddocks on the Yarra River. There was a vast French medieval-style convent, a bluestone church, school, orphanage, re-education centre, large commercial laundry, massive basement stores, a bakery, kitchen and working farm with stables, piggeries, dairy and chicken coops.<sup>4</sup> Mount Magdala would eventually reproduce all of these elements at its Halswell property.

Work commenced almost immediately on developing the farm at Mount Magdala. The foundation stone for the Magdalen Asylum (Mount Magdala) was laid by Cardinal Moran of Melbourne on 18 February 1886 amid great ceremony. The Cardinal was driven from the Barbadoes Street church in a carriage drawn by four black horses and attended by other Bishops. The procession was greeted at the entrance to the Mount Magdala site by a group of 800 banner waving children from Catholic schools throughout the diocese.<sup>5</sup> The first Sisters from Abbotsford Convent led by Mother Mary of the Visitation, arrived in Christchurch in July 1886. They began their work from an old house in Manchester Street north<sup>6</sup> (later the site of St.

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<sup>2</sup> The Abbotsford Convent buildings and grounds are today recognised as a significant heritage precinct. The buildings and grounds are being restored over a staged five-year program. The restoration is scheduled for completion in 2009. The Convent is developing as a unique arts and cultural venue.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Ginaty in *Canterbury Times* 19.02.1886 p21

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.petticoated.com/conventSU03.html>

<sup>5</sup> *Canterbury Times* 19.02.1886 p21

<sup>6</sup> *Press* 8.02.1936 p2

Mary's catholic presbytery) while they awaited the construction of their convent and the development of the farm.

In 1888 the Halswell property transferred from Fr. Ginaty to representatives of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. The first building<sup>7</sup> of the Mt Magdala complex designed by F.W. Petre, was opened in March 1888 and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd relocated from their temporary premises in Manchester Street to Mount Magdala along with 45 women in their care.<sup>8</sup> The farm was at least partially established by this time. The formal opening of the institution, conducted by the Right Rev. Dr. Grimes, Roman Catholic Bishop of Christchurch was held on 22 July 1888. The high public interest in the establishment of Mount Magdala was confirmed by the turnout at its opening celebrations which were attended by an estimated 3000 people.<sup>9</sup> Fr. Ginaty, who later became Vicar-General of the Catholic diocese, died in June 1911 and is buried in a tomb within the St. John of God Chapel. By the time of his death, Mount Magdala had developed considerably - there were 26 nuns, 159 children, 62 orphans and 8 workmen based there.

The farm at Mount Magdala stretched away to the rear of the Convent buildings and at the time of opening in 1888, the Sisters owned five cows, two pigs, several fowls and one horse.<sup>10</sup> In 1903, the Cyclopaedia of New Zealand stated: "*The sisters do all in their power to make the institution self supporting and independent of outside assistance.*"<sup>11</sup> Mount Magdala was indeed, largely self-sufficient and by 1916, the property's extensive self-contained farming unit included a slaughter house and a brick bacon curing house. A dairy herd was built up from pedigree shorthorns, there were poultry, eggs, fruit and the institution baked all its own bread. The Sisters engaged lessees and hired men to undertake the farm work and the residents themselves worked in the extensive vegetable gardens on the 200 acre property.<sup>12</sup> As far as possible everything that could be raised for the institution was grown on the farm or in the gardens. The farm staff killed their own beef and mutton. The farm also had a piggery which supplied Mount Magdala with bacon.<sup>13</sup>

Residents were taught embroidery and made vestments for the Church. Sisters and residents made their own clothing and shoes. The main industry of Mount Magdala was however, a large commercial laundry operated by the residents and Sisters. Laundry was collected from all over the city to be washed, steamed and ironed at Mount Magdala. At its peak in the 1930s Mount Magdala was a self-contained unit housing close to 500 people<sup>14</sup> and until at least the late 1950s, Mount Magdala was considered a 'self-supporting community' incorporating extensive farming areas.<sup>15</sup>

Mount Magdala is of social and historic significance as a pioneering institution in the social services field in New Zealand. It is also of significance as a representative example at an international level of the 'Magdalena home' concept. Girls and women came to Mount Magdala from all over the country. Some girls were committed by the Courts, others applied for admission themselves or through their parents or guardians. Many of the residents were

<sup>7</sup> The F.W. Petre building was demolished in 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Press 8.02.1936 p2

<sup>9</sup> Press 23.07.1888

<sup>10</sup> Weekly Press 18.04.1888 p392

<sup>11</sup> *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, 1903. p161

<sup>12</sup> Fraser Faithful pers.com. Margaret Lovell-Smith 7.06.2004 (CCC Heritage Files)

<sup>13</sup> Evening News 6.05.1916

<sup>14</sup> O'Meehan, M. (1987) *Held Firm by Faith*. p155

<sup>15</sup> Star Sun 7.10.1957

described by the Lady Superior in 1900 as “*helpless, shiftless creatures, ruined by alcohol and long years of vice.*”<sup>16</sup> Some residents lived at Mount Magdala under the care of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd for many years, eventually growing old there. This led the Sisters to extend their work to include the care of the elderly. Mount Magdala also cared for orphans – the celebration of Mount Magdala’s Golden Jubilee in February 1936 was marked by the opening of the adjoining St. Joseph’s Orphanage, the building provided for by the will of the late Mrs Eliza White (wife of A.J. White). The farm also provided sustenance for the St. Joseph’s orphans.

The large size of the Mount Magdala institution and changes in social work practice meant that after 80 years of service at Mount Magdala, the buildings were deemed unsuitable for the care and ‘re-education’ of women and girls. Smaller institutions were developed elsewhere and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd transferred their personnel to centres at ‘Marycrest’, Te Horo, Mount St. Joseph’s, Auckland, and to a hostel for unmarried mothers, ‘Rosanna’, at Waiwhetu, Wellington. The Lincoln Road/Nash Road complex that had been home to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd from 1888 to 1966 was taken over by the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God. It is likely that the farm buildings ceased use around this time - they were certainly considered beyond their useful life by the early 1970s.<sup>17</sup> The Mount Magdala Convent buildings have since been demolished.

#### **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The St. John of God Farm Buildings have high regional cultural and spiritual significance and moderate national significance for their association with the delivery of early social services in New Zealand and their relationship to the mission of the Catholic Church and the Order of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd ran Mount Magdala for eighty years. Their philosophy of protecting and rehabilitating women within a self-contained and self-sufficient Convent complex was part of a wider international movement executed by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at other locations such as Abbotsford in Melbourne and later, the Home of the Good Shepherd in Seattle (est.1907).<sup>18</sup>

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (Sisters of the Good Shepherd) was founded by Rose Virginie Pelletier (1796 - 1868) in the early 19th century at Tours, France. Pelletier, who took the name Marie-Euphrasie, established a monastery at Angers, France in 1829. Originally known as the Magdalena, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd cared for women and girls in distress and disadvantaged by the society of the time. From 1836 the Order spread all over France and then Europe, England, America and Asia. By the end of Pelletier’s life, there were over 2,000 Sisters established in over 100 houses on five continents; this rapid expansion led to Pelletier being known as a patron of travellers. Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier was canonized in 1940.<sup>19</sup> The Sisters of the Good Shepherd home in Abbotsford, Melbourne was founded in 1863 during Pelletier’s lifetime. Mount Magdala was modelled on Abbotsford. Similar self-sufficient Good Shepherd institutions for women were

<sup>16</sup> Lyttelton Times 17.09.1900 p6

<sup>17</sup> Fraser Faithful to Margaret Lovell-Smith 7.06.2004 (CCC Heritage Files)

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=3837](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=3837)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.catholic-forum.com/SAINTS/saintm03.htm>

founded at locations around the world both before and after the establishment of Mount Magdala.

In July 1886, four Sisters from Abbotsford Convent led by Mother Mary of the Visitation, arrived in Christchurch. They began their work from a temporary site in Manchester Street north.<sup>20</sup> In September 1886, four more Sisters arrived from France including Mother St. Aidan (after whom the Aidanfield subdivision is named) who was later appointed Mother Prioress of Mount Magdala. By 1887 when Dr. Grimes, the first Catholic Bishop of Christchurch arrived, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd had 28 women in their care.<sup>21</sup> When the Sisters eventually took possession of their new home at Lincoln Road on March 13, 1888 there were a total of 45 women in their care.<sup>22</sup>

In Victorian New Zealand, State provision of social services was limited and such services were largely provided by the work of religious groups. Thus, at Mount Magdala, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd made an otherwise non-existent facility available to not only Christchurch but the whole of New Zealand. Women and girls were sent to Mount Magdala from all over the country. From the mid-twentieth century, the Good Shepherd philosophy of protecting and rehabilitating women (and later orphans) within a large institutional Convent setting gradually became outdated. Around the world, large convents similar to Mount Magdala began to be closed.

In 1966, the large size of the institution and changes in social work practice meant that after 80 years of service, Mount Magdala was deemed unsuitable for the care and ‘re-education’ of women and girls. Smaller institutions were developed elsewhere and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd transferred their personnel to centres at ‘Marycrest’, Te Horo, Mount St. Joseph’s, Auckland, and to a hostel for unmarried mothers, ‘Rosanna’, at Waiwhetu, Wellington. The Lincoln Road/Nash Road complex that had been home to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd from 1888 to 1966 was taken over by the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God. The site has since been occupied by Maryland’s (later) Hogben School and today has an ongoing connection with social service delivery with the Halswell Residential School now located on part of the former Mount Magdala site.

The Aidanfield subdivision is named after Mother St. Aidan, one of Mount Magdala’s founding Sisters. Mother St. Aidan was appointed Mother Prioress and stayed at Mount Magdala until her death in 1958, aged 98.<sup>23</sup> The spiritual and cultural significance of Mount Magdala as part of the wider Catholic history of the area is further recognised within the subdivision through the naming of streets after prominent Catholic clergymen.

#### **ARCHITECTURE AND ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE:**

Though not associated with a particular architect or designed the St. John of God Farm Buildings have high regional and national architectural significance in that they are an uncommon form within New Zealand farm buildings of ‘steading’ style farm building layout more common in European countries.

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<sup>20</sup> Press 8.02.1936 p2

<sup>21</sup> Press 8.02.1936 p2

<sup>22</sup> Press 8.02.1936 p2

<sup>23</sup> Press 8.02.1936 p2

The St. John of God Farm Buildings are a rare collection of institutional Victorian farm buildings consisting of a granary, adjoining wings for stabling/storage etc., a partially brick paved courtyard and implement sheds. The composition of these buildings enclosing the central courtyard is unusual in the New Zealand context and may be described as an example of ‘farm steading’. This is a type of farm layout where buildings are built to house animals and have allied structures set in such a manner as to provide a courtyard format. While this setting is in a ‘U’ format it does provide for the purpose of a steading. Set apart from this complex is a shearing/woolshed.

The British tradition of having the several farming functions housed in one or more adjoining blocks with an enclosing yard did not find much acceptance in New Zealand. The generally milder climate and larger scale farming with more space and differing patterns of development all tended to discredit the farm steading and only a few examples exist in New Zealand.<sup>24</sup> However, the relatively small scale ‘self-sufficient’ model employed at Mount Magdala required a multitude of farming functions to be carried out on a relatively small scale as the farm produced solely for the direct use of the institution rather than for commercial purposes. This may account for the ‘farm steading’ type design employed in the configuration of the Mount Magdala Farm Buildings where the granary, stabling, storage and other facilities are housed in buildings enclosing a central courtyard which has a significant spatial quality.<sup>25</sup>

Although brick construction was used in many parts of Britain for farm buildings from the early 18th century it has been seen only occasionally in the rural areas of New Zealand.<sup>26</sup> The brick buildings that form part of the Mount Magdala farm complex therefore have significance on account of their rarity. Their age, form and material give them an enduring quality.<sup>27</sup> A portion of the courtyard is also brick paved as are the floors of several bays contained in the brick wings and adjoining timber/corrugated iron wings.

The implement sheds to the west of the courtyard have trusses spanning 10m.

The woolshed/shearing shed, a timber frame iron clad structure, stands apart from the central courtyard. It too has architectural significance, particularly its fenestration and interior finishes.<sup>28</sup> Woolsheds have come to be regarded as the symbol of the New Zealand rural scene. As the largest farm buildings they figure prominently in the landscape.<sup>29</sup> The unusual almost ecclesiastical fenestration that is a feature of the Mount Magdala woolshed/shearing shed adds interest and brings a unique quality to this workmanlike building.

Though the architect for the buildings is unknown it must be noted that the institutional buildings were designed by the Diocesan architect F W Petre. Petre was not known for agricultural buildings but it is possible, given the degree of consideration for the ‘steading’ style layout and the unusual fenestration of the woolshed, that Petre may have had some part in the design and layout.

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<sup>24</sup> Thornton, G. p196

<sup>25</sup> Fulton, W. Report undated CCC Heritage File

<sup>26</sup> Thornton, G. (1986) *The New Zealand Heritage of Farm Buildings*. p16

<sup>27</sup> Fulton, W. Report undated CCC Heritage File

<sup>28</sup> Fulton, W. Report undated CCC Heritage File

<sup>29</sup> Thornton, G. (1986) *The New Zealand Heritage of Farm Buildings*. p152

**TECHNOLOGY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE:**

The farm buildings display a moderate regional degree of technology and craftsmanship significance in that the construction and use of material is not untypical of agricultural buildings of this period.

However in saying that the construction and use of material is not untypical of agricultural buildings of this period, the buildings have been constructed with high degree of craftsmanship and careful detailing. The unusual, almost ecclesiastical, fenestration, a feature of the Mount Magdala woolshed/shearing shed, adds interest and brings a unique quality to what is essentially a good quality, well constructed utilitarian farm building.

A variety of materials are used in the construction of the buildings – timber, corrugated iron and brick are the principal materials. The brick building is timber framed with a brick skin and there is substantial use of brick flooring – masonry flooring was a not an uncommon feature for areas where animals or implements would be stored.

**CONTEXT, ENVIRONMENT, LANDMARK AND GROUP SIGNIFICANCE:**

The complex has high metropolitan landmark and group significance.

The St. John of God Farm buildings contribute significantly to the distinctive historical identity of the area that once constituted Mount Magdala. The buildings also provide a significant reminder of the longstanding rural history of the region which has been farmed since the time of the first European settlement. The wider Halswell area retains a semi-rural nature and the St. John of God Farm Buildings provide a substantial link between past and present farming associations. The Farm Buildings relate geographically to the other remnant buildings of the Mount Magdala complex – the St. John of God Chapel, the cemetery and the (former) St. Joseph's Orphanage. Collectively these buildings contribute to a sense of place that recalls the eighty year history of Mount Magdala.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

The complex has high regional archaeological significance.

In European terms the significance dates from 1886 when the Mount Magdala institution was established at Halswell. Thus there is clear evidence of pre 1900 human activity and the site is considered to have significant built and ground archaeological potential relating to early farming methods within the Canterbury and Otago regions.

Regard in the instance of any site development should be paid to Sections 22-37 of the HPA, which include, Historic Places, Historic Areas, Wahi Tapu and Wahi Tapu areas and Sections 9-19 Archaeological Sites.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

The St John of God Farm buildings are part of a group of institutional buildings that collectively form a landmark in the area both in physical location and in the community



consciousness being a significant remnant of the once extensive Mount Magdala complex. The buildings tangibly express the self-contained and self-sufficient principles that underpinned the institution. Together with the St. John of God Chapel and the (former) St. Joseph's Orphanage, the Farm Buildings contribute to an understanding of the extent of the Mount Magdala institution which occupied the site for eighty years.

The farm buildings also illustrate the early European history of the use of land in this area for farming purpose. The composition of these farm buildings, a farm 'steading', is a type of layout where buildings are built to house animals and have allied structures set in such a manner as to provide a courtyard format. This is an uncommon format within New Zealand farming practice but the relatively small scale 'self-sufficient' model employed at Mount Magdala.

The significance of the Mount Magdala institution to the character and history of the area is emphasised in the naming of the new subdivision - 'Aidanfield' - named after Mother St. Aidan, one of the founding Sister's at Mount Magdala.

**The St John of God Farm buildings have high regional and moderate national heritage significance.**

**REFERENCES:**

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CCC Heritage Files

*The Press, Weekly News, Star/Sun. Lyttelton Times, Canterbury Times* – various issues as footnoted