

HERITAGE TRAIL



– NEW NORCIA –

The Development of the Benedictine Settlement
at New Norcia, Western Australia

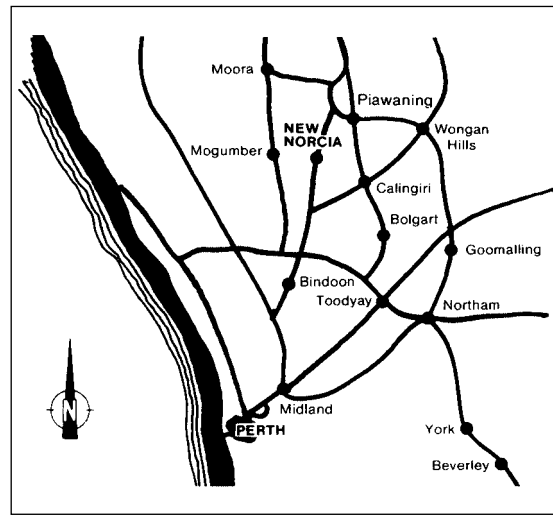


108 Adelaide Tce East Perth Western Australia 6004
Tel (08) 9221 4177 Freecall 1800 644 177 Fax (08) 9221 4151

HOW TO GET THERE

New Norcia is 132km north of Perth on Great Northern Highway, a drive of about 1 1/2 hours.

There are coach tours to New Norcia almost every day and enquiries should be directed to the Western Australian Tourist Centre (08) 9483 1111 or the New Norcia Information Centre on (08) 9654 8056 and the Victoria Plains Shire in Calingiri (08) 9628 7004.



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE TRAILS NETWORK

History

The New Norcia Heritage Trail is part of the Heritage Trails Network, a project for community participation originally devised by the Western Australian Heritage Committee (now known as the Heritage Council of Western Australia) in commemoration of the 1988 Bicentenary.

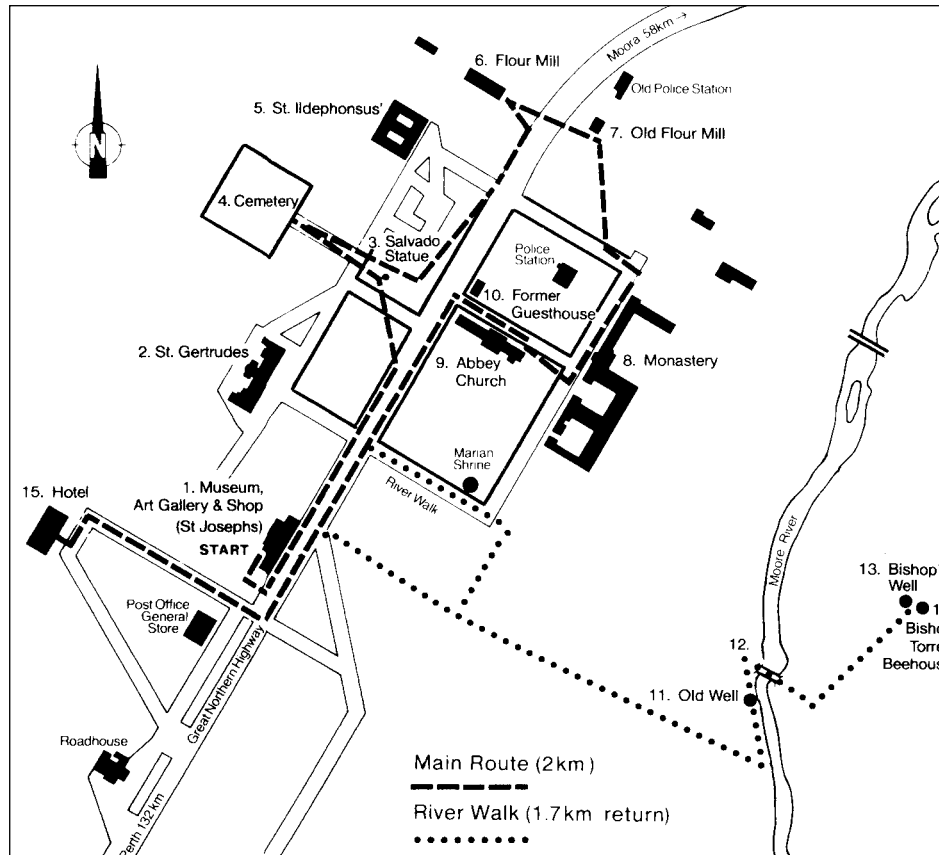
The Heritage Trails Network which was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments under the Commonwealth/State Bicentennial Commemorative Program was established to provide the Community with a Statewide network of "Heritage Trails" - routes designed to enhance awareness and enjoyment of Western Australia's natural and cultural heritage.

The map below indicates Heritage Trails in the North Metropolitan region of Western Australia.

The New Norcia Heritage Trail is 2km long (with an optional 1.7km long River Walk) and is suitable for all walkers. Allow a leisurely 2 to 3 hours to explore this unique Australian town.

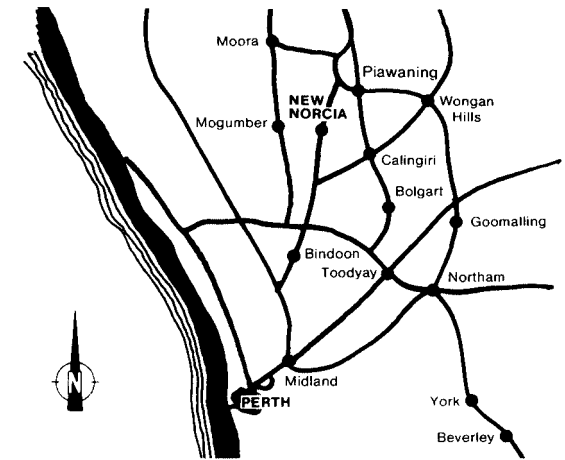
Please note:

- The River Walk is not suitable for prams and a river crossing may not be possible during high water levels.
- Please use rubbish bins provided.
- Please take care when extinguishing matches and cigarettes, especially in summer.
- Visits to the Flour Mill, where there is an interpretive display, can be arranged at the Museum.



Front cover: Monastery, c1890s
(courtesy Benedictine Community).

Midlands Heritage Trails




- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. New Norcia HT | 7. Kellerberin HT |
| 2. Moora HT | 8. Quairading District HT |
| 3. Koorda HT | 9. Merredin Peak HT |
| 4. Toodyay Pioneer HT | 10. York to Goldfields HT |
| 5. Northam-Katrine HT | 11. Farming HT |
| 6. York HT | 12. Guildford to York HT |



New Norcia in 1864 (courtesy Battye Library, 73671P).

Towards the end of a particularly dry, hot summer in 1846 a small band of Benedictine monks arrived in the Victoria Plains to establish a mission to the region's Aborigines. They could not have known that the primitive bush chapel they built would grow to become the focal point of a pastoral empire in the 1880s and a monastic and educational centre in the 20th Century.

The **New Norcia Heritage Trail** traces the development of this settlement, starting at the New Norcia Museum and Art Gallery (on your left as you enter the town). Ample parking is available here and in front of the New Norcia Hotel.

Following the trail route map, look for the signs bearing the Heritage Trails Network symbol. 

Please be careful when crossing Great Northern Highway, as traffic is sometimes heavy.

Please note:

The **New Norcia Heritage Trail** has been designed to cause minimal intrusion into the Benedictine Community's monastic way of life, and it is hoped that trail users will appreciate the monks' generosity and respect that several of the buildings featured are not open to the public. As the trail is on private property, users are requested to keep to the trail route and respect the privacy of the Community.

A Mission Founded

The leaders of the Benedictine party were Dom Rosendo Salvado and Dom Joseph Serra, who had fled their native Spain in the wake of the 1835 anti-clerical revolution. Their arrival in Italy coincided with a monastic revival which renewed interest in establishing foreign missions, and the two friends volunteered for overseas service. Late in 1845 Salvado and Serra joined twenty-four other missionaries under the newly-consecrated Bishop of Perth, Dr John Brady, and set sail on the *Elizabeth* for Fremantle.



Dom Joseph Serra (left), who later became Bishop of Perth and New Norcia's first Abbot, Dom Rosendo Salvado (courtesy Benedictine Community).

Bishop Brady had worked in Australia for some time, and was deeply concerned for the Aborigines. He deplored the ill-treatment of the country's original inhabitants at the hands of white settlers and their introduction to European vices and diseases. Only "the blessing of civilisation and religion" could ensure Aboriginal survival in the face of this massive onslaught, and Brady's aim was to set up missions throughout Australia. However, of the original three he established at New Norcia, Port Essington (in what is now the Northern Territory), and Albany, only this central mission survived.

After a precarious start, the fortunes of the infant Swan River Colony were improving by the 1840s, mainly due to wool exports. The resulting demand for land was causing settlers to look beyond the Perth and Avon Districts. A Catholic magistrate, Captain John Scully, along with James Drummond, the first government botanist, explored and named the Victoria Plains in 1841. Scully met Bishop Brady upon his arrival in Perth five years later, and convinced him that the region, where Aborigines were numerous, was the ideal location for the central mission.

Brady entrusted this mission to Salvado and Serra, who, accompanied by one other Benedictine and an Irish catechist, set out on foot from Perth for the Victoria Plains on February 16th, 1846.

It took them at least 24 hours to reach Guildford. They left Perth on the night of the 16th and reached Guildford on the night of the 17th after getting lost along the way. Guildford back then was only a small but hospitable township, from where the missionaries went on to spend the night at Samuel Moore's house on the Upper Swan. Samuel's brother was George Fletcher Moore, the explorer after whom the Moore River was named.

*For those interested in the establishment of Guildford and the development of the Swan River Colony, the **Swan Valley Heritage Trail** traces the latter part of Captain James Stirling's exploration up the Swan in 1827. (Please see page 18 of this brochure).*

Scully had provided Salvado and Serra with a guide and a bullock cart to carry their belongings, and on March 1st, 1846 the missionaries made camp and said mass at Noondagoonda Pool on the Moore River, some 8 km north of present day New Norcia.



Salvado and Serra with Aborigines in their first year in the Victoria Plains (courtesy Benedictine Community).

The first year saw great hardship, tragedy (the Irish catechist, John Gorman, was accidentally shot), and disappointment. However, good relations were established with the region's Aborigines, and Salvado began learning their language and customs. Then in December 1846 the monks were forced to abandon their second camp when it was discovered they were trespassing on the leases of the Macphersons, Scully's shepherds, and they moved south to New Norcia's present location.

On the anniversary of their arrival in the bush, Salvado and Serra, now alone, laid the foundation stone for a permanent mission. By a coincidence it was the feast day of St. Rudesindus, Salvado's patron, and it is this date which today's monks celebrate as their foundation day. March 1st also marks the opening of the **New Norcia Heritage Trail** in 1986. Assisted by a group of French and Irish tradesmen from Perth, the walls of this first chapel and dwelling were completed on March 1st 1847, and Salvado wrote that "out of reverence for St. Benedict we named the place New Norcia, in memory of the spot where our founder was born".

1. Museum, Art Gallery and Shop

Open 10am to 4.30pm daily, closed Christmas Day.



This somewhat idealised drawing of New Norcia in 1882 shows a growing monastery complex, the Abbey Church, and both flour mills. To the left of the church are the neat rows of Aboriginal cottages and above these is the first St. Joseph's Orphanage (courtesy Battye Library, 73614 P).

From the beginning, Salvado sought to establish an independent and self-supporting mission village after the model of European monastic towns, and encourage Aborigines to settle down as landholders. This, he believed, would assist them in the difficult transition to "civilised" life. In 1848 he built an Aboriginal girls' school and orphanage, and named it St. Joseph's.

Set aside an hour to browse through the displays of New Norcia's long history and the collection of post-Renaissance paintings. The museum shop offers an attractive selection of monastic wares, books of local history, souvenirs and locally made products.

Early this century the second Abbot of New Norcia, Dom Fulgentius Torres, replaced the original institution with a new St. Joseph's, which in turn became in 1978 the town's museum and art gallery.

2. St. Gertrude's

Open only to Day Tour Groups.

The construction of St. Gertrude's and neighbouring St. Ildephonsus' marked the redirection of the settlement under Abbot Torres from bush mission to educational centre.



St. Gertrude's (courtesy M. Hugo-Brunt).

Built in 1908 St. Gertrude's is a splendid example of Gothic revival architecture. Originally a convent college for girls in the care of the Josephite Sisters, it amalgamated with St. Ildephonsus' in the 1970's to become part of a co-educational boarding school firstly named Salvado College and later New Norcia Catholic College. The College ceased operation at the end of 1991.

Originally a convent college, St. Gertrude's became the residence for girls attending the co-educational Salvado College in 1974 that was administered by the Benedictines until January 1986. It was then taken over by the Catholic Education Commission under the title New Norcia Catholic College and it was looked after by the Good Samaritan Sisters. The college had once 200 boarding students from wheatbelt, mining and metropolitan areas, and overseas. In 1991, the college ceased to function, but it is still used for educational purposes by the monks for visiting Catholic school children.

3. Rosendo Salvado Statue

This statue of New Norcia's first Abbot was presented to the Benedictine Community by the Spanish government in the early 1960s (courtesy Brian O'Brien).



Salvado quickly realised that land was vital for the mission's survival. He set about expanding the original government grant of 20 acres, and by the end of 1848 the mission had over a thousand acres

supporting over twice as many sheep. Crops and vegetables were also grown, and in return for food the Aborigines who came to New Norcia provided the labour required to further develop the mission. Salvado then set about encouraging them to farm their own plots of land, hoping to "found a village of native proprietors who would be farmers and skilled workmen". He was now managing the mission alone, Serra having been called to Rome early in 1848.

However, in 1849 Salvado found himself also on his way back to Rome, ordered there by Bishop Brady, who did not share his vision of an independent New Norcia. There Salvado was consecrated Bishop of Port Victoria, in Northern Australia, a great setback to his hopes. When the port was abandoned a month later, he was the Bishop of a diocese which did not exist. After nearly four years (during which he wrote his memoirs) Salvado was finally granted permission to return to New Norcia. He arrived back in Western Australia in 1853, bringing with him thirty-seven artisan brothers and three priests, and a substantial amount of money he had raised in Europe. Salvado was to spend another 47 years fulfilling his missionary task before his death during a later visit to Rome.

4. Cemetery



The large grave of New Norcia's second Abbot, Dom Fulgentius Torres (centre) in the cemetery (courtesy Brian O'Brien).

The location of the Benedictine Mission in the Victoria Plains attracted Irish settlers to the district, many of whom are buried at New Norcia. Some 130 monks and sisters are also buried here, including Abbot Torres, whose large marble grave dominates the cemetery. The tomb of Salvado himself is located in the New Norcia Abbey Church.

The numerous white wooden crosses mark the graves of Aborigines who lived and worked at the mission. The black gravestone at the rear right of the cemetery belongs to Mary Helen Cuper, an Aboriginal who was New Norcia's first postmistress and telegraph operator. Another identifiable grave is that of Senor John Casellas, the master wood craftsman who built the original beehive behind the monastery.

5. St. Ildephonsus'

Open only to Day Tour Groups.

When the girls' college was completed the large contingent of labourers was employed by Abbot Torres on St. Ildephonsus' College for Boys.

A tighter economic situation forced Torres to design a simpler though no less imposing building than St. Gertrude's. The Byzantine-influenced St. Ildephonsus' was opened in 1913 by Governor Strickland and originally staffed by the Marist Brothers. The white statue in front of the building depicts Blessed Marcellin Champagnat who founded the Marist Brothers in France in the early 19th Century.

Today St. Ildephonsus' is used in conjunction with St. Gertrude's and offers extensive dining and activity spaces for large groups. St. Mary's was used by the college for agriculture, music and art classes, until the college's closure in 1991.

Torres also designed the large brick building north of St. Ildephonsus'. This building replaced the Aboriginal boys' school and orphanage built by Salvado and Aboriginal workmen late in 1847. Originally named St. Mary's, it has been known for many years as Weld Square after Governor Weld who was a great friend of Salvado.



St. Ildephonsus' (rear) and the second flour mill, built in 1879 when the first became too small (courtesy Brian O'Brien).

6. The Flour Mill

An interpretive display is on the first floor. Visits are by arrangement with the Tourist Information Centre at the Museum.

Salvado's aim of independence for New Norcia was realised in 1867, when a decree from Rome separated it from the diocese of Perth. Previously treated as a source of agricultural produce and revenue for the monastery established at Subiaco by Serra, whose main interest was in the white population, New Norcia now entered a period of expansion, and Salvado was named its Abbot for life.

The Flour Mill, the oldest operating mill in Western Australia, was built in 1879 when the original mill became too small to handle the processing of wheat from the mission's expanding leases and neighbouring properties. It produced flour not only for breadmaking but also for the production of macaroni and spaghetti.

The Flour Mill was partially restored in 1988 with the assistance of a Bicentennial grant.

In 1993 the Monastery's Bakehouse was reopened and bread is now baked on a daily basis. Attracted by the old wood-fired oven a speciality baker, produces a range of breads under the label, "New Norcia Natural Breads". These breads are available fresh each day at both the Museum Shop and the Trading Post as well as at a number of selected outlets in Perth.

*Crossing the highway to the original mill you will see just to the north a small, low-roofed building, New Norcia's first **police station and gaol**. Early in 1860 Salvado had become concerned at the trouble being caused by Aborigines visiting the mission, and his appeals to the Toodyay Resident Magistrate resulted later that year in the arrival of Mounted Constable Ebenezer Martin.*

Now a private home, the police station was the venue for the Victoria Plains Road Board's inaugural elections in 1871. Bishop Salvado, was elected to the Board, the predecessor of the Victoria Plains Shire Council.

7. The Old Flour Mill

Not open to the public.



The original flour mill (right), and the old stables and wool-press, used to bale the wool, c.1880s (courtesy Benedictine Community).

Between the years 1878 and 1885 Salvado greatly extended the land leased by the mission. During these prosperous years the original flour mill was surrounded by shearing sheds, wool-baling machines, stables, storehouses and workshops, all of which were demolished this century. Built in the 1850s, the mill is one of the oldest surviving buildings in New Norcia, and its original wooden shingles (roof tiles) can be seen under its eaves.



The old novitiate (now the New Norcia Police Station), showing the large 19th century sundial (courtesy Brian O'Brien).

As you walk from the mill towards the Monastery, look for the large

example of a late 19th century sundial on the wall of the present police station. This building was constructed in 1876 as a residence for novices to the Monastery, since the novitiate must be kept distinct from the Monastery. Later the building was used as a guesthouse and workers' quarters before being converted to a police station in the 1950s.

*At the centre of a group of buildings on the northern hill overlooking New Norcia is the **old courthouse**, now a private residence. It was here that Salvado sat as District Magistrate and Road Board meetings were held.*

8. The Monastery

Not open to the public

The New Norcia Monastery, located on the site of the original 1847 mission building, was greatly expanded under Abbot Torres early this century. The monks employ a full-time and part-time workforce of about 55.

During the 19th century the impact of white settlement and the introduction of diseases decimated the Aboriginal population of Australia, and the Victoria Plains were no exception. New Norcia's Aboriginal population, which had averaged 130 during the 1890s, was further depleted as many Aborigines left to utilise skills learnt at the mission.

Abbot Torres soon realised that New Norcia could not continue as a bush mission and saw the need to emphasise education and establish a properly appointed monastery in which all the monks could observe the Benedictine way of life.



A view of the Benedictine Monastery in the 1960s (courtesy Benedictine Community).

Just inside the Monastery's wrought iron gates, imported from England in 1903, is a statue of St. Benedict of Nursia. St. Benedict is known as the father of Western monasticism, and his 6th century writings guided those seeking God within a community. He emphasised simplicity and discipline with members taking vows of obedience, stability and conversion of life.

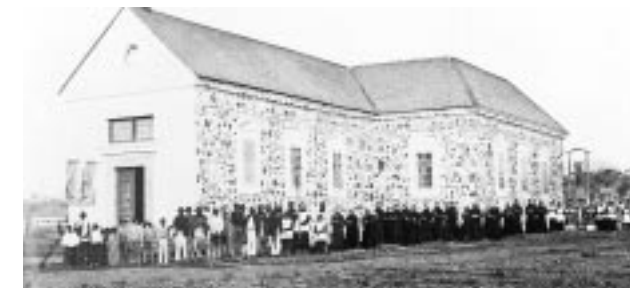
New Norcia's present population of 26 monks live a simple communal life of prayer and work within the Monastery. They employ a workforce of 50 including several Aboriginal families who live on the hill overlooking the town.

The Monastery also houses a Guesthouse for those who wish to retreat for a few days and experience the monastic life.

For further information write to the Guesthouse Secretary care of the Monastery or ring on (08) 9654 8018 in office hours.

9. Abbey Church

Sunday Mass 7.30am and 9.00am. Please see the notice board just inside the front door for other service times.



A procession from the Abbey church, c.1870. This photograph shows the original contemporary Georgian style of the church (courtesy Battye Library, 73716P).

The church was constructed from bush stones, mud plaster and rough-hewn tree trunks, and the original wooden shingles can still be seen under the eaves. It was opened in 1861 and has been added to over the years.

It is interesting to note that the oldest sections of the church have imitation plaster pillars, while later additions have white pillars painted on them.

Abbot Torres altered the original contemporary Georgian style in 1908 by adding the Italian Renaissance influenced facade and bell tower.

The building's newest section is the brick addition at the rear, made in the early 1920s to house the massive church organ brought back from Germany by the Benedictine composer, Father Stephen Moreno.

Salvado died during a visit to Rome on the 29th December 1900 at the age of 86, a testament to his physical strength and energy. His remains were brought back to the New Norcia he had loved by his chosen successor Torres in 1903, and are interred in the marble tomb in the church's choir area.

Hanging on the wall is the painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel (also called The Mother of Good Counsel), given to Salvado before he left for Australia in 1845 by Bishop (later Saint) Vincent Palotti. One of New Norcia's most famous stories relates how Salvado turned back a bushfire threatening the mission's crops in 1847 by, placing this revered painting in its path:

"Scarcely had the sacred picture been placed facing the flames than the wind suddenly changed direction and drove the flames back to the part already burnt, and with this danger ended".

10. Former Guesthouse and Gaol

(now Public Toilets)

The public toilets were originally a guesthouse for visitors to the mission and later used as the town's gaol. Similar cottages to the south of the church, made of stone and mud-plaster with wooden-shingled roofs (which can be seen under the building's eaves), were constructed for Aboriginal families.

These cottages, numbering twenty-two in the 1880s, were demolished as New Norcia's role changed in the 20th century.



An Aboriginal family outside their cottage, one of many built at New Norcia in the second half of the 19th century. All of these stone and shingled buildings were demolished in the 20th century (courtesy Battye Library, 73688P).

River Walk

Trail users may either continue on to the New Norcia Hotel and complete the settlement section of the trail or take the River Walk (1.7km return) across the Moore River to Bishop Torres' Beehive. The approach to the river passes the Marian Shrine, built on the spot where Salvado is said to have turned back a bushfire with the picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel, and offers fine views of the monastery complex.

To the south is an old red-bricked house where the mission's pig-keeper used to live; the low ruins of the piggery can just be seen beyond this building.

11. Old Well

The monks were experts at digging wells and lining them with stone, and this disused well is one of over 200 sunk in the Victoria Plains and surrounding districts during the mission's expansion in the 1880s.

Salvado's increasing landholdings met with some criticism from other settlers in New Norcia and Perth, but he knew the mission needed land if it was to survive and assist Aborigines to establish themselves as farmers. Although their landholdings are less substantial than in Salvado's time, today's monks continue to farm extensively. They are also committed to the environment, holding the largest area of uncleared bushland in the Victoria Plains.



A view from the east bank of the Moore River in 1933, showing the old well (right foreground), Aboriginal cottages, and St. Gertrude's College (courtesy Battye Library, 816 B/B 2628).

12. The Moore River

The river is named after George Fletcher Moore, an Irish lawyer who arrived in the Swan River Colony in 1830 and explored the region in 1836. Like many other colonists Moore suspected the existence of an inland sea, and though this did not exist, his explorations and reports of good soil encouraged the colony's northern expansion. By coincidence, the Aboriginal name for the river is "Maura".

Adjacent to the walkway, designed for the New Norcia Heritage Trail by the Main Roads Department, are old floodgates built by the monks from local stone. Boards were inserted in the slots and an artificial lake created.

13. 'Bishop's Well'



Bishop's Well and Bishop Torres' Beehive on the east side of the Moore River (courtesy Brian O'Brien).

This is the largest surviving example of the wells sunk by Salvado, and also one of the oldest on the Victoria Plains.

In the early days, wells were made very wide to hold a large quantity of water. A sapling was weighted with a stone at one end and a chain and bucket at the other, then set into a forked post and pivot. Using this age-old technique water was raised from the well and poured into a trough made of a hollowed tree trunk.

These wells made it possible to graze large flocks of sheep on land previously thought too dry.

14. 'Bishop Torres' Beehouse'

Not open to the public.



Father Basil Nosedo tending bees in 1948 (courtesy Battye Library, 72910 P).

Towards the end of the 19th century the mission was producing a variety of products including wine, olive oil, silk, soap and tobacco, while bees had been introduced to the Victoria Plains by Salvado early in the mission's history. Originally a single-storeyed wooden structure built by Senor John Casellas, the brickwork and second floor of this unique eight-sided apiary were completed by monks in the late 1930s. It was originally a single-storey wooden beehouse built in 1918. The additions were completed in 1938 so as to house a honey factory.

Use of the beehouse declined in the second half of this century as salt from the river gradually destroyed the orchard which once covered this area, forcing the bees to scatter. Then a flood in the early 1960s severely damaged the apiary and honey production ceased altogether.

** Public access to the Beehouse is restricted until funds are available to complete the restoration of this unique building.*

15. New Norcia Hotel



The New Norcia Hotel in 1985 (courtesy Brian O'Brien).

Hospitality is an important part of the Benedictine tradition, and the word "Salve" on the front steps of the hotel means "welcome".

This imposing structure, with a massive divided central staircase inside its main entrance, was designed by Father Urbano Gimenez and built in 1927 as a hostel for parents visiting their children being educated at the town's colleges.

Counter lunches are available at the hotel between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Monday to Saturday. A-la-carte and set evening meals are also available.

Telephone: (08) 9654 8034.

16. The Monastery Roadhouse

Located at the southern entrance to New Norcia and is open seven days a week from 7.00 a.m. - 8.00 p.m. Excellent home style meals are available in Salvado's Restaurant. Phone (08) 9654 8020.

This completes the New Norcia Heritage Trail. The Heritage Council of W.A. and Benedictine Community hope you have enjoyed this walk.

The Heritage Trails Network project's metropolitan prototype is the Swan Valley Heritage Trail, based on the latter part of Captain James Stirling's expedition up the Swan in 1827. This driving excursion features the region's historical, Aboriginal and natural significance, and offers opportunities for walking, canoeing, picnicking and wine-tasting.

Brochures for both trails are available from the Heritage Council of W.A., Shire Offices and local tourist bureaus, museums and libraries.

17. Daily Tours.

In addition to the self-guided Heritage Trail the Benedictine Community has also introduced Daily Tours.

In the company of an experienced guide visitors are taken inside the buildings not otherwise open to the public and can hear a more complete history of this unique settlement.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the tour is the opportunity to view the grand interiors of St. Gertrude's and St. Ildephonsus'. Both feature elaborate pressed metal ceilings, extensive murals and decorative paint finishes, and the fine craftsmanship of Senor John Casellas, the master woodcarver, who worked at New Norcia early this century.

At the conclusion of the tour a complimentary cup of tea or coffee is offered in St. Ildephonsus' dining room. Further information regarding Daily Tours is available at the Museum or ring (08) 96548 056.

The Heritage Council of W.A. appreciates the generosity and co-operation of the Benedictine Community, who approved the trail concept, assisted with its development, and gave permission to reproduce the photographs in this brochure. The participation and generous assistance of the Shire of Victoria Plains is also acknowledged.

The Heritage Council of W.A. also thanks the Main Roads Department and Victoria Plains Tourist Information Centre for providing assistance in developing this inaugural Heritage Trail.

Photographs

The photographs in this brochure are courtesy of:

- Benedictine Community of New Norcia
- Battye Library
- M. Hugo-Brunt, **National Estate Survey and Photographic Record of the Benedictine Mission of New Norcia** (1979).
- Brian O'Brien



A view of New Norcia showing the Abbey Church tower and the Monastery (right), with St Benedict's Boy Residence in the background (courtesy Brian O'Brien).

The Benedictine
Community of
New Norcia.

Erickson, Rica

Perez, Dom Eugene

Salvado, Rosendo
Storman, E.J.
(Ed. and Trans.)

Stannage, Thomas
(Ed.)

Hutchison, David

**The Story of
New Norcia** (1984).

**The Victoria
Plains** (1971).

**Kalumburu
War Diaries** (1981).

**The Salvado
Memoirs** (1977).

**New Norcia
Studies** (1992).

**A Town Like No Other:
A Living Tradition
of New Norcia** (1995).



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