

# Chirnside Mansion

The exquisite 60-room Italianate Mansion built at Werribee Park from 1874 to 1877 was a testament to the successful partnership between Scottish squatters Thomas and Andrew Chirnside. The pioneering brothers were a driving force behind early settlement in this region, all of which evolved from humble beginnings.

## Building an Empire

Thomas Chirnside left his homeland of Scotland in 1838 with a few hundred pounds in his pocket, a bible and dreams of a new life in an emerging country. Boundless opportunities were available in a developing agricultural industry, and as an enterprising individual Thomas invested largely in stock and the land. His younger brother Andrew joined his bold venture in 1841 and together the brothers set about building a lucrative pastoral empire.

## Unrequited Love

With the business progressing well Thomas returned to Scotland for a visit 1845. He remained for a couple of years, during which time he fell in love with his first cousin Mary Begbie and asked for her hand in marriage. Her parents did not approve and he ventured back to Australia alone.

With Thomas safely back, Andrew finalised plans for his first trip home. But before leaving his older brother asked a favour – to bring Mary back to Australia any way he could.

Andrew returned in 1852, accompanied by Mary as his wife. Thomas never married.

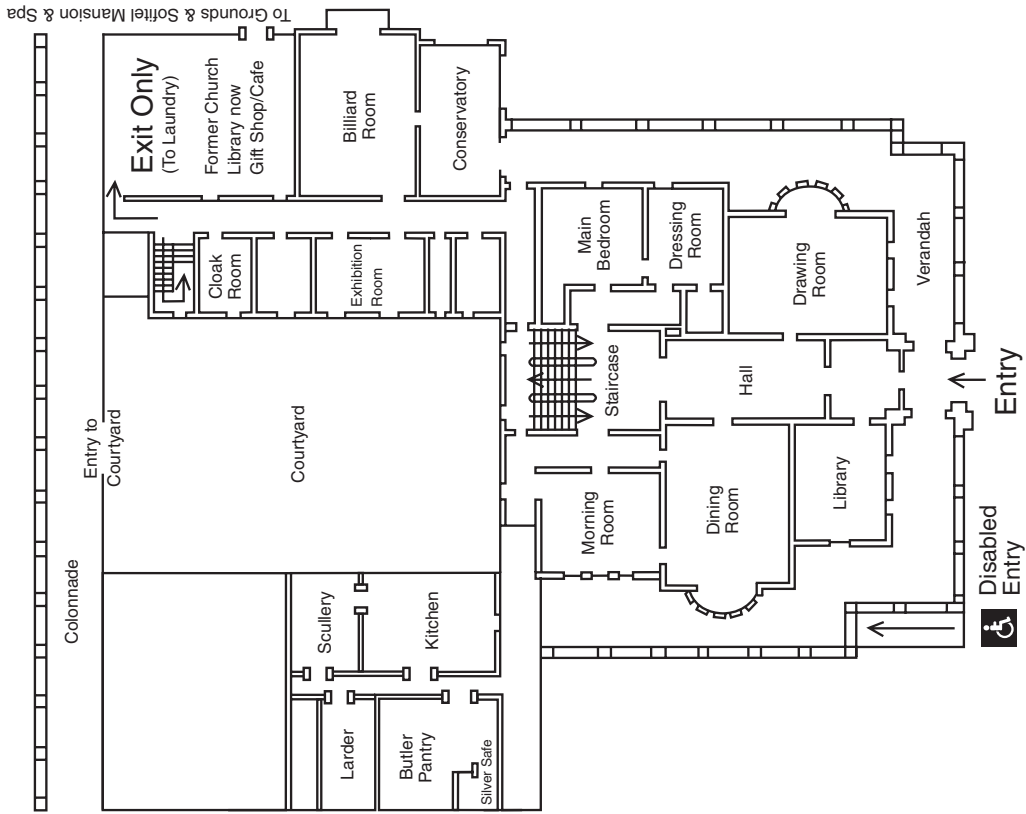
## The Pinnacle

Thomas wanted Mary to reside in a home of stature and serenity unrivalled in Victoria. In conjunction with Andrew he set about building an elaborate 60-room Italianate style Mansion at their Werribee Park property. The residence was also an opportunity to showcase their successful venture to the world. Using the finest materials and expertise the Mansion was built in three years in the 1870s for Andrew and Mary Chirnside and their three youngest children.

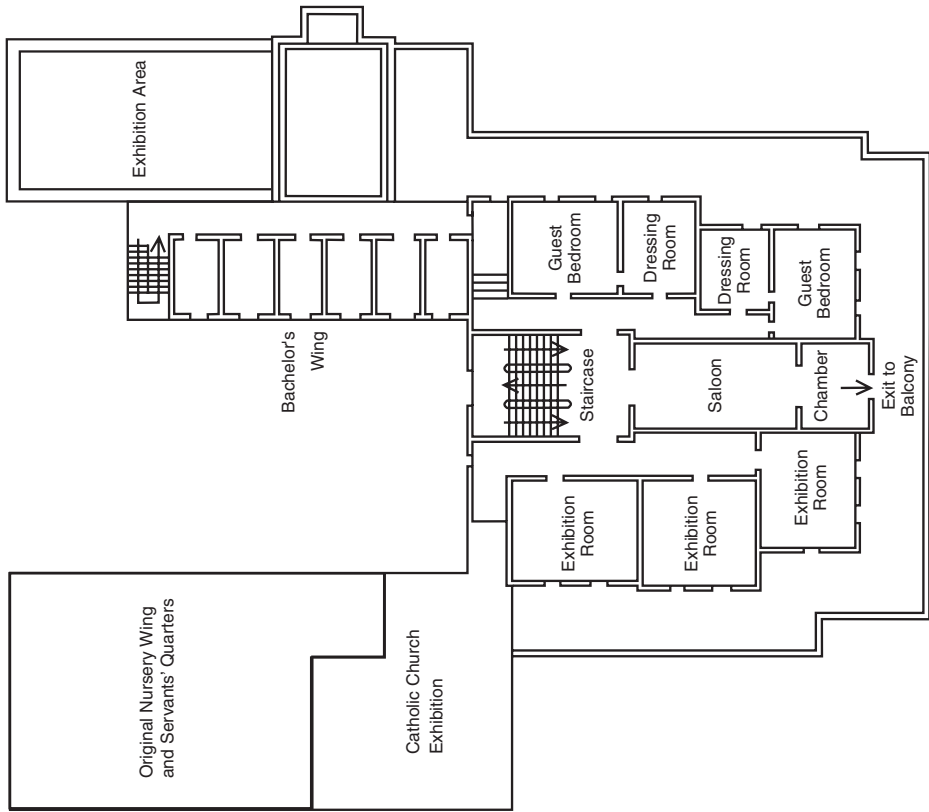
Thomas took permanent residency at his nearby property in Point Cook until his last few years, where he joined Andrew and Mary in the elaborate Mansion at Werribee Park.



# Ground Floor



# First Floor





## *Werribee Park*

K Road  
Werribee VIC 3030

Tel: 13 1963  
Fax: (03) 9741 6879  
[www.werribeepark.com.au](http://www.werribeepark.com.au)  
[www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

Melway Map: 201 D1

### **Opening Hours:**

November – April  
10.00am – 5.00pm daily

May – October  
10.00am – 4.00pm weekdays  
10.00am – 5.00pm weekends

Closed Christmas Day.

### **Parking & Transport:**

Free car parking is available,  
or for an alternative transport  
option the Werribee Park  
Shuttle service operates daily  
from the Victorian Arts Centre,  
telephone  
(03) 9748 5094 for  
reservations.



### **The Demise**

As society developed in Australia new laws and taxes were introduced. The successful empire created by the Chirnsides required savvy management and attention to stay viable.

Thomas and Andrew passed away within three years of each other, in 1887 and 1890 respectively. Andrew left Werribee Park to his two youngest sons George and John Percy with a proviso that Mary maintain residency in the Mansion for her remaining days. The sons subsequently divided the property with George overseeing the Mansion and surrounding land.

Mary died from a terrible accident in 1908. Her hair caught alight from a bedside candle and tragically she did not recover.

George diversified from the pastoral industry, leasing areas of land to agricultural farmers whilst managing his own stock of pigs and jersey cattle. Unfortunately he was unable to return the kind of profits enjoyed by his forbearers in the changing business climate.

Chirnsides ownership of Werribee Park ended in 1922. Initially purchased by Philip Lock, a self-made wealthy grazier from Warrnambool, it was sold again a year later to the Roman Catholic Bishops of Australia for development as a seminary.

### **Return to Past Times**

The Victorian Government acquired Werribee Park from the Catholic Church in 1973 and commenced work to progressively restore the Mansion and remaining 400 hectares of land to its former glory. Now proudly managed by Parks Victoria, the park offers visitors a rich array of history, culture and stories to explore.

Step into the Mansion and experience opulence of the 1880s whilst listening to the chatter of the Chirnsides family with an audio headset tour. Have a look through the Conservation Exhibition located on the first floor, at the far end of the Bachelor's Wing. This display details the immense restoration project undertaken by the Victorian Government over many years.

Visit May in the Laundry, an enthusiastic maid with a wealth of knowledge to share.

Take a stroll to the farm area where rustic bluestone outbuildings, once abuzz with workers and activity, provide a stark contrast from the elaborate craftsmanship of the Chirnsides Mansion.

Imagine yourself as a son or daughter of Andrew and Mary Chirnsides. How different would your life be?