



## REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

### 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### 11.1. AESTHETIC VALUE

In its incomplete state *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* demonstrates a range of different characteristics of Gothic Revival architecture, reflecting the different phases of its construction. (Criterion 1.1)

Set in its elevated position in Victoria Square, *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* has been a Perth landmark since it was first built. (Criterion 1.3)

As the termination of the vista, *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* contributes strongly to the visual character of the historic Murray Street East Precinct (Criterion 1.4)

#### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The siting of *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* in the centre of Victoria Square reflects the original intention of the colonial Surveyor-General in reserving land for a 'church square'. (Criterion 2.1)

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* is closely associated with: the Benedictine Brothers, who built the original portion of the Cathedral in 1865; Bishops Griver, Gibney and Clune who administered the various phases of construction; and, prominent Western Australian architect Michael Cavanagh, who designed the 1930 extension. (Criterion 2.3)

#### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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#### 11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* is highly valued by the Catholic community of Western Australia as the symbolic seat of the Church. (Criterion 4.1)

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* contributes to the sense of place of Victoria Square. The garden is enjoyed by members of the local community. (Criterion 4.2)

### 12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

### **12.1. RARITY**

The enclosed garden setting of the Cathedral grounds is rare within the city. (Criterion 5.1)

The unusual juxtaposition of the original building and its later addition is an oddity in ecclesiastic architecture in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.2)

### **12.2. REPRESENTATIVENESS**

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### **12.3 CONDITION**

There is a problem with falling damp in the south west corner of the nave (1865). This requires repair work to gutters and flashings. There is some cracking on the western wall in the southern corner.

The mosaic floor, in both chapels and the sanctuary (1930), has cracked in both a north-south and east-west axis.

Overall, the building appears to be in sound condition.

### **12.4 INTEGRITY**

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* continues to be used for its original function. It retains a high degree of integrity.

### **12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

During its life *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* has been subject to a series of alterations and additions associated with the changing needs of the Church, and liturgical changes. The building retains a high degree of authenticity.

## 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Mary's stands on high ground in the centre of Victoria Square, a site which was designated on the first town plan of Perth as 'Church Square'.<sup>1</sup>

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* was built to supersede the earlier and smaller *St. John's Pro-Cathedral*. The administrator of the Perth diocese, Bishop Serra, had recently completed the construction of the Bishop's Palace using the Benedictine Brothers from Subiaco and New Norcia, and was keen to construct a 'more worthy Cathedral' for the Perth Catholic community.<sup>2</sup> Bishop Serra considered the reserve land in Victoria Square (opposite his new Palace) an ideal site for the new Cathedral and accordingly requested that the Governor cede the site to the Catholics of Perth. The 'church square' had originally been set aside for use by the Church of England community, however they preferred a site in St. Georges Terrace within the Domain. The reserve was therefore granted to the Catholic Church on 13 August 1859.

Bishop Serra had to travel to Rome to attend to business concerning the dual administration of New Norcia and the Diocese of Perth. Before he left Perth, he appointed Fr. Martin Griver to act in his place. In Rome, Bishop Serra was unable to solve his differences with church officials and soon resigned as Bishop of Perth. However, while in Italy, Serra sought support for the construction of a new Cathedral in Perth. Francis II, the King of the Two Sicilies donated one thousand scudi and the Benedictine Brothers of the Monastery of St. Paul's-Outside-the-Walls donated marble for the high altar. The altar was designed and made in Rome, and arrived in Fremantle in 1862.<sup>3</sup>

In 1862, a subscription list was opened for the construction of the new Cathedral in 1862 and, by 8 February 1863, enough funds had been raised for Bishop Salvado, the only Catholic bishop in the colony at the time, to lay the foundation stone.

In the absence of Bishop Serra, Fr. Griver administered the building project. Work on the Cathedral progressed slowly due to the lack of funds and builders. There were few mason brothers left in Perth, most of them having left for New Norcia. Their numbers continued to dwindle until there were only three left to work on the new Cathedral, one of whom was the master mason Brother Ascione, who directed the construction. The clay bricks used in its construction were taken from a property in Adelaide Terrace owned by Mr B Smith. 'By January 1864, at a cost of £2,395, the walls had been raised to their full height; (the bell-tower was as yet incomplete). The work then ceased for lack of money.'<sup>4</sup>

The building was completed in January 1865 at a cost of £4,000. On 29 January 1865 all those clergy who could come to Perth walked in an evening

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<sup>1</sup> The National Trust of Australia (WA) Assessment Exposition, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Bourke, D. F. *The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia*, (Archdiocese of Perth, 1979) p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Centenary of the Catholic Church in WA. (1846-1946)* (Perth, no date.)

<sup>4</sup> Bourke, p. 74.

procession and the Cathedral was blessed by Fr. Griver and Fr. Gibney. The new Cathedral was named the *Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception*.

Early photographs show the Cathedral to be a simple two storey building in the Norman Gothic style, with a tower on the southern side and single storey side aisles.<sup>5</sup>

Sometime between 1897 and 1910, during the administration of Bishop Gibney, a number of alterations and additions were made to the Cathedral. The new work emphasised the gothic character of the Cathedral. Both Bishop Griver and Bishop Gibney are buried in the vaults of this early portion of the Cathedral.

Gibney's successor Bishop Clune was keen to replace the *Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception* with a larger edifice and, in 1924, he began a series of appeals throughout the Perth Diocese. Michael Cavanagh was appointed architect for the project. Cavanagh had had many years' experience designing numerous churches, convents, and schools in various gothic forms for the Catholic Church.

Cavanagh designed an impressive Academic Gothic Cathedral. However, due to financial constraints it was decided to temporarily utilise the existing Cathedral as the nave and only build the new transept and sanctuary, leaving the completion of the new nave to later generations.

The foundation stone for the new Cathedral, to be called *St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral*, was laid on 25 April 1926. The limestone used in the construction was quarried from the same site as that used in Perth's G. P. O. Bishop Clune took great interest in the design and construction of the new Cathedral and travelled overseas to choose many of the interior fixtures. The marble high altar, built by Brother Ascione in 1865, was relocated in the new sanctuary.

The new sanctuary and transept of *St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* was formally blessed by Bishop Clune on 4 May, 1930. Various Catholic dignitaries came from all over Australia for the opening ceremony, at which Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane preached the inaugural sermon.

Sixty years later Cavanagh's design is still incomplete, and the intended impressive effect so often found in Gothic Cathedrals is diminished due to the incompleteness of the nave and west end. Internally some changes have occurred. In 1951, a new carillon of bells was installed in the belfry and the 1676 Spanish bell relocated in the Cathedral porch. In 1963, the organ (1910) was enlarged and relocated in the new choir loft in the south transept. In 1973, the layout of the sanctuary was altered to accommodate the liturgical changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council.

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<sup>5</sup> Oldham suggests that Bishop Serra obtained plans for the building from the renowned English Gothic Revival architect, A W Pugin, but there is little evidence to support the notion. Oldham, R. & J. *Western Heritage*, (Perth: Lamb Publications, c.1961) p. 76.

In 1994, the Lotteries Commission gave a grant to enable a conservation plan to be done of the place and some urgent repairs to the south wall. Work is continuing in 1995.

## 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* is the product of three building phases. The original two-storey brick Cathedral, now the nave, was completed in 1865; alterations and additions were made to this building sometime after 1900; and, the limestone clad transepts and sanctuary - the eastern portion of Cavanagh's grand Gothic design - was added in 1930.

*St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* is sited in an elevated position in a garden setting in the centre of Victoria Square. The Cathedral grounds contain mature planting and lawn. The original boundary fence was constructed of brick in flemish bond; however, the present cast iron fence and gates, with stone pillars, were probably built during the construction of the 1930 addition. *Royal Perth Hospital* is located directly north of the Cathedral, while to the south is the *Bishop's Palace*, *Mercedes College* and *St John's Pro-Cathedral*.

*St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral* is cruciform in plan, and oriented with the sanctuary facing east in the traditional manner. The original Cathedral was Norman Gothic in style and quite simple in detail. The windows to the original Cathedral are a pattern of diamond shaped coloured glass with painted central rondels.

A number of alterations were made to the exterior of the Cathedral in the early 1900s. A slate clad steeple, crenellations, pinnacles and gargoyles were added to the bell tower, a porch added to the western end, two additional lancet windows and an aedicule, housing a statue of the Virgin, installed in the west end. A rendered frieze and additional rendered details were added around all the windows.

Internally, access to the bell-tower was altered. The southern section of the aisle was enclosed and a tower room created. Today, this room contains stairs which provide access to the choir loft and the top of the tower. The choir loft was probably altered at this time. The original brick vaulted staircase to the carillon has had a new brick balustrade added; however, the brick stairs appear to be unchanged.

The north east corner of the porch contains a bell which was originally hung in a Benedictine Abbey at Compostella. Bishop Salvado brought the bell with him from Spain and erected it at Subiaco. The bell was transferred to the Cathedral's belfry, in 1867, and then relocated in the porch, in 1951, when a new carillon of bells was installed in the belfry.

Cavanagh's expressive Academic Gothic design for the transept and sanctuary of *St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral*, is built in limestone. The sanctuary is four bays long and the transepts two bays wide, each bay emphasised by a four-light tracery window, and separated by flying buttresses. The buttresses are capped with ornamental pinnacles. A heavily

moulded battlement extends around the top of the walls. The high pitched roof of both the old and new buildings were covered in clay tiles in 1930.

Internally, the new transepts and sanctuary feature a vaulted, ribbed and embossed ceiling; the crossing is supported on four large sandstone columns; and the great east end window, 7.5 m high and 5.4 m wide, is divided into seven lights by stone mullions with curvilinear tracery above, and depicts the crucifixion.

The sanctuary is flanked by two chapels with pyramidal roofs; the Sacred Heart Chapel and the Lady Chapel. Both chapels are highly decorated with an array of fine finishes. The Sacred Heart chapel features a Carrara marble altar, and the walls of the Lady Chapel are panelled in Sienna marble, above a green marble skirting. The floor of the sanctuary is laid with mosaics to a design based on the Book of Kells. The tiles were manufactured by Melacco Brothers, Sydney. Other fixtures and fittings in the Cathedral display the same degree of refinement and craftsmanship.

In 1994, Lotteries Commission funding was allocated to undertake repair work to the south wall : repointing and replacement of some stone, and repair to drainage and flashings.

### **13.3 REFERENCES**

Bourke, D. F. *The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia*, (Perth: Archdiocese of Perth, 1979)

Oldham, R. & J. *Western Heritage*, (Perth: Lamb Publications, c. 1961)