



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

Its cultural heritage includes the complementary Franciscan and Arts and Crafts ideals of exaltation of labour labouring with ones' hands and hence (in the case of the Arts and Crafts theory) design by the informed labourer, both of which ideals were here acted out and put into practice by the architect, assisted by others of the community; this heritage being one of universal aesthetic ideas that still survive, as much as being regional historical trends. (Criterion 1.1)

This cultural heritage also includes the aesthetic internationalism both of the Anglo-Catholic and Catholic missions, to their colonial flocks, and of the international Arts and Crafts alternative to the International Modern Movement in professional architecture, a product of which, as here, is a remarkable aesthetic regionalism; the *ad hoc* transporting of historic vernaculars to new regions of like climate but different periods of time. (Criterion 1.1)

The aesthetic characteristics of the building include illustration of an uncommon mastery of the crafts of design and building, and of liturgy and the liturgical arts. (Criterion 1.2)

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier is the largest and most imposing of all Hawes' extant works in Australia and indeed is the most complete, best kept and consistent of all his larger works extant throughout the world. It has been described as his masterpiece in Australia but the quality and variety of his work defies serious ranking in this manner, except at the level of personal preference. It is nonetheless one of his masterworks and a masterwork equal to many more celebrated monuments at the source of the Arts and Crafts Movement. (Criterion 1.2)

Like all Hawes' works it is eclectic and catholic in its sources, which are international and from many historical eras. It is creative and innovative to the highest degree of aesthetic excellence within this deliberately chosen path. It displays this excellence in the masterful use of conventional architectural symbolic forms of power (mass, height, towers), mystery (hidden and revealed light sources) and drama (rhythmic processions of spaces) in a well

crafted liturgical plot through which one is compelled to approach, to enter and to look about and up. (Criterion 1.2)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

The place is significant in the evolution and pattern of the history of Western Australia for the following themes and sub-themes:

- its illustration of the historic themes of the growth of human settlement and the nature and components of towns in the Geraldton region and the State of Western Australia; (Criterion 2.2)
- its illustration, through the story of Hawes' various postings about the world, of an historic phase of the international colonising role of the Christian Churches specifically, in this case, of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in the Bahamas and Australia; (Criterion 2.2)
- its illustration of the historic theme of development of religions in Australia and the sub themes of the history of the Catholic Church and Catholic missionaries in Australia; (Criterion 2.2)
- its illustration of the historic theme of development of architecture and liturgical arts, and engineering in Australia; (Criterion 2.2)
- its role in the history of Roman Catholic and other community groups in the town and region; (Criterion 2.2)
- its association with pioneering, administration, nursing, teaching and missionary-pastoral care by priests, nuns and bishops of the Geraldton region, and diocese, and the Murchison and Victoria Plains regions; (Criterion 2.2) and,
- its association with its architect-priest author, John Cyril Hawes. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

It has demonstrable potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the natural or cultural history of Western Australia.

There is still a wealth of understanding to be developed from further investigation of the place and related archival materials and comparative studies with other places of the same class and other works by Hawes. (Criteria 3.1, 3.2, 3.3)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier is highly valued by the wider community of the City of Geraldton and the State as evidenced by a high level of visitation for secular cultural tourism, and by its wide publication as a place of interest. (Criteria 4.1, 4.2)

As well as having spiritual value to members of the Roman Catholic faith and others, it is a place of gathering and congregational worship, and it is also of a class of place that is ordinarily a vehicle of local identity, pride and sense of place, and hence of great value to the community. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier is an example of a functional building type that is now rarely commissioned in Australia, as a result both of limited financial resources and the adequacy of the existing cathedrals to meet the demands for Bishops' equipage with such symbols. (Criterion 5.2)

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier is one of a small number of works in the world, surviving in viable state, (about twenty in 1992, of which ten or twelve are in Western Australia) for which John Cyril Hawes was architect and not simply a 'restorer' or draftsman. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier demonstrates the characteristics of the cathedral class of Christian places of congregational worship in Australia and of community institutions in Australia. (Criteria 6.1, 6.2)

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier demonstrates the processes of propagation of aesthetic ideas in architecture in Australia with special relevance to the international aspects of the Arts and Crafts movement and emergence of regionalism in architectural design. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

According to Ian Molyneux in 1994, the condition of the place is of a relatively good nature with respect to all of the cultural heritage significance values. HCWA has not inspected the place in 1995.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier continues to be used for the purpose for which it was designed and the original intention of the cultural values is relatively highly intact. The likely long term sustainability of the values identified and their ability to be restored is relatively well assured.

The time frame for any restorative process is relatively extensive.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The extent to which the fabric is in its original state is relatively wide and of a high percentage. *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Documents relating to *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* and the life and works of John Cyril Hawes are scattered throughout the world, including collections in England, Wales, Bahamas (Nassau), USA, and Australia (Perth, Geraldton, Victoria). The principle sources of documentary evidence on which this documentation is based are two biographies of Hawes (1876-1956), one by Anson and another by Evans.¹

As a young man, Hawes trained as an architect, acquiring the skills and knowledge that would assist him later in life. Although he met with a measure of success in his profession, Hawes continued to feel drawn to a more religious life. In 1904, he joined the Anglican Church as a priest. Following a period in the Bahamas, he came to the conclusion that to be a proper priest he needed to belong to the Catholic Church.² In March 1911, he was received into the Catholic Church. In 1914, after meeting the Bishop of Geraldton while studying in Rome, Hawes commenced the designs for *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* - the Cathedral of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Geraldton.³

The Geraldton Diocese was the centre for the Victoria Plains wool growing district and the Murchison pastoral and gold mining region. The Diocese was remote and isolated by great expanses of ocean and unsettled land. The building of *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* an essential and normal institution of any growing regional centre and Bishopric, reflected the growth of settlement in the region and the broadening economy of the state of Western Australia on the heels of the turn-of-century gold boom. This was to be cut short by World War I, and consequently, *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* was constructed in two main campaigns twenty years apart. Work commenced with Hawes and parishioner-volunteers beginning building, under very constrained financial circumstances because of the First World War, on 20 June 1916. In September 1916, a stone from the first Catholic Church built in Geraldton (demolished), in 1870, was re-laid as the cornerstone of the North West Tower, of the new *St. Francis Xavier Cathedral*, by Bishop Kelly. The west towers and nave were officially opened on 18 August 1918. The second building campaign was undertaken in August 1937, after the Depression and on the back of rising world gold prices, and was opened on 28 August 1938, with the Second World War imminent.⁴

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier has remained in use as a place of worship ever since its construction. It is a significant tourist attraction in Geraldton and is widely promoted as a place of interest and beauty and is featured on various promotional brochures for the City of Geraldton.

¹ Anson, Peter., *The Hermit of Cat Island. The Life of Fra Jerome Hawes* (Burns & Oates, London, 1958); Evans, A. G., *The Conscious Stone* (The Polding Press, Melbourne, 1984).

² Zaalberg, R., 'Monsignor J. C. Hawes: Priest and Architect - His work from 1915 - 1939' (unpublished thesis, Claremont Teachers' College, 1962) p. 4.

³ *ibid.*; Hawes was later titled Dean Hawes, Monsignor Hawes, and finally Fra Jerome: 'The Hermit of Cat Island'.

⁴ Evans, pp. 74, 88-94, 130-134.

Hawes' input into *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* was considerable, both as an architect and as a builder. His experience in the design and engineering of stonework and brickwork was needed for both the practical completion of the building and for the aesthetic and technical sophistication of its design.⁵ He advocated that a church, regardless of size, should be of monumental character and that the design should be reminiscent of the past and also inclusive of the present.⁶ His philosophy regarding the design of church buildings was that: '

A proper church is no mere assembly-hall, theatre or auditorium for preaching and community singing; but it is first of all a place of sacrifice ...It should breathe forth an atmosphere of prayer, of religious awe and supernatural mystery.⁷

He brought this philosophy to fruition in *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier*.

In the years between the building of the stages of *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* Hawes continued his activities as an architect, his skills particularly in demand in the Western Australian countryside where the vast open spaces and a small but growing population provided numerous opportunities to design new church buildings. By the time of his departure from Western Australia, in 1938, Hawes had also designed: *Melangata* (1916, a station homestead near Yalgoo), *The Sacred Heart Convent* in Northampton (1919, for the Presentation Sisters), the *Chapel of St Hyacinth* at Yalgoo (1920, for the Dominican Sisters), the *Chapel of San Spirito* at Utakarra Cemetery (1936), the *Church* and the *Priesthouse* in Mullewa (1923, 1927), and a new *Cathedral* for Perth (1922) which was not built.⁸

Hawes aesthetic, liturgical, religious and historical work shows him to be significant as:

- a gifted architect who worked in the most changeful of centuries and was taught by Prior, Lethaby and Sedding, and friend of other notable architects such as Sir Giles Scott and Father Benedict Williamson, from which he assumes importance as a scion of the Arts and Crafts lineage, and whose works have directly identifiable sources in the works of his mentors;
- an example of a limited number of United Kingdom immigrants and United Kingdom trained Australian architects of the same direct linkages who introduced international avant-garde ideas of the time to Western Australia (and not simply through importing publications) (e. g., Cohen, Parry, etcetera);
- an as yet 'undiscovered' example of the rear guard of international architectural practice, the non Modern Movement lineage 'discovered'

⁵ Hawes had previously designed a stone-walled church, *St. Christopher* at Gunnerton, Northumberland (1899-1900), within a stone quarrying area settled by Welsh quarry workers, and his architectural mentors' works in the United Kingdom are structurally innovative stone buildings.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Fra Jerome, O. S. F [Mons. Hawes] 'Building a Church: Thoughts for new Churches' *Our Lady of Fatima Messenger*, (December 1949) quoted in Zaalberg, p. 2.

⁸ see Anson, Bourke, Evans; Also Monsignor *Hawes Heritage Trail*, (Bicentennial Heritage Trails Network Publication, 1988).

by the reactionary and Post Modern Movement historians of the 1980s and 1990s and since celebrated, such as the work of Lutyens;

- an early example of an international professional practitioner of architecture and an early example of the mid to late twentieth century practice of world wide study travel by architects;
- a gifted structural engineer with an early pioneering expertise in structural engineering of parabolic masonry vaulting and earthquake resistant construction, anticipating the post World War II exponents such as Nervi, Candella, etcetera;
- a gifted practitioner and designer of liturgical practices, anticipating John XXIII's leadership of the Catholic Church in aspects of the role of the congregation in the liturgy, and evolving forms of places of worship that physically express the metaphysical concepts within the liturgy;
- a gifted graphics artist, sculptor with a naive streak, and a craftsman-builder; and,
- a person with a religious vocation of spiritual significance in its own right.

The following resume is of his life and relevant events with respect to his significance *per se* and *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier*

1876: Born at Richmond, Surrey. United Kingdom., 7th December.

1892: Commences architectural studies and articles London.

1898-99: Early promising architectural works arouse professional interest.

1901: Enters Lincoln Theological College.

1903: Ordained Anglican priest.

1906: Architect to and member of Anglican Benedictine Community, Wales.

1909: Joins Bahamas Mission, acts as architect-builder Long Island.

1911: Leaves Bahamas to convert to Catholicism, New York. Works on Canadian Pacific railroad.

1912: Enters Beda College, Rome.

Made tertiary of the Third Order of St Francis as 'John Francis Xavier Hawes', 4 October at Assisi.

1913: Visits Malta.

1914: Recruited by Bishop Kelly in Rome.

Designs for the Cathedral in Rome, January.

1915: Ordained priest in Rome.

Embarked for Australia 2 October ,aged 39 years.

Arrived Fremantle November.

Geraldton population of 3,500.

- Catholic Diocese 314,500 square miles.
Mt Magnet parish priest until March 1916.
- 1916: Cathedral commenced 20 June.
- 1917: Facade scaffolding removed March, opened 18 August 1918.
- 1920: Visited ageing parents in UK travelling via New Zealand,
Panama, Costa Rica, Miami, Bahamas, New York, travelling within
UK.
- Returns to Geraldton end of year.
- 1921: Bishop Kelly dies 26 December.
- 1922: Legally Registered as Architect under Architects Act in Western
Australia 29 May.
- November embarks for UK to consult with Sir Giles Scott over
his own plans for the Cathedral at Perth (not executed), travels
in France and Spain (Evans. Note: Anson states 1933 and lists
Seville, Burgos, Toledo, Segovia, Cordova, Granada, Barcelona
and Ireland) Rome, returning October 1923.
- 1923: Bishop Dr. Richard Ryan then Bishop of Geraldton.
Hawes' work undermined by privately practising professionals.
- 1926: Ryan departs for sale, Victoria in April 1926., replaced by Most
Rev. James Patrick O'Collins.
Hawes appointed Diocesan Architect and created Dean.
- 1931: Applies to Bishop of the Bahamas for position as secular priest
6th August.
- 1935: Resumes planning of the cathedral early in year (aged 59).
- 1937: Resumption of work authorised August.
Confirmation of appointment as Domestic prelate to His
Holiness the Pope entitling him to the title of Right Reverend
Monsignor, December.
- Created Diocesan Consultor ad Triennium.
- 1938: Grand opening of the Cathedral, August.
Appointed parish priest for Greenough, December.
Departs on *MV Romolo* 14 May via Port Said, Jaffa, Jerrico,
Jordan, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Naples, Rome, Assisi, Paris,
London.
- 14th July; Travels in UK to Celtic and hermitage sites.
- 1939: 16 October; embarks for New York and arrives Nassau,
Bahamas 12 November in habit of monk of the Third Order of St
Francis, adopts name of Fra Jerome and vocation of Franciscan
tertiary hermit, continues to work as architect of churches,
convent, monastery, hermitage, experimenting in structures on his
builder's house.

1953: Decline in health, continues to live alone at Hermitage.

1956: Taken to Miami hospital where he dies 26th June. aged nearly 80 years.

Entombed at the Hermitage on Cat Island 29th June in tomb he had prepared for himself, as at Geraldton before.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier is built of local Geraldton stone, and confidently employs wide-span arches and skilfully laid rubble and ashlar.

The building is conventionally aligned along its east-west axis with the altar oriented east.

The conventional west-front towers flank a powerful Romanesque styled arched entrance doorway, and a recessed Baroque styled gable which is the gable end of the nave behind.

Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, through the building and manipulation of the site in the Arts and Crafts manner, generates a cultural environment in its own right.

The raised and open location of the place ensures that it can be seen from all sides and, hence, its many facets of walls and roofs present rich, varied, aspects to the townscapes about it.

The building is raised on a podium formed by a hillock within broad open spaces, with its main east-west longitudinal form running parallel to Cathedral Avenue, one of the main historical landward entries to the town centre. *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier* projects itself visually in dramatic manner to the town, along this axis.

Its massing culminates with the octagonal domed crossing, crowned with a crucifix on the glazed lantern. Hence, one's gaze is led upward to reinforce this as a gentle but significant mound at the entrance to the town. Views across lawns from the south and west repeat this experience, and the towers culminate the views from the stair approaches at the north.

The western facade, with its towers, is seen across a depression within an avenue of trees that, together, extend the east-west axis, enhancing the scale of the facade.

The aesthetic qualities include a deliberate synthesis of aesthetic experiences. Hawes, himself, attributed a Roman style to *Cathedral of St Francis Xavier*, with features from the Norman-Romanesque (11th century) and Renaissance (17th century) and admitted to borrowing the towers from the Californian Franciscan missions of *San Luis Rey* and *Santa Barbara* (18th and 19th centuries).

The Geraldton towers are octagonal in plan, in three tiers of decreasing plan size, and the north tower carries a space for a clock (never added) whilst the southern tower has arched openings in all three tiers. The towers of *Santa Barbara* are similar but not octagonal. Rather, they are square with heavy chamfered corners, with only the two top tiers open, whilst *San Luis Rey's* single tower, although octagonal, has only one open tier above the square base.

Hawes' towers are therefore his own extension of a convention of building styles employed elsewhere.

The sacristy, located within the fold of the apse and the northern transept (said to be a late addition to the design at the direction of Bishop O'Collins, and by some to be incongruous), casually evokes a 15th century tower from some chateaux on the Loire. Whether this is 'incongruous' depends perhaps upon whether it is imagined as a fragment out of date in a time warp, as an addition to a 'later' styled building, or as a fancied 'foundation chapel' to a later, larger establishment. It is also perhaps relevant to compare this conical form with the tower attached to his other contemporary work, *St Mary's in Ara Coeli* at Northampton (1936) which indicates an interest in the medieval.

It is likely that, for Hawes, the stylistic design of the tower was welcomed as an opportunity to add the complexity to his work which is typically found in buildings constructed over extended periods; perhaps a message to future generations on the matter of additions. This 'incongruity' could perhaps be better seen as a master stroke.

Internally, the nave is formed by massive Norman or Romanesque styled cylindrical columns supporting arches and a flat ceiling under a timber framed roof.

The arcades separate the nave from concrete roofed side aisles of lower height. The nave leads to an octagonal crossing which is roofed with a dome with a lantern, beyond which is the altar in an apse over a crypt.

The octagonal domed crossing is designed, liturgically speaking, to gather participants about the priest and altar, perhaps anticipating the current contemporary practice of the priest facing and involving the congregation.

The variety of historical associations and commonly understood meanings that the forms and decorations evoke is skilfully controlled to be subservient to the liturgical presence. The harmonising use of local stone and stone coloured cement and paint is an essential part of the external power (solidity of forms and sparse and small openings), mystery (interior forms hinted at by exteriors) and drama. Internally the use of coloured banding acts like contour drawing or ploughing to bring the shape and progression of the spaces into sharp focus.

The aesthetic concerns thus include the dramatic (liturgical) arts as well as the two and three dimensional design arts, and unifies the internal liturgical experience with the external exposition of faith on the landscape.

13.3 REFERENCES

Molyneux, I. *Assessment of Significance* (for HCWA, July 1994)

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