



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

Chapel of San Spirito is a well resolved building in both the design of the building and the detail of the fittings. The eclectic interior decoration is uncommon and representative of Hawes architecture. (Criterion 1.1)

Chapel of San Spirito is an unusual building in the way its internal layout has a separation of the narthex, nave, and sanctuary by metal screens. The intersecting barrel brick vaulting is creative and gives dynamism to the internal spaces. (Criterion 1.2)

The strong modernist lines of *Chapel of San Spirito* contribute to the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. (Criterion 1.3)

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Chapel of San Spirito has a close association with the expansion of the activities of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Geraldton in the 1920s. (Criterion 2.1)

Chapel of San Spirito has historic significance for its close association with Archdeacon Lecaille - whose tomb is contained within it; and for its association with Monsignor John Hawes, an idiosyncratic ecclesiastical architect. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Chapel of San Spirito has a close association with the Roman Catholic community as a religious building and as a place to commemorate the activities of two prominent Roman Catholic priests of the area. (Criterion 4.1)

Chapel of San Spirito contributes to the Geraldton community's sense of place as a building which represents Roman Catholic activity in the area and as place in which to express bereavement. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

The intersecting barrel brick vaulting of *Chapel of San Spirito* is one of very few examples of this type of construction in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2. REPRESENTATIVENESS

The unusual internal decoration of *Chapel of San Spirito* is representative of Monsignor J. C. Hawes' distinctive style of church decoration in the MidWest region of Western Australia. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

Chapel of San Spirito is in excellent condition. Some water damage is evident at ceiling level in the sanctuary end of the nave and the exterior of the building is in need of painting but otherwise the building has been well maintained.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Chapel of San Spirito has a high degree of integrity. The building continues to be used for the purpose for which it was designed.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Chapel of San Spirito retains a high degree of authenticity. The original fabric, including the decoration and original colour scheme is intact and in its original state.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

In the early years of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Geraldton experienced rapid growth due to the development of surrounding land for wheat and sheep farming properties by returned service personnel and migrants who started new farms with their families. In addition to the growth of Geraldton, itself, smaller regional centres in the diocese experienced growth including Northampton, Mullewa, Morawa, and Perenjori; and the towns on the Perth-Geraldton road such as Mingenew, Three Springs, Carnamah and Coorow. These towns all had populations with active Roman Catholic congregations.

Chapel of San Spirito at the Utakarra Cemetery, was designed by the architect and priest, Dean (later Monsignor) John Cyril Hawes, in 1935.

As a young man, Hawes trained as an architect. 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. 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.¹ In March 1911, he was received into the Catholic Church. As Father John Hawes, he arrived in Western Australia in November 1915, and was attached to the Geraldton Diocese between the years 1915-1939.

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. His philosophy towards the design of church buildings is summarised in the following passage:

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."²

Hawes 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.³

Prior to the construction of *Chapel of San Spirito*, Hawes had designed: *St. Francis Xavier Cathedral* in Geraldton (1915), *Melangata* (1916, a station homestead near Yalgoo), *Sacred Heart Convent* in Northampton (1919, for the Presentation Sisters), *Chapel of St Hyacinth* at Yalgoo (1920, for the Dominican Sisters), and a new *Cathedral* for Perth (1922, which was not built).⁴

¹ Zaalberg, R., 'Monsignor J. C. Hawes: Priest and Architect - His work from 1915-1939', (unpublished thesis, Claremont Teachers' College, 1962) p. 4.

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

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *Monsignor Hawes Heritage Trail*, Bicentennial Heritage Trails Network Publication, 1988.

On 11 February 1930, the Most Reverend James Patrick O'Collins became the Bishop of Geraldton.⁵ Hawes was at that time the Parish Priest of Mullewa. O'Collins had started a plumbing apprenticeship prior to entering the priesthood and he recognised the talent of his 'captive' architect John Hawes, and determined that he would '...put churches all over the diocese!'.⁶ Under O'Collins, Hawes began his busiest and most productive period in Western Australia.⁷

Chapel of San Spirito was designed as a cemetery chapel, and as a tomb for the remains of Archdeacon Adolfe Lecaille, whose sarcophagus is in the middle of the nave. Lecaille was a Belgian missionary, and was the founding priest in the Geraldton area. In addition to his duties as a priest, he designed and built seven churches in Western Australia over a ten year period and was greatly respected in the Diocese. Both Lecaille and Hawes are prominent in the history of the Geraldton and Mid-West regions of Western Australia and gained almost 'legendary' status with their pioneering religious and construction efforts in very difficult conditions. When Lecaille died in Perth, on 7 May 1908, he was buried there, but, in 1936, his body was exhumed and laid to rest in *Chapel of San Spirito* to be near the region he loved and served.⁸ Hawes also designed a special window in Geraldton's *St. Francis Xavier Cathedral* as a memorial to him.

As an interesting parallel with *Chapel of San Spirito*, Hawes initially designed the Northampton church, *Saint Mary's In Ara Coeli*, in 1934, in a modern style. This was rejected in favour of a more traditional Gothic design which was built concurrently with *Chapel of San Spirito*.

The design for the church at Northampton demonstrated a struggle Hawes faced as the Diocesan Architect while attempting to implement his own artistic development and influences in the face of rigid traditionalist ideas for church design. Hawes was in touch with the 1930s Modern movement in architecture, where architects were trying to find a new architectural expression that reflected the twentieth-century machine age. The design of *Chapel of San Spirito* is a melding of Hawes influences (from England and the Bahamas); his knowledge of building (gained from wide reading and from detailed study tours of structures in France, Spain and Italy); and, also of his desire to be designing in the contemporary style of the time.

John Hawes wrote in a letter to Bishop Bernard of Nassau, dated 23rd July, 1935, that most of the Western Australian priests wanted Gothic

so in Carnarvon and Northampton my hands have been tied to that extent, but I've been left a free hand with regard to the Cemetery Chapel and I think I can claim that the design (the interior especially) is frankly modern without being fantastic or eccentric.⁹

Chapel of San Spirito took three months to build - April, May and June of 1936 - and cost £824. Design and detailed drawings of the chapel are in the archives of the Geraldton Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, at Bishop's House in

⁵ Bourke, D. F. *The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia, 1829 - 1929* (Archdiocese of Perth, 1979), p. 78.

⁶ Evans, A. G. *The Conscious Stone* (The Polding Press, Melbourne, 1984)

⁷ *ibid* and Anson, P. *The Hermit of Cat Island* (Burns & Oats, London, 1957).

⁸ Bourke, p. 78.

⁹ Evans (Research Notes)

Maitland Street, Geraldton. The sketch drawings are dated July and September 1935; two sheets of working drawings are dated September 1935; and further detailed drawings of the iron work and the cross for the rood-screen and triptych are dated May 1936. The building contractor was Berry Bros., Mount Hawthorn. Other costs noted were labour, £200; joinery for front doors, window frames and louvres, £13/0/0; casting of columns £12/10/0; six red and white (now red and black) candlesticks (Berry Bros.) stand and cross, £7/12/6; altar slab (Wilson, Gray and Co.), £12/7/0; one only twenty inch bell with patent clapper, £34/2/6; and two fixed screen grilles (William Priestner), £27/6/0.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The exterior of *Chapel of San Spirito* is simple and unadorned.¹⁰ The shape of the building is rectilinear, and it is crowned with a detailed bellcote. The exterior mass relies on a block form simply expressed with plain white walls to create a sculptural quality. The white painted and rendered external walls of this building provide sharp contrast between the crisp light and deep shadow areas created by the strong sunlight of the region. The stepped and angular planes of the bellcote, crowned by a cross, have the same sculptural effect.

The original isolation of the chapel from surrounding foliage followed the modern ideal of letting a building stand alone to be 'read'. The Chapel is now melded into the landscape by the coverage of mature trees and, therefore, the earlier sharp visual impact of the structure has been lessened. There is also a intrusive (later) low brick wall each side of the building which prevents the building being read in isolation.

The building has the entry at the west end and the altar at the east end. The floor plan consists of a narthex, a nave, a sanctuary, and a small sacristy on the north side. The bell is operated by a draw wire through the roof into the sanctuary.

The external appearance of the building has been likened to a bier and coffin, with the roof waterspouts as handles but whether this was part of the design intent is not known.¹¹ The waterspouts are necessary to remove the stormwater as far as possible from the solid wall and roof structure. One can determine from Hawes' linework that the small sacristy was added to the working drawings at a relatively late stage. The sacristy is not shown on the sketch plans, and protrudes out from the north-east corner of the building. It has an 'asbestos-cement' sheet roof. Within the sacristy there is some dignified jarrah cabinetwork designed by Hawes.

The interior, Romanesque in style, with a combination of various materials (concrete, brick, stone, timber, and metal screens) is solid and comforting, while retaining a solemn and majestic atmosphere.

¹⁰ Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present.* (Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989) pp. 176-179.

¹¹ Evans Research notes; *Monsignor Hawes Heritage Trail* (Bicentennial Heritage Trails Network Publication, 1988)

In lieu of windows to the bays on each side of the nave, Hawes used a fixed timber louvre, externally, with side-hinged (casement) timber shutters, internally, to control the strong sunlight. This was a device he also used successfully at *Saint Mary's Church*, Northampton, except that *Saint Mary's Church* louvres are top hinged and thus able to be opened.

In the sanctuary, there are two circular 'port-hole' windows (one on each side), and an arched head, stained glass, window behind the altar with vibrant cement tracery work on the inside which is a feature of Hawes' work in almost all of his churches. These sanctuary windows have deep window splays which open internally so as to spread the diffused light past the thick solid walls, and into the interior of the structure.

The narthex is lit from above the bolt-studded west-facing timber double doors by a large, circular window, with square paned, semi-translucent glazing. Similar windows were originally also in place in *Saint Mary's Church*.

The ceiling is painted cream, a colour which reduces the impression of weight in the ceiling while still revealing the brick joints and thus the solid construction to the beholder. The white and mauve striped vault ribs internally parallel Geraldton's *Francis Xavier Cathedral* and *Saint Mary's Church*.

On the facing wall of the sanctuary is a triptych, designed and painted by Hawes. The back-lighting of the triptych, by a hidden high-level window, produces an exciting uplifting of the eye as one progresses through the nave towards the sanctuary. The rood cross is similar to those Hawes designed for other churches.

Behind the sarcophagus for Lecaille (also designed for resting the coffin on during the service) is an empty grave Hawes prepared for himself (he was eventually buried in the Bahamas). This grave is covered by a brass plate with an excellent likeness of Hawes in priestly vestments, and bears the words in Latin which translate as: 'Pray for the soul of the Reverend John Hawes, Dean of the Parish of Mullewa, Architect of Geraldton Cathedral, and builder of this and other churches.'¹²

The ceiling of the nave, in the elevated bay, has a biblical scene painted by the artist Dan Mazzotti in about 1953 or 1954. Mr Mazzotti recalls going to see the Diocesan Bishop of that time (Bishop Alfred Gummer) in Geraldton 'as a migrant artist fresh off the boat from Italy'. Mr Mazzotti explained to Bishop Gummer that he was seeking work. The Bishop drove him out to the chapel and asked if he could paint 'something' on the ceiling. A builder was engaged to plaster the ceiling first and Mr Mazzotti then completed the work that is in place today.¹³ There is evidence of water penetration through the ceiling at the sanctuary end of the painting. This is despite Hawes' notes on the sketch and working drawings specifying the use of 'Pudlo or Impervit' waterproofing powder in the cement, but the damp penetration is not surprising considering the relatively flat roof that requires careful maintenance to prevent such occurrences. The red marseille roofing tiles on the horizontal steps of the external walls are not indicated on the original

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Telephone conversation with Mr Mazzotti and John Taylor, Architect, on 30 March, 1994.

drawings, and they are likely to have been placed to deal with waterproofing problems.

13. 3. REFERENCES

National Trust Assessment Exposition, July 1974.

Australian Heritage Commission Data Sheet, 1978.

John Taylor Architect *Utakarra Cemetery Chapel - Chapel of 'San Spirito' (the Holy Spirit) 1936* (for the Heritage Council of WA, Perth, 1994)