



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

The *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* building is a fine example of Monsignor J. C. Hawes' idiosyncratic architectural style, utilising an eclectic mix of Gothic and Romanesque elements as applied to church design, details and construction. (Criterion 1.2)

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church has landmark value as a prominent building on a hill side position. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The construction of *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* has historic value as a demonstration of the faith and efforts of a rural religious community, still affected by the 1930s economic depression. (Criterion 2.2)

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church has historic value for its close association with Monsignor J. C. Hawes, an architect and priest who made a significant contribution to the design and construction of a number of substantial church buildings in the mid-west area of Western Australia between 1919 - 1939. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church is valued by the community for its associations with the growth and continuity of religious activities and facilities in Northampton. (Criterion 4.1)

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church contributes to the Northampton community's sense of history and place, as is demonstrated by its inclusion in the *Monsignor Hawes Heritage Trail Brochure*. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church, with its eclectic mix of Gothic and Romanesque elements, is representative of Monsignor J. C. Hawes' distinctive body of church architecture in the mid-west of Western Australia. (Criterion 6.1)

12. 3 CONDITION

According to a condition report compiled in May 1993, *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* is in sound condition.¹ The building has been in continuous use since construction and has been well maintained. A program of regular maintenance will ensure that attention is paid to specific items in the near future.²

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church is in sound condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

The building has been used for the same function since its construction. Although some minor modifications have taken place over the years, the building generally remains in its original form and therefore has a high degree of integrity.³

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

Although some minor alterations have been made to the Church, the loss of original detailing has been minimal and *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* therefore retains a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13. 1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church is an imposing building featuring an eclectic mix of Gothic and Romanesque elements built, in 1936, to replace the existing church on the site that had served the needs of the parish for nearly 70 years.⁴ The original church, built in 1868, under the guiding hand of Father Lecaille, was eventually demolished, in 1963, to make way for a new brick Catholic school.⁵ The new church was sited slightly in front of the old building and occupies a prominent position on a hillside.

¹ Taylor, J., 'Saint Mary's in Ara Coeli Roman Catholic Church: Condition Report', (prepared for Heritage Council of W.A., May 1993), p. 5.

² Refer to Taylor, pp. 3-5, for further details concerning the current condition of the building and specific issues that need to be addressed.

³ *ibid.* p. 3, provides further details regarding the changes that have occurred.

⁴ Apperly, R. (et al) *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the present* (Angus and Robertson Publishers, North Ryde, 1989) pp. 194-201.

⁵ Suba, T. 'The Thematic History of the Town of Northampton' (for the Shire of Northampton, 1993).

The planning and construction of the church took place over several years. The architect for the project was Monsignor John C. Hawes and the contractor, Mr. T. P. Crothers of Northampton.⁶ The signatures on the set of contract drawings are dated 1935.⁷ The foundation stone was laid on 24 May 1936, and reads, 'This foundation Stone of St Mary's in Ara Coeli was laid by the most Rev. J. P. O'Collins D. D. Bishop of Geraldton on the Feast of Our Lady of Christians 24th May 1936. Very Rev. Dean J. Irwin. Pastor. Very Rev. Dean J. C. Hawes Architect.'⁸

The design concept for the church originated with Dean Irwin, priest of the Northampton Diocese, who after rejecting Hawes' original design quietly but insistently argued that if a new church was to be built it was to be in the Gothic style. The *Cathedral Chronicle* reports, "At first he (J. C. Hawes) thought that Dean Irwin was very obstinate in rejecting his first scheme, but now he had to confess that he was quite right, and they could judge the finished results of their combined efforts."⁹

Hawes (1876-1956) was attached to the Geraldton Diocese between the years 1915-1939. Within that period he was architect, and in many cases the builder, of a number of Roman Catholic churches in the area. 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, he continued to feel drawn to a more religious life. In 1904, he took the step to join the Anglican Church. Following a period in the Bahamas Hawes came to the conclusion that to be a proper priest he needed to belong to the Catholic Church.¹⁰ In March 1911, he was received into the Catholic Church. As Father John Hawes, he arrived in Western Australia, in 1915, after meeting the Bishop of Geraldton while studying in Rome.

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 reflected 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."¹¹ In addition, 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 - characteristics that are evident in *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church*.¹² His work ranged from the *Geraldton Cathedral* (1916-1936) to a

⁶ *Cathedral Chronicle* October 1936, Vol.V, No. 60, p. 1.

⁷ Prints of the original drawings are appended, in reduced form to: Taylor, J., 'Saint Mary's in Ara Coeli Roman Catholic Church: Condition Report', (for Heritage Council of W.A., May 1993)

⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁹ *Cathedral Chronicle* October 1936 Vol V, No. 60, p. 2.

¹⁰ Zaalberg, R., 'Monsignor J.C. Hawes: Priest and Architect - His work from 1915 - 1939' (unpublished thesis, Claremont Teachers' College, 1962) p. 4.

¹¹ Fra Jerome, O.S.F [Mons. Hawe] 'Building a Church: Thoughts for new Churches' (Our Lady of Fatima Messenger, December 1949) quoted in Zaalberg, p. 2.

¹² *ibid.*

small church in Yalgoo. *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* and the *Our Lady of Fatima Church*, immediately south of the town of Nanson, were both built as churches to service a convent complex.

In 1936, Hawes compared three of the buildings he had designed in the area, the *Geraldton Cathedral* (1916-1936), the *Mullewa Church* (1920-1923), and the *Northampton Church* (1936), emphasising the design philosophy behind each:

In the Cathedral the underlying motif of the design was to express the idea of the solidity and strength of their church, hence the massive round pillars, almost cumbrous, and heavy roof timbers. At Mullewa, the motif was the antiquity of their church. Compared with the Northampton Church it was not so impressive, nor as well proportioned, but visitors found it interesting because its details were gathered from the far corners of the globe, and it reflected some of the romance and the quietness of some of the old, old churches of the past, that were full of such marvels as they would never see again. Spirituality was the motif of their Northampton church. In Gothic architecture all the lines soared upwards. Against the outer walls the strong buttresses sprang out of the ground and tapered aloft to the parapets. The sharp ridge of the steep roof cleft the sky like the bows of an ocean liner: and springing yet higher from the roof the spire pointed a finger heavenwards.¹³

The planning and construction of *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church*, over a number of years, was a community effort in both the donation of labour and funds, made more difficult as the state was still recovering from the Depression years. At the opening ceremony the Hon. J. M. Drew, MLC mentioned that when he had been approached in 1931, to make a donation, he was doubtful about the success of the project given the economic situation of the time.¹⁴ However, the church was completed, and during the consecration proceedings the Bishop outlined the number of similar projects being carried out:

The Bishop said he arrived at the heightening of the depression and was still in it, but was pleased to state that the Diocese during that time has some six new churches (stone and cement brick), two presbyteries, two convents, and a hospital, a college and three schools opened.¹⁵

A final remark at the opening ceremony illustrates the importance of the church at the time:

In conclusion His Lordship expressed his pleasure at being present on that grand occasion, and again congratulated Dean Irwin and all concerned with the new church, which, while enhancing the district of Northampton, would prove a source of pleasure to all travellers through the town.¹⁶

Over the years, changes to the liturgy within the Roman Catholic Church have resulted in modification of the internal arrangement of *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church*. The building continues to be used as a church.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church is an eclectic mix of Gothic and Romanesque elements constructed, in 1936, to replace the original small Roman Catholic

13 *Cathedral Chronicle* October 1936 Vol V, No. 60, p. 2.

14 *ibid.* p. 3.

15 *ibid.* p. 4.

16 *ibid.*

church on the site, built in 1868. *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* was built for Dean Irwin, priest of the Diocese of Northampton.

In general, according to Apperly, Christian churches of the 1920s and 1930s usually adopted some form of well-worn medieval revivalism. More often than not, the Gothic language of pointed arch and steeply pitched roof continued to be employed to provide an instantly recognisable sign of a building's use for religious purposes. But when an architect wished to avoid this stereotype and perhaps move cautiously towards the uncluttered simplicity of mass and detail favoured by the modernists, an essay in the Romanesque might be undertaken.¹⁷

The *Cathedral Chronicle* of October 1936, provided the following description of the new church building:

As regards the exterior of the building, it gains character from the rugged nature of the hammer-dressed masonry, the deeply raked-out joints emphasising the charming and various colours of each stone. The main front of the church sheers up a precipitous cliff of rock: the effect of height increased by the long vertical lines of the massive buttresses springing upwards from the ground, and the soaring effect of the single deeply recessed arch. In the middle of this is set two-light long mullioned windows with traceried head. The green tiles that cover the roofs give a very similar appearance to the green Westmorland slates of the north of England. Over the intersection of chancel and transepts rises a tall slender fleche surmounted by a silver ball and cross of wrought iron.¹⁸

St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church is sited on the slope of a hill facing Hampton Street, slightly north east of the old church (now demolished), and adjacent to the 'Nagle Centre' - a former Presentation Sisters' 'Sacred Heart' Convent.¹⁹ The Church's ground plan is cruciform, consisting of a clerestoried nave with side aisles, and the high altar set at the junction of the north and south transepts, at the western end of the church. Being built on the slope of a hill, *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* has a flight of steps leading to the east door. Inside the porch, these steps divide to left and right, the wall between the two occupied by a set of doors through which the coffins, at funeral services, can be passed in or out of the church.

Mons. J. C. Hawes' *St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church* design demonstrates an eclectic use of features from both the Romanesque and Gothic styles. The prominent pointed arch with plate tracery detailing at the entrance and the asymmetrical massing of the building, especially in relation to the tower, are distinct Gothic features. However, the rear and side windows employ rounded arches, a more Romanesque element. A feature of the exterior is the tall, circular turret in the north-west corner with its conical roof which encases a stone spiral stairway to the choir gallery. The interior of the building is simply decorated, featuring pointed arches to the sanctuary and transepts, the exposed timber roof trusses being particularly noteworthy.

¹⁷ Apperly, p. 194.

¹⁸ *Cathedral Chronicle* October 1936.

¹⁹ The former Convent was built in 1919 and in 1984, after demolition was considered, the Northampton Parish decided to renovate the building, turning it into a camp centre.

John Taylor, in his report 'Saint Mary's in Ara Coeli Roman Catholic Church: Condition Report', (prepared for Heritage Council of W. A., May 1993), mentions a number of features within the church that are also of particular note: the side aisles with their round arches; the louvred shutters; the clerestory of long windows, the natural lighting of the high altar from two very long narrow windows; and, the impressive open hammer-beam roof in dark jarrah.²⁰

Over the years, a number of minor alterations have been made to the internal layout of the church to accommodate the slight changes in needs that have occurred. For example, the Pulpit has been demolished, the table portion of the altar moved forward to enable the priest celebrating the mass to face his congregation, the "nun's chapel" in the south transept has been converted to reconciliation rooms or confessionals, and some of the altar balustrades have been removed. Generally, the internal changes that have been made are to conform with changes in the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

A recent condition report (1993) notes a number of items that will require maintenance in the near future if the church is to remain in a sound condition. There are some signs of damp penetration, drainage problems, termite activity, wall cracking, and the dislodgment of some roof tiles.

13.3 REFERENCES

Taylor, J., 'Saint Mary's in Ara Coeli Roman Catholic Church: Condition Report', (prepared for Heritage Council of W. A., May 1993).

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

²⁰ Taylor, p. 2.