

ARCHBISHOP DUHIG - CHURCHES OF HIS EARLY YEARS

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There is a photograph in the Catholic Centre which portrays Archbishop Duhig and a number of churches which were built during the first period of his episcopacy. It is entitled "A golden period of Catholic progress under His Grace, the Most Rev. James Duhig 1912-1927". To speak of all the churches built during this period would take much more time than is available tonight, so I shall speak of fourteen of these churches, all but one are in the metropolitan area and will be familiar to most of you.

To introduce the subject it is necessary to sketch in some background and I have chosen an excerpt from Dr Tom Boland's lecture on the Duhig era to 1929 which admirably sums up the circumstances in which he found himself at the time of his elevation to the episcopacy and the steps which he took to overcome what he saw as the shortcomings of the archdiocese. What he found in 1917 was a critically neglected diocese. In a letter to Cardinal Moran in 1910 he described Brisbane as in time of crisis. He used the term in a medical sense, referring to a stage of an illness at which a patient either recovers or dies. Robert Dunne, at the height of his powers, was not an activist. He consolidated the disorderly advances of James Quinn and made a few well-planned ones of his own. He ran his diocese from the desk, as Quinn had from the saddle and Duhig would from any means of transport available. In his later years he kept the books and wrote innumerable letters, but he did not know his diocese. One test Rome uses to gauge a bishop's effectiveness is the regularity of Confirmations and pastoral visits associated with them. Canon Law required Dunne to visit and confirm in every parish every three years.

From 1910, at least, Duhig was doing it for him and he found sizeable towns that had never seen a bishop. The numbers confirmed in all districts reached astronomical proportions and some of the candidates were well into their twenties. At last, on 21 August, 1910, he came to St Stephen's, Dunne's own cathedral. There in a ceremony lasting well into the afternoon he confirmed 875 men, women and children. They could not be accommodated in the church. He had to move out into the grounds and confer the sacrament where the statue of Bishop Quinn now stands.

This was horrendous, but it was only a sign of the pastoral state of the diocese. In an expanding era, Dunne had not kept up. He had good pastoral ideas for his policy: he believed in homes before schools; in large parishes with a community of priests rather than small ones nearer the people; in credit rather than deficit in budgeting, which left whole areas without churches and schools; in diocesan priests rather than religious; in lay teachers rather than religious where possible. All these policies were to ensure strong central control in his own hands - and no one else's. This worked well enough so long as his hands were firm. Duhig believed that they may have been, but that certainly since the turn of the century the diocese had seriously declined.

In the fifty years of the diocese before his coming to it, it had created thirty parishes. In seven years to 1919, hampered by Dunne, he opened seven. From 1919 to 1929, he opened twenty-seven more. Between 1912 and 1919 he opened forty-three churches and extended more. His real love was land. Even he could not tell how much he had bought, but between August 1917 and August 1918 he bought large estates in Toowong, Nundah, Redcliffe, Bowen Hills, Clayfield, Bulimba, Hawthorne, Coorparoo, Ashgrove, and Dutton Park. Brisbane had never seen anything like this raid on the property market.

In later years he may have been less discriminating in purchases - though a new city found use for his property - but at this stage he chose land on or near the suburban railways and the arterial routes in and out of the city. In parishes, churches, primary and secondary schools he planned for provision before need and absolute accessibility for all Brisbane Roman Catholics. He claimed to have spent half a million pounds by April 1919, most of which he did not have. For once his figures may not have been inflated. Unwary bank managers competed for his account.

These words give us an insight into his motivation. He was determined that Catholics would have an equal share in the growth and development of Queensland. He was not merely a builder of buildings, but a builder of the Catholic faith. His buildings were merely a means to an end. His overwhelming ambition was to make the clergy and the sacraments readily available to every Catholic. To do this, he reversed Dunne's philosophy of a few large parishes and embarked upon an expansionary programme the like of which was not to be seen again until the post-World War II period which he also orchestrated.

Between 1912 and 1927 the population of Brisbane increased from 128,500 to 223,600 - a growth of seventy-four percent. The area of the city increased by sixty-five percent in this time from forty-two square miles to seventy-one square miles. A conservative estimate of the increase of Catholics in the metropolitan area during these years would be 25,000. It was fortunate that Archbishop Duhig was the right man in the right place at the right time. Not only did he purchase considerable quantities of real estate, he evinced a determination that the land he purchased would be the best and most appropriate land for his purposes. In doing so, he ensured that in a physical sense, at least, the church would have a high profile and be a visible force in the community.

Fr Boland relates the anecdote that, in the manner of the generals of World War I, the Holy Father kept a map of Brisbane in his study and took great pleasure in marking upon it flags for each hill top captured by his 'General Duhig'.

The consequence of this land acquisition and of the expansion of the parishes in the diocese had left us with an extraordinarily rich heritage of splendid ecclesiastical buildings, each with its own particular charm reflecting, at the same time, the hand of the archbishop, the parish priest and of the architects who were chosen to translate the concept into reality. We are fortunate that, in the main, these buildings are still in excellent condition. The common feature of all these buildings is that they were constructed in brick. Fortunately the bricks of Brisbane were essentially sound and most of the buildings of the period we are interested in are in good condition. However, lime mortar was the preferred bonding agent in those days. This material is so soft that it can be scraped out with any sharp instrument. Brisbane's concern in the future will be to pay attention to the mortar joints of its older buildings and to restore them by raking out and re-pointing with cement mortar.

Whether preventive restoration should be a parish or a diocesan responsibility is a matter of policy, but we should be aware that our responsibilities in these respects will increase in the future and we should be planning for them now. Before looking at the buildings of this period it is of interest to spend a few moments considering the architectural thinking of the period.

The principal style of the period was eclectic. England was still under the influence of the Gothic revival inspired by the writings of John Ruskin. The modern movement had already begun. Peter Behrens in Germany, Auguste Perret in France, John Rennis McIntosh in Scotland and Louis Sullivan in the United States had laid the foundations for an architecture which was to take form from technological and industrial change. Gustave Eiffel in France and Isambard Kingdom Brunel in England had already

demonstrated the potential of wrought iron for structural purposes. Walter Gropius, a student of Behrens (as, incidentally, was Carl Langer who practised for many years in Brisbane) founded the Bauhaus school in 1919. By 1912, Frank Lloyd Wright had already formulated the philosophy which was to lead him to become a giant among his peers. Le Corbusier in France published his definitive work 'Towards an Architecture' in 1923. The foundations of the modern movement were tied to industrial and technical development, it had not yet seriously addressed itself to buildings of a monumental character. Notre Dame de Raincy, the first reinforced concrete church was built by Auguste Perret in 1922. It was at the cutting of architectural thought in ecclesiastical architecture and the forerunner of things to come.

Such thinking was as far removed from Brisbane as the city was from Europe and America. The vast distance which separated Australia from Europe and the advent of World War I did not foster the development of contemporary architecture here until much later. More importantly, perhaps, the instigators of architecture, the clients, had no knowledge of and consequently, no commitment to experimentation in ecclesiastical architecture. Neo-classical eclecticism was, to them, the only proper form for church buildings

One man in Queensland in those years had within him the spirit of change which was being born in Europe. He had travelled extensively and had worked in Scotland in the early 1900s. His architectural philosophy was formulated by these experiences and he subsequently became what many consider to be the finest architect that Queensland has produced. His name was Robin Dods.

Coincidentally, one of the first functions at which Archbishop Duhig presided after his translation to Brisbane as co-adjutor, was the laying of the foundation stone of St Brigid's, Red Hill, designed by Dods. The design had been finalised before Duhig's return to Brisbane and explains perhaps why the first church in which he was involved was the Gothic style, a form which later years confirm, was not his favourite. It is my own theory that the influence of Rome, both the city and the Vatican played a large part in the choice of architectural form preferred by Australian prelates. Most of the 'Episcopabile' were Roman trained and were, no doubt, influenced by the magnificent Roman basilicas. This preference was still manifested well beyond this period and I recall Bishop Cahill asking me to introduce the character of St Mary Major in Rome when I was designing St Monica's Cathedral in Cairns in the middle of the 1960s.

It is a great shame that St Brigid's was the only Catholic church that Dods designed in Brisbane. We are not to know why his triumph with St Brigid's did not lead to more commissions and I have no doubt that the archdiocese is the poorer for it. St Brigid's had been described as the finest ecclesiastical building in Brisbane. It started from what can only be described as humble beginnings as this excerpt from the *Brisbane Courier* of 7 November, 1881, entitled "Red Hill Church" attests. "A meeting was held at the new Roman Catholic School room at the top of Red Hill, Waterworks Road, yesterday afternoon in order to inaugurate a movement to form a committee to provide funds for fitting up the school room as a church wherein Mass can be celebrated. The Rev Father Fouhy presided and at the commencement of the proceedings he suggested that, owing to the inclemency of the weather and the small attendance, it would be advisable to adjourn the meeting until next Sunday ..."

From this inauspicious start there began a move which culminated in, on 9 August, 1914, which must have been within days of the declaration of World War I, the opening of the church. Archbishop Duhig laid the foundation stone on 5 May, 1912, shortly after taking office as coadjutor and assuming the duties which ill health prevented Archbishop Dunne from carrying out. The opening was a triumph for the Catholics in the

archdiocese and was widely reported in the *Brisbane Age*. Archbishop Mannix and Bishop Shiel of Rockhampton attended. Bishop O'Connor of Armidale celebrated the Pontifical High Mass. The building cost 15,000 pounds of which two thirds had already been raised at the time of the opening.

Dods based the design, at the request of the parish priest, Fr J. F. McCarthy, on the Cathedral of Albi, France, which dated from 1282. It was an unusual building for its time just as its counter-part in Brisbane was six hundred years later. Although Gothic in character, it lacked the flying buttresses which were the hallmark of Gothic designs of the time, relying instead upon massive buttresses to withstand the thrust of the roof beams upon the lofty walls. It was unusual in another respect also that the town was the seat of the Albigensian heretics and Bishop Bernard de Castanet expended most of his energy combating the heresy which threatened his authority and his diocese. This may have had a bearing upon the fortress-like appearance of his cathedral. While Dods worked with classical forms, he was always their master and never their slave. He moulded the forms to his own requirements which was the key to his greatness. With consummate skill he translated the character of Albi to the heights of Red Hill to create a church which, despite the exponential growth of Brisbane, still dominates the skyline.

Dods was the first to recognise that the ecclesiastical buildings should be designed to suit the exigencies of the local climate. Regretably this lesson was not learned by his contemporaries and subsequent churches reverted to European traditions which had been developed to suit temperate climates. Dods' design for St Brigid's enabled the entire walls of the nave to be opened to allow the church to be cross-ventilated. He protected these openings with verandahs in recognition that the hot months in Brisbane were generally accompanied by monsoon rains. His eye to detail was meticulous even whimsical. The interior is majestic and surprisingly contemporary in its austere simplicity. Whilst it borrowed from the Albi Cathedral the general mass and Gothic feeling, it is by no means a replica of Albi. Dods had merely reiterated the character and scale - the detailing, especially the shape of the buttresses, the finials and the arches at the top of the walls are all of his own invention. In the fullness of time, I should like to think that money could be found to bring the bridge connecting the presbytery to the church into line with the form of the church. This, I think, would be a worthy objective for St Brigid's parish.

Within a week of the opening of St Brigid's, Archbishop Duhig laid the foundation stone for St Columba's Church, Wilston. This is the first of three churches designed by G. H. M. Addison. The others are St Benedict's, East Brisbane and Sacred Heart, Rosalie.

The eclecticism in St Columba's is not definitive. The Gothic form had been used for the roof and the finials at the top of the buttresses, but the decor is strongly Romanesque. It is the first manifestation of the style which was to be used almost exclusively in the churches of this part of the Duhig era. The external treatment is in face brick relieved by the treatment of lintols and parapets in cement render. The apsidal form of the sanctuary is forthright and plain in contrast to the Rosalie church, and in my view, is more successful because of the use of the external verandah which repeats and reinforces the roof form of the sanctuary. The interior is distinguished by a beautiful timber ceiling, again of Gothic character, but the Roman arches dominate. The roofed verandah around the sanctuary is reminiscent of Dods' use of covered verandahs in St Brigid's and must have made for greater comfort in the sanctuary, at least.

The contract price for St Columba's was 2,064 pounds. Compare that with the 15,000 pounds for St Brigid's. It was built on a site purchase for 800 pounds. Archbishop Mannix was present at the laying of the foundation stone. The church was not a parish church until 1916. Up to that date it was administered from St Patrick's in the Valley. It was opened on 3 January, 1915, and signalled a temporary halt to church building, no

doubt, because of World War I, until early 1917 when more churches were begun.

The first of these was St Benedict's, East Brisbane. The foundation stone was laid on 18 March, 1917, and it was opened for worship some five months later on 12 August. It is a simpler version of St Columba's and, as mentioned, was designed by Addison.

His third church was Sacred Heart, Rosalie. As was the case with St Brigid's, St Columba's and St Benedict's the site was superb. The exuberance of St Columba's, significantly absent in St Benedict's is repeated in the Sacred Heart Church. Indeed in my own mind, I have christened them the twin churches. The foundation stone was laid just three months after St Benedict's on 17 June, 1917. The external treatment not only in form, but in finish, is extraordinarily similar to St Columba's as if Addison wanted a repeat performance of his earlier success. The facade is dominated by a splendid rose window. The sanctuary is once again apsidal in form, but in this instance, the surrounding verandah roof is concealed behind a parapet. The sanctuary contains three attractive circular windows repeating the theme of the rose window at the front and giving the sanctuary an airy quality. The roof is more truly Romanesque than St Columba's and repeats the form expressed in the fenestration. It was opened on 16 June, 1918, in the presence of Bishop Shiel of Rockhampton and Bishop Heavey the Vicar Apostolic of North Queensland, and was dedicated by the Apostolic Delegate, Monsignor Cattaneo. The occasional sermon was preached by Fr W. Barry who later became Coadjutor Archbishop of Hobart. The cost - 8400 pounds.

Within three months of the laying of the foundation stone of Sacred Heart, Archbishop Duhig laid the stone for the church of Our Lady Help of Christians at Nanango on 23 September, 1917. This building reintroduces the Gothic form and is unique in that sense, although two years later another Gothic church would be built, this time in Warwick. I have been unable to find out who the architect was - perhaps the same architects - Bornbusch and Connally who designed the Warwick church. A close look at the side elevation will reveal the same detail of buttresses and finials which was used at Wilston and Rosalie. The corner buttresses are remarkably similar to the buttresses used at Albi Cathedral, but I rather think there is no direct relationship, the conical form being quite common to the Gothic style. The building was opened by the archbishop on 26 May, 1918, and cost 4000 pounds. It was opened free of debt.

The following year, on 24 August, 1919, Bishop Cattaneo laid the foundation stone of Our Lady of Victories, Bowen Hills, and here we are faced with something of a mystery. What started off as a church in the Gothic style, ended up as the only church in the archdiocese to be built in the Spanish Mission style. The architects of the original style were T. R. Hall and Prentice. (Hall was later to design the Brisbane City Hall.) I assume, although I haven't been able to establish it for certain, that they were the architects for the building which was built.

The church was intended to be a peace offering and a thanksgiving to God for the successful termination of World War I and was to be a memorial to those who gave their lives in that conflict. In the words of the day - "the site of the new building is magnificent. It overlooks the Brisbane River as it enters on the almost straight stretch to the bay and was, at one time, the location of 'Folkstone', the home of the Perry family". It was opened on 26 May, 1925, which is also something of a mystery, and obviously something happened in those six years to cause the delay and the change of design. It is recorded that at the opening ceremony T. C. Beirne donated fifty pounds. Cash on hand was 1350 pounds and the building cost 9000 pounds.

The building was constructed of stuccoed brick with ornamentation in typical Spanish Mission style. It is the first of the churches mentioned so far to have a tower.

The interior is superb with a magnificent timber ceiling and stained glass which is the work of William Bustard, one of Brisbane's best and least recognised artists. He was responsible for artwork in the Holy Spirit Church, New Farm, and the famous murals in the Tattersal's Club. In particular, the rising sun of the Army badge surmounted by a cross, which appears at the top of each window is most appropriate. It is now the parish church of the Polish community in Brisbane.

The archbishop seems to have paused to catch his breath after the laying of the stone of Our Lady of Victories. The next church he began was Blessed Oliver Plunkett, Cannon Hill. He laid the foundation stone on 19 June, 1921. The original church was quite small and it was later extended by the addition of the transepts, the front portico and alterations in the sanctuary. The extension had been handled in a masterful fashion. The alterations also added generous roofed verandahs to the nave to provide good cross-ventilation - the same concept originated by Dods in St Brigid's. The supporting columns pierce the roof in much the same way as St Columba's and Sacred Heart, but here the similarity ends as the piers are superbly sculptured in an idiom entirely of brick. The result makes it, in my view, one of the finest churches in the archdiocese. It is difficult to separate old from new in the interior, but I think the transformation should be documented for the benefit of future generations.

The records indicate that this church was opened by Archbishop Mannix on 7 August, 1921, which is less than two months after the foundation stone was laid. Either the record is wrong or the original church was very small indeed, or the foundation stone was laid after the building was well advanced.

St Agatha's Church, Clayfield, was the next to be added to the archbishop's growing record of church buildings and for the first time, he seems to have been unable to 'capture' the hill top. While it is elevated above the land south of it, it is well below the crown of the hill upon which St Rita's stands. The foundation stone was laid by Archbishop Cattaneo on 10 August, 1924. (Unfortunately the files in the archives from this period onwards were away being microfilmed and I am unable to supply much detail.) St Agatha's was extended relatively recently by Monsignor English in a style which preserved the character of the building and here again we see the strong Roman influence in the exterior and interior treatment. The superb font was donated by Archbishop Duhig's family.

The following year, in June 1925, the archbishop laid the foundation stone for Corpus Christi, Nundah. This church is remarkable for its beautiful copper-sheathed dome - a portent of things to come, for work began on the site of the Holy Name Cathedral in the same year. The scale is intriguing. From the exterior one expects the building to be large, no doubt the effect is enhanced by the splendid dome. On entering the building one realises it is simply a parish church. This church is one of the finest examples of the Romanesque basilica form in Brisbane.

If Wilston and Rosalie are the twins of the archdiocese, the next group of churches are the triplets. The Laidley church, St James, Coorparoo, and Sts Peter & Paul, Bulimba are almost identical. Indeed the parish priest of St James wanted a "church exactly like Laidley"; and that is what he got. The architect, M. L. Marks, and the builder were both from Toowoomba. The foundation stone was laid on 25 January, 1925, and it was opened on 29 November of the same year at a cost of 10,000 pounds. The Romanesque style is reminiscent of Thomas Jefferson's architecture in Virginia with its expressed classical frame, brick infill and circular clerestory windows.

The face brick idiom is carried through to the interior. Sts Peter & Paul, Bulimba, was begun the following year - the foundation stone was laid on 9 May, 1926. The plan form is identical to the others, however, the absence of the expressed frame robs it

of the lightness of the others, externally, at least.

During this time, the archbishop was busy with his plans for the Holy Name Cathedral and his next venture, which brings to an end this period, is the Holy Spirit Church, New Farm. The stone was laid on 1 June, 1930. The architect was Jack Donohue who had been Jack Hennessy's 'man in Brisbane'. This church, also distinguished by a tower and made of the famous Benedict stone, (which was to be the building material for the Holy Name Cathedral), for the detailed work in the pediment and in the areas which show up as white in photographs. It, too, boasts the work of William Bustard - the frieze of angels in the sanctuary dome and the stained glass windows. The Benedict stone has shown a remarkable resistance to weathering. It is as fresh looking today on Holy Spirit Church as it must have been when it was first laid.

The Holy Name Cathedral could well be the subject of a lecture all on its own. It is, of course, common knowledge that the project died because of poor financial planning. Archbishop Duhig was very much a man who made his own decisions and he was not one to operate through committees. He was at the best of times vague as far as money was concerned and did not establish a sound financial plan to achieve his ambitions.

It is ironic, therefore, that the man who contributed so much to Brisbane by way of church buildings should have been unable to realise his most cherished project.

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