

## *PAPER II*

### *HERITAGE AND THE BRISBANE CHURCH*

(This article was prepared before the Queensland Heritage legislation was introduced. It was produced also before the magnificent restoration/renovation of St Mary's by Mr Maurice Hurst, Fr Harry Bliss and the Maryborough parishioners was completed.)

Recently I attended the funeral of the late Monsignor Robert Lyons in Maryborough. In his lifetime much of the history of the diocese occurred and he contributed more than anyone else to the development of the Northern sector. It occurred to me, as I looked around the church in which he had served for more than thirty years, that it was not only one of the most beautiful churches in the archdiocese but also one of the most historic. It had been served by pioneers, clerical, religious and laity, and by notable personalities. In a provincial city like Maryborough it both served and witnessed to the development of the local community. It is not easy to define "heritage", but many of the elements that occur in heritage legislation and discussion are present in St Mary's, Maryborough. Its history and various restorations, extensions and renewals may serve as a basis for discussion of heritage and all the buildings, sites and customs of the Brisbane Church.

Among extant major churches St Mary's is the second oldest. Only the first St Stephen's antedates it. However, the present building has a pre-history that puts us into the Polding era. The first recorded Mass - not necessarily the first Mass - was celebrated in 1852 by Fr Hanly, who liked to call himself, not quite accurately, the Parish Priest of Queensland. It was held in the home of the police sergeant, McAdam. It was in the "old township", the first site of Maryborough. The sergeant was well known in the history of the town. He is buried in the old cemetery. His grave, with some others, is of historical significance to the church and to the city. Another pioneer undoubtedly present at that Mass was James Cleary, a generous patron whose name is connected with every movement in the foundations of the church in Maryborough. He was the first person buried from the present church. His grave, too, is of major significance. One of the first Sisters of St Joseph, too, is buried in the old cemetery. That site is part of our heritage.

In 1858 a timber church/school was opened on a site made available as a result of a

grant under the Burke Church Act. There are very few such sites in Queensland, since the first Queensland Parliament abolished the Act for the Colony in 1860. The building became the boys' school until the coming of the Christian Brothers in 1888. The first teacher in the church/school was James Cleary. The building had a history. It was of timber construction with a shingle roof, an art form of historical interest. A problem with these buildings was that they were temporary, and usually meant to be so. There are everywhere waves of structures:- (1) The Pioneering building, small, often crude, not meant to last; (2) the replacement, usually brick or better quality hardwood with stone architectural pretensions; the architect is often one of the great series of the expansionist period of Queensland, 1870-1890; (3) the "final" structure built when it seemed that local development had reached its peak. This may be by a new building altogether, as at Woolloowin, or by building on to the second phase structure, as at Maryborough. The latter alternative raises interesting problems of consistency of style and relocation of parts. A little reflection on the history of any of the older parishes will reveal these three stages and prompt a search for the first stage site and buildings and the superseded furnishings. In some cases, as in the travelling churches of the Beaudesert parish, a fascinating history comes to light, one which reflects the development of the district and the growth of the parish.

Timber churches deserve special attention, especially in Queensland where, until very recently, timber remained a preferred material. The disappearance of our magnificent hardwoods has made the surviving timber churches of more than inherent value. A cultural form which spoke of our regional life is disappearing. We need to defend what remains. There are two types - the primary first phase buildings, which may have been crude but which are becoming close to unique, and which may illustrate some pioneering building techniques. An excellent example may be seen in the Anglican church of St Augustine's in Leyburn or the Anglican Chapter House in Townsville. Many pragmatic pastors and congregations would like to knock such buildings down and build a modern functional church or hall; but the Leyburn church is an example of "single skin exposed stud frame construction". An architect from Norway, where medieval timber churches are one of the country's most treasured cultural assets, described St Augustine's as "a church of international significance". The same author sees no reason why our 19th century hardwood structures should not last 800 years, like those of Norway. He sounds a warning. Out of many hundreds of Norwegian medieval timber churches, only twenty-nine survive - not because of the ravages of Norway's severe climate, but because of human neglect and bad judgment.

The second phase timber churches of the late 19th century or early 20th century were frequently in smaller towns of country parishes. Before the transport revolution of the last decades a country parish might have from four to ten such churches.

Declining population and easy access to bigger towns made obsolete many timber structures of considerable historic and artistic worth. The community value of the churches has been tragically neglected. Some churches were sold, some were converted to other uses. Changing economic and social factors are now making many of these churches necessary again. The ravages of neglect and the changing liturgy have made restoration and/or renewal necessary. A splendid example of sensible and sensitive treatment is seen in St Patrick's, Pomona. A sad case, what may yet be regretted, is seen in the sale of the 1928 church of St John the Evangelist, Bauple, in the parish of Maryborough. A charming illustration of Australian timber Gothic, it fitted its setting like a natural feature.

It is a sad fact that not all country churches are charming. Anglican Bishop Webber, who built many and replaced others, spoke of "those familiar white-painted timber boxes which dot the Queensland landscape". The dots are disappearing and some of them are little loss; but the fate of those remaining needs careful consideration.

To return to St Mary's: the diocese of Brisbane was erected in 1859. In 1861 the first bishop, James Quinn arrived. Within weeks he was in Maryborough and left behind him Paul Tissot A.A., as parish priest. By 1869 a foundation stone was laid for a larger, phase two church. It was opened in February 1872. It was in red brick - some still seen in the organ pump room - like the superseded phase two church at Wooloowin. Its architecture was "Early English" Gothic. Many people find an anomaly in red brick Gothic, but this was more graceful than most. The then ground plan was a "headless cross", leaving room for future extension with transepts and a larger sanctuary. The overall internal dimensions were 81' 6" by 38' (approximately 40m by 11m). Bishop Quinn described it as "a nice church intended as the first portion of a cathedral". Here we see another significance about St Mary's: it was seen as the centre of a future diocese. There were a number of sculptured scenes executed by Dean Tissot himself in the exterior walls and "a handsome fretted screen" separating nave and sanctuary - also the Dean's work. The altar was carved by Brother Polycarp, another French Augustinian of the Assumption. In future renewals of the structure these precious items disappeared. For historical, cultural and cultic reasons, this was destruction of our heritage. It is a serious practical and financial problem, when structural changes have to be made, to preserve something which has become an integral part of the structure to be changed; but pragmatism cannot be our sole guide. Nor may we make artistic judgments based on contemporary values. Our lived past speaks to us and enhances our lives in the expressions of faith and devotion of our forebears.

The plans were said to be by Charles Tiffin, first Colonial Architect. A letter from Father Tissot suggests that the plans - or perhaps the preliminary sketches -

were his, later appraised by Tiffin. Whatever is the truth, the building was a valuable piece by one of the pioneering architects, who set the style and taste of colonial Queensland. It is a piece of community, as well as church, heritage.

It is worth noting that at the opening the choir sang the Mozart Mass No. 12. There are other indications of this particular Mass in the early Brisbane repertoire. In some old church lofts or basements copies of the music may still exist. They are part of our heritage, as is the Mass. It would be an appropriate piece for a notable Brisbane occasion.

In 1875 Dean Tissot moved on and Father Thomas O'Brien took his place. Three years later he died suddenly in Bundaberg. In 1881 his body was transferred into St Mary's with a stone monument. This ancient practice was discontinued in the Colonies, leaving only a few instances in Queensland. Those that remain should be preserved and discreetly highlighted. These are pioneers and, even in that, bearers of a tradition beyond our shores.

In 1879 Father John O'Reilly was appointed. He carried out some of the extensions envisaged in 1872. In 1885, again to the tune of Mozart's 12, he added a 40' by 57' section ( approx. 12m by 17m). He preserved the plain Gothic interior, but introduced on incongruous note, "imitation marble pillars". In 1898 he was made Administrator of St Stephen's. He died suddenly in 1904, and the Maryborough parishioners placed a plaque in commemoration in St Mary's.

In 1898 Philip Brady was appointed parish priest. He made a number of important contributions to Maryborough's heritage. In 1912 he installed a new type of organ and blower at the cost of £900. It is a unique model in Australia, a manual action Whitehouse organ with electric pump. It is a heritage item of rare value for culture as well as cult. Associated with it is the name of Concannon. Josie was organist for fifty years. Her sister became an international opera singer. Both were trained by the Sisters of Mercy in Maryborough. The name is commemorated on a plaque. A personal association like that is part of the heritage of St Mary's.

In 1913 Father Brady raised a new bell to complement the parish and community amenities. Archbishop Duhig, who blessed it, called it "this sweet-toned bell". Bells are no longer welcome in many secularised communities. Modern churches usually do not install them; but those that have them can find ways and times for an acceptable use.

Father Brady was committed to sodalities. The Brisbane Church has a colourful and effective tradition of Sacred Heart, Children of Mary, Holy Name, Hibernians

with banners and regalia. Parishes should preserve and sometimes use the heritage which tells of this most vital period of our Church life. When Father Philip died in 1922, a plaque to his memory was placed in the church. It has disappeared, as has a brass plaque to a notable family of benefactors, the O'Regans. The brother of the last pastor, Father Patrick Brady, served from 1922 to 1926. He came from Gayndah, a fact commemorated by a personal chalice he left in Maryborough. It is only one of a number of handsome and valuable pieces of liturgical furnishing. Many churches have similar treasures. Too many are allowed to languish and tarnish in culpable neglect.

In 1926 arrived the great renewer of St Mary's, Monsignor J.F. McCarthy. He came from Red Hill, a fact attested by another opulent chalice. At Red Hill he built the famous St Brigid's which still dominates our city. He was still in the mood and set about Maryborough with a will. He built a new presbytery, furnished throughout by the firm of Rosenstaengel. This was one of the furnishing houses that dominated public and domestic buildings since earliest colonial days. Rosenstaengel's were a leading Catholic family with associations in every phase of Catholic life. Such a complete collection of a style deserves to be retained. When the presbytery had to be moved, much of it was, and we are all the beneficiaries of such good judgment; but there have been many cases of disposing of heritage items for contemporary junk.

In 1936 the Monsignor turned his attention to the parish church. He completely remodelled St Mary's. The building was turned around completely from end to end to provide easier access and to take advantage of more space for a proper setting. This was exquisitely achieved. Since there were no major liturgical or stylistic changes involved, the complete upheaval caused no serious internal problems. The new sacristy was designed to serve as a mortuary chapel, an unusual feature in Queensland.

However, certain heritage issues arise. This was the Duhig Roman Basilica period. Though the Gothic style was retained, an enlarged open area in the chancel was provided. This made for greater visibility of the altar. But a clashing note was introduced by what His Grace described as "magnificent sanctuary columns", which support a canopy around which ran a Latin text, reminiscent of Roman Basilica style. A later addition of a bank of lights has obscured the best features of this canopy. The lighting itself is excellent, but it has shut out what it should light up. The columns are unique. They are a significant stylistic variation with heritage value. Renewal as well as restoration should, as far as possible, preserve the style of the original. The 1936 renewal did not do so in this instance, but its very fault has created a new interest. Even mistakes at times are more appreciated than textbook orthodoxy. The great Cathedral of St Stephen in Vienna is an interesting case in point. Built over centuries,

it displays an almost ludicrous variety of styles. These are themselves an historical document, but the actual confusion has become the most loved feature of the building. After World War II the authorities had the opportunity, in repairing war damage, to correct the stylistic faults. The public outcry convinced them that there was more than material and style involved. The lives and the faith of centuries of Viennese were involved. They, too, were a part of the heritage.

At this time many new furnishings were added, including the fine Corser window over the main door. It is sad that the historic Tissot items disappeared. His Grace was delighted to find yet another sculptor in Maryborough, Mr Prout, who produced a fine altar work. He was so pleased that he commissioned statues of Sts Peter and Paul. It is believed that the sword held by St Paul was a relic of Waterloo. At one stage the statues were moved and placed at ground level. The result was that the features were seen at an angle never intended by the artist so they appeared distorted. In ensuing liturgical changes, when the massacre of the innocents swept our churches, they were removed even further. However, they were put to good use, sent to a church of Sts Peter and Paul in Canberra. In the same modification of the sanctuary the reredos of the altar was detached and placed on the back wall. The work was delicately done, so that the table and reredos still look attached to the eye, while allowing ample room for movement around the liturgical table.

The liturgical renewal creates heritage problems. An extreme case was seen in the Cathedral of Cuernavaca in Mexico. Historically Mexico had produced a unique style. If the Rococo had been a development upon the Baroque, Flemish Rococo had produced an almost tropical lushness of involved decoration. In Mexico this became Churubusco, thick and cloying as a rainforest. Whether or not it was attractive or useful, it was specifically Mexican, and Cuernavaca was a special case, since it was founded by Hernando Cortes himself. Yet, with the co-operation of the Mexican Department of Colonial Monuments, the Bishop in the late 1950s, before Vatican II, stripped all the excrescences away, and created an open area for stunning liturgies, with which he transformed one of the most communist cities in the country. A bonus was the discovery of an historical mural on the original walls.

There are a number of factors involved in this situation. Often heritage advocates are motivated by preservation only, not recognizing the dynamic of a continuing society. Property owners, including Churches, are concerned with changes forced on them by demography, by the economy, by -in the case of the Churches - refined pastoral or liturgical needs. Neither side has the sole right. We need a development which serves, not just preserves, tradition. Many interested in building preservation are, in fact, not interested in churches or the Church as such. Since they will determine public policy, it is essential that the Church be seen to act responsibly in all

renewal, and that she make her needs and views known in the appropriate places and in proper fashion. Legislation in some States has given power to Heritage Councils to impose legal restraints and consequent financial burdens on the owners of "historic" buildings. The Church must face the situation and ensure that any such restraints are just and practical.

It would not be proper to take the history of St Mary's any closer to the present. I trust that its story has illustrated some of the items that are "heritage", and some of the questions that its changing has imposed. How do these relate to Heritage legislation, agencies and ideals?

Australia came late to Heritage legislation. Policy had been hammered out in older countries for decades, but the approach of the Bicentennial alerted Australian governments and people to the fact that we are no longer a young country, even as a European nation. The most influential Heritage group met at Venice in 1966 and produced the International Council on Monuments and Sites - ICOMAS. Its principles have been accepted by many governments and heritage authorities. Groups committed to the ICOMAS philosophy have formed in many countries, including Australia. In 1981 ICOMAS Australia met in the historic South Australian town of Burra and adopted the ICOMAS Australian Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance. This is known as the Burra Charter. It set out in 29 clauses the principles, definitions, processes and practices of conservation of important sites and buildings. It is the most significant document in Australian heritage. Commonwealth legislation, including the Australian Heritage Commission Act of 1975, shows the influence of ICOMAS, and publications of the Commission make direct use of the Burra Charter.

Some people have reservations about the stress on conservation. Does it mean mere preservation or restoration only? The language of the Charter does lean that way, but it does make provision for ongoing development in needs and uses. The Commission draws up a list or Register of "places". In itself it imposes no restrictions on the properties concerned except on Commonwealth properties; hence the outcry over the Queen Street Commonwealth Bank building scheduled to be knocked down by Kern Corporation. Some States have created Heritage Councils which do have statutory powers to prohibit certain uses or changes in the listed buildings. The Church has a natural interest in future legislation which may extend such powers. The Church maintains the need to allow for continuing, dynamic, pastoral and liturgical needs of Churches. At the same time Churches must accept that their buildings have a cultural and community value as well as purely ecclesiastical.

There is no need for the Church to envisage the future with apprehension. A

number of Church "places" are listed in the National Estate or in Queensland lists. The attention drawn to them can be to the Church's advantage. The expertise being developed in the care and enhanced use of some of our buildings can be to the advantage of all. Listing can be directly or indirectly a source of financial assistance. Some instances in our Archdiocese are particularly encouraging. St Patrick's, Mt Perry is a good case in point. Mt Perry was once a thriving provincial city with mining as the basis of its success. The parish of Mt Perry was established in 1874. A first phase timber church was replaced by a stylish 2nd phase timber structure in 1904. The interior panelling and furnishings reflected the wealth of the community. Till World War II it supported two priests. The mines died and the meat industry declined. Mt Perry became almost a ghost town but not quite. It was absorbed into the parish of Gin Gin, itself now part of Childers. The church was used periodically, but the cost of maintenance was too much for the tiny population. It seemed that this fine piece of our heritage would decay. The liturgical changes after Vatican II were accomplished with respect for the established style; but the problem remained. Under the 1975 Commonwealth Heritage Act it was adjudged part of the National Estate and provision for various grants was recommended. Several external sections had collapsed - guttering, porch, gable and sacristy stairs. The walls needed painting and a suitable colour scheme was recommended. The Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Conservation made funds available to the State Department of the Arts, National Parks and the Environment for the study of the situation: \$1,800. The total cost of repair and painting came to \$28,386.25. Another grant of \$17,000 and a Bicentennial grant of \$5,000 left the parish liable for only \$5,886.35. The architects were Allom Lovell Marquis Kyle Pty. Ltd. Co-operation between Church authorities, heritage-minded architects and Government departments produced a happy result. The work was awarded a John Herbert Award for Excellence in 1988.

The *Catholic Leader* on the 4th of February 1990 carried the story of the renewal/restoration of St Francis Xavier's, Goodna. The Parish celebrated its centenary in 1981. It had already a phase 2 church in 1881, and until the recent population changes its size and capacity were adequate. It was a pleasant Gothic building, stone walls, timbered roof and shingles. Bishop James Quinn founded it. The architect was Signor Stambuco, one of the major architects of the time, associated with some of the principal church buildings in the diocese. In 1915 the church was extended by adding a brick apse, cut into the stone wall. Vatican II called for modifications. It was a time for experiments, some of which had a disturbing effect on the structure and on the congregation.

This time no grant was sought but a combination of architect, pastor and congregation with heritage and usage in view produced a remarkable result. It was both a renovation and a restoration. The altar, which had been moved into the centre of the



church, was restored to the sanctuary; but the latter has been projected further into the nave to achieve the desired closeness. The former pews, in poor condition, had created an awkward access to the sanctuary. Pews from the old Stafford church allowed for open and intimate arrangement. St Stephen's Cathedral supplied carpet. The *Leader* picture shows how tablets, stations, glass and statutes have been preserved without dominating the Eucharistic assembly building. Altar rails have been re-employed around the Blessed Sacrament altar. The choir gallery, not used in the new liturgy, was removed. It was not original, and it had blocked the view of a beautiful window, now fully visible. Mr Bruce Buchanan, an architect who worked with the Parliament House restoration, was consulted; but the architect for the work was a parishioner, Mt Hubert van Hoof. Parishioners assisted in the work and the costs were a modest \$50,000.

Heritage is an important issue for the Brisbane Church. It is our lived history, and to abandon it is to abandon our organic past. We can look forward to much exciting development in the future, which will be part of our continuing presence in the Queensland community.

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