

HOLY NAME CATHEDRAL – FACT AND FICTION

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One day in 1974 I received a phone call from a prominent Brisbane journalist, asking for the story of Holy Name Cathedral and its funds. As it happened, I had recently finished the research on that topic. I asked her if she wanted the facts or the fiction. She replied rather huffily that she was a journalist: she wanted the facts. I gave them to her. Next day she published in a full page of *The Courier-Mail* the most lurid and ludicrous of the fictions.

It is still impossible to convince people of the truth. Some years ago a Catholic visitor complained to Archbishop Rush that a City Council tourist bus driver was telling the usual scandalous stories about Holy Name. He lodged a complaint to the Council. After a while a change was made: they now told the stories about St Stephen's.

The actual story is dramatic enough to need no overlay of invention. James Duhig never liked St Stephen's. It was too small, it was Gothic – he preferred Roman style – and it did not provide the grandeur he thought the Church and Brisbane demanded.

When he returned to Brisbane in 1912, he had already decided that Brisbane should be redesigned, and that its centre should be his cathedral. It would not be St Stephen's. While Bishop of Rockhampton he had used the skill of architect Jack Hennessey. They became friends and in the last days of Archbishop Dunne they roved Brisbane's thoroughfares and envisaged a new metropolis more to their liking. There would be a new magnificent City Hall. It would stand across a grand square from the imposing cathedral. It would be in The Valley.

The new Greater Brisbane came into existence in 1925. It needed a bigger City Hall, and the town was still suffering from the after effects of the Nineties floods. The town was moving to The Valley. After considering three sites in this vicinity Duhig settled on Duncan's Hill opposite All Hallows. It was unfortunate that the land was already occupied by one of the city's notable buildings, *Dara*, the Bishop's House. The original *Dara* had been a pioneer city building, always ramshackle, but in the early Nineties a shambles. While Robert Dunne was overseas, G.W. Gray and T.C. Beirne put up an attractive house, which all loved. James blew it up. T.C. never forgave him. Their long time friendship was put under considerable strain.

James was ready to go in 1926. First he needed a grand plan and a grand bank balance. Hennessey was engaged to provide the plan. James would use his persuasive skill and convenient conscience to raise the money. He was confident on both scores. One of the problems of putting the facts is that neither archbishop nor architect was business-like about arrangements. They were friends, they shared enthusiasm, they relied on each other's word. This was good, but they had to rely on each other's memories instead of memoranda of agreement.

Even before Robert Dunne died, Hennessey provided various designs for the cathedral, which they then intended to call Sacred Heart. It was only after Duhig visited Chicago in 1925 for the Eucharistic Congress in their cathedral of Holy Name that he settled on the name that haunted him for forty years. These 'designs' were simple sketches, and they varied. They enthused about one of them in the parlour at *Dara*, while Dunne was lying in bed upstairs, perhaps chuckling about his Will, which would torpedo their plans. Monsignor James Byrne, later first Bishop of Toowoomba, asked how much it would cost. Hennessey told him £250,000. Byrne said that the people of Brisbane would not give 250 pence for it.

After Duhig assumed command in 1917 the first problem was to find a site. Monsignor Byrne again had a sardonic comment. Facetiously he suggested *Dara*. They were to remember this much more seriously later on. At first Duhig favoured a site next to St Ann's in Ann Street. He purchased it from the City Council. He later tried to sell it back to them for City Hall. Hennessey decided it was not long enough for his basilica, and Duhig thought, ironically, that traffic noise would make it impractical. In 1925 he announced that the place would be Duncan's Hill, *Dara*.

He let out a contract to H. Cheetham for excavating and levelling the site. Hennessey insisted that they should prepare foundations for the whole cathedral at once, since it would be impractical to blast after the construction of the shell had commenced. In February 1925 he sent his first claim for fees, 3% on £25,000.

James sprang into action raising funds. He approached several wealthy Catholics, who all promised large sums. Some paid up. In September 1927 he went to Rome to arrange the setting up of the dioceses of Townsville and Toowoomba. He arranged for Cardinal Cerretti to come as Papal Legate for the Sydney Eucharistic Congress, and come on to Brisbane to lay a foundation stone for Holy Name. He was riding high. He went through the art shops and galleries like a drunken sailor on shore leave. He spent all the existing Holy Name funds.

Returned to Brisbane, he arranged a whirlwind campaign to raise the wind. He appealed for £40,000 from the parishes and promised that he would not ask for more till construction began. The four pastors who raised the most were made monsignori. He preached everywhere himself and appointed Father Tim O'Connor as questor. He established a Million Shillings Fund, the names of the donors to be inscribed in a Golden Book, which would be kept in the Cathedral. Children were asked to find a Million Pennies.

He himself pledged £1,000 p.a. and hoped the clergy would follow. He offered the grand steps for £3,000. The Children of Mary offered £3,000 for a Lady Chapel and he urged other organisations to do the same. The town was entertained to a series of Grand Balls, including a Grand Jazz at the O'Connor Boathouse, then the in-place for the gilded youth of Brisbane. School concerts and dances were arranged for Holy Name. The newspapers announced a Grand Concert (*Daily Mail*) or Divertissement Classique (*Courier*). There were Sacred Concerts in St. Stephen's. Sign of things to come, there was a Grand Art Union with prizes from the Archbishop's 'valuable' pictures. The Queensland Parliament was asked to pass a Brisbane Roman Catholic Cathedral Sale Act.

At Hennessey's recommendation Duhig engaged the southern firm of Concrete Constructions Ltd. to take over the work on 9 February, 1928. This was taken badly by Brisbane contractors. Duhig always maintained that the arrangement was for the building to be done in stages, each independently paid for. Hennessey claimed that Duhig had from the beginning contracted for the whole cathedral. The CCL contract called for £10,000 on 1 October 1928 and thereafter 10% each quarter. On 19 February an article appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, repeated in the Brisbane papers, that a contract had been signed for £1,000,000. Duhig denied this in the Brisbane papers. He sent a telegram of protest to Hennessey, who denied that he had authorized the article.

By September 1928 there were 283 more workmen on the site. The weekly wage bill, at day labour rates, reached £1,600. Up to foundation stone day costs rose to £84,000. Duhig announced £120,000, but this included the purchase of Benedict Stone works for up to £40,000. The project was kept constantly in the Press. There was a stream of 'first sod' turnings; on one occasion three in one day. There was a picture of 'James the Riveter' and the first rivet. Local and visiting firemen were photographed with the

star, on the site. Many articles appeared in the Australian and foreign Press. To settle the anxieties of Brisbane Catholics who were disturbed by the threat to St Stephen's, in March 1927 he issued a Pastoral Letter, in which he declared that Bishop Quinn had bought land in Spring Hill for a new cathedral, and that the third Bishop of Brisbane would build it.

On 30 May 1929 Leo Drinan sent Duhig a set of dimensions for Holy Name. This may argue that Hennessey knew the future shape of the cathedral, but not that plans and specifications existed.

They were as follows:

▪ Overall length	340'	(AGE 33)
▪ Overall width of transepts	240'	(AGE 220)
▪ Overall width across nave and aisles	100'	
▪ Width of nave	50'	
▪ Internal diameter of dome	80'	
▪ External diameter of dome	100'	
▪ Height to top of dome	278'	
▪ Width of facade, incl. towers	120'	
▪ Height of towers	120'	
▪ Height of barrel vault over nave	77'	
▪ Ambulatory or chevet	12'	
▪ Seven radiating chapels in ambulatory		
▪ Two transept chapels		
▪ Four main pillars	5000 tons each	
▪ Seating for	4000	

By September 1928 they had used:

- 60,000 tons of stone excavated
- 5,000 cubic yards of concrete poured
- 160 tons of steel
- 33,000 bags of cement
- 5,000,000 bricks laid
- foundation stone 4½ tons of granite (presumably each)
- independently overall area reported 55,000 square feet.

In September 1928 Duhig went to Sydney where, to the annoyance of Michael Kelly, he stole the show. He returned to Brisbane on 11 September, to be followed on 14 September by the Legate and a host of important and colourful guests. These he flashed around Brisbane in flag-fluttering motorcades to call on VIPs and Catholic institutions. Father Martindale, sj, wrote a book about his visit to Australia. He included an adulatory and inexact account of the extravaganza of the 'Napoleonic Archbishop'.

It was all too much for even Duhig's constitution. On the great day he had influenza, but nothing could keep him away. A crowd of 35,000 swarmed over and around Duncan's Hill, when at 3 pm a long procession of prelates led Cerretti across Ann Street from All Hallows. Monsignor Caccia Dominioni, later the Cardinal who announced the election of Pius XII, carried a copper vessel containing soil from the catacombs to rest under a foundation stone. The Archbishop of Tuam, Monsignor Gilmartin, brought soil from the four provinces of Ireland. A granddaughter, of Captain Wickham, first Government Resident in Brisbane, sent from South America a medal to commemorate his place in

Brisbane history. Cerretti lowered his 4½ tons of granite on the catacombs soil. It was adorned with the coat of arms of the Pope. Gilmartin did the same for the Irish soil and Duhig. There followed ten unmemorable speeches, but the crowd lingered on into the dark. It was some kind of apotheosis for James.

He needed it, for then the fun began. The Knights of the Southern Cross took up a collection on the spot. It was not counted in time for the Press deadlines. The papers made up their own figures, which varied from £50,000 - £60,000. The Knights reported £42,000. The next day Duhig paid £16,000 to CCL. A month later he borrowed £40,000 from the Australian Bank of Commerce, to be paid directly to CCL. The firm itself was in financial difficulties. The Commerce Bank which cut its authorised overdraft from £35,000 to £10,000 was soon to crash. However, with CCL, Duhig was up to contract. The Benedict Stone cost was not announced. This, with the difference between the Press figures and the Knights' report, was enough to start rumours about a missing fortune.

The next year, 1929, was the year of the Great Crash. For ongoing work Duhig owed CCL £26,350. Now the Brisbane City Council struck for its pound of flesh. It decided that *Dara* was no longer an ecclesiastical residence, and it was not yet a church. It rated the site at £5,000. Desperate, Duhig tried to activate the Parliament's Act for sale of St Stephen's. To his annoyance his solicitor told him that he could not mortgage it. He offered the site for sale for £50,000. No one was interested.

Duhig may have thought the Good Fairy had blessed his day of glory on Duncan's Hill. The Bad Fairy was there as well, spinning lunatic legends and moronic malevolence. They had colourful stories about the apparent disappearance of the funds.

One I dearly love was the principal furphy in *The Courier-Mail* beat-up referred to earlier. In this Marx Brothers scenario the Papal Legate – or, even more sinister - an anonymous monsignor

packed all the money in a port and took it to Rome to be blessed by the Pope. The less charitable said he simply pocketed it – big pockets! Just what they imagined they meant I have often tried to discover. For one thing, surely the loot, much of it in coin, must have weighed a ton. Secondly, the Customs officials would have some suspicions about the weight. Thirdly, what form of blessing could even a pope devise for a bag full of Australian money? The accountants of Avignon, the financial age of the papacy, would blush. Of course, it would not occur to these scenarists that Duhig might have done just what it was collected for: paid his debts.

There is a charming variation of the tale of the port of gold. The bag was full not of prosaic coins and notes but of precious stones. What kind of stones varied, according to taste; but rubies were the favourite. It suggested scenes of oriental splendour and vice. I tracked down the source of this extravaganza.

Among the many exotic fund-raisers Duhig favoured was yet another spectacular Art Union. The principal prize was a ruby necklace offered by a city jewellery store. It was displayed in their window and photographed for the Press. Unfortunately, before the draw, the 1929 crash occurred. The firm could not afford its offer of rubies; but Duhig had to go ahead with the draw. He could not afford rubies either; so he had to offer substitutes of much less value. The ticket-holders – especially the winners – were understandably not impressed. The rubies had disappeared. The monsignor Pink Panther had struck again. It was a scam above rubies.

Duhig threatened to sue anyone who repeated the scandalous stories. As late as 1950 he asked his bankers to publish his accounts for the time to prove his integrity in the matter; but the stories were too good to be false. They are part of the folklore of Brisbane.

Of course, Roma oil was another source of whispered scandals. Duhig was in the United States in 1925. In California he was captivated by the miles and miles of citrus orchards in Orange County. He found more aesthetic pleasure in the derricks pumping oil in streams.

Like the Beverley Hills' Clampetts, he could see untold wealth paying for all his building schemes, especially his new cathedral. The oranges were a disappointment in his attempted agricultural college in Mapleton. Roma was more devastating. He was often cavalier in business dealings, but in the case of Roma – or rather Mooga Oil - he was a model of the prudent investor. Although he saw it not as a personal investment but a black cornucopia for the cathedral, he did not put any great amount of Church money into it – certainly not Holy Name money.

Many excellent Catholics believe that their parents or grandparents invested at Duhig's recommendation. In fact, he did not want many investors. He asked a few wealthy Catholics, not all in Queensland, to invest – hoping they would generously put much of the profits into the cathedral scheme. He was probably too enthusiastic about oil investment in general. There were many companies formed to search the Roma area and all were referred to as Roma Oil. Duhig certainly should bear some of the blame for the boom atmosphere, and he did publicly advise people to invest; but he did not ask them to invest in Mooga. One of those he did approach was the long suffering T. C. Beirne. Beirne imposed yet further strain on their friendship by replying that he did not believe in gambling. Still, the archbishop obtained for him a papal knighthood.

One day at Wynberg Sir James was musing at the dinner table. He asked – rhetorically, I am sure – what Brisbane would be like in a hundred years' time. Father Dinny O'Rourke, a true Nathaniel in whom there was no guile, wondered whether Holy Name would be finished. The organ voice boomed out, 'We give you thanks. Almighty God', and dinner was over.

But Dinny had a point: Holy Name was in some kind of stasis. What was going on?

Several things were going on, none of them edifying. During the Second World War, it was the site of a noisy fun fair. It became the haven of hoboes, rum bottles and things much less respectable, all on the sacred soil of the catacombs and the four provinces of Holy Ireland, and under the patronage of the pope and the archbishop, whose coats of arms greeted the revellers at the top of the grand steps.

It is true that in 1934 he had some success underground. He opened the Crypt at the cost of £9,000. This was at Hennessey's instructions and on a separate contract with Concrete Constructions. It was at the very depth of the Depression. It appeared that no one had any money, but Duhig's years of experience of Queensland told him where to find some and he took his share. The Crypt became a popular church of devotion. However, Duhig's insistence on building it was to circumvent the Council's piratical rates attack. The Crypt cost less than two years rates.

By the time the Depression was properly over, Second World War was on. In the post-war period the city boomed. He had to build more and more parishes with their churches, schools, convents and other institutions. Building materials were short and prices were high. He could no longer afford to build Holy Name. The last surviving cathedral operation was Light Street Benedict Stone workshop

The Benedict Stone story was one of the saddest shadows on the Holy Name enterprise. In 1929 he brought out from the United States a Mr Brown and his family. Brown was contracted to run the process. He was guaranteed an annual salary of £1,200. He installed the machinery and made the stone for Duhig's occasional jobs; but almost as soon as he came, the prospects of the cathedral stalled.

Duhig applied for the contracts for several State and Federal buildings to keep the works going. Despite his reliance on his influence with several politicians, he obtained not one contract. The major evidence of the stone is the old CML building next to the GPO. Hennessey's father had a theory that Australian buildings should be colourful. The colours on the CML make me glad that Holy Name was never built.

By 1940 Duhig was desperate. Throughout the Forties he tried to lease the premises, usually to steel processing plants. He was approached by the United States military forces to lease it as storage space. He actually let it out to the Royal Navy till 1945. One of the few profits he made was from a claim for damages for £2,000 - he actually got over £3,000. One of the schemes he contemplated was for making bomb casings, for which there was considerable demand. He flirted with the idea of literally turning the military hardware into ploughshares. One bright promise was from New Norcia, where the Benedictines were building a new cathedral. It came to nothing. All this time Mr Brown, who remained steady in his faith in the archbishop and his vision, was begging for his salary. The pleas went on, becoming more and more desperate. By 1955 he still was owed over £2,000. In May 1950 Duhig sold the premises to Queensland Pastoral Supplies for £20,000. He had the machinery valued at £10,000, but did not expect to get it. He had purchased the place for over £30,000. The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palace, the solemn temple were all dissolved and like some insubstantial pageant faded, leaving only a wreck behind on Duncan's Hill.

Mr Hennessey struck immediately. He had been patient for many years in claiming his commission. It would have been injudicious to dun the client while there was still a chance of finishing the job. The sale of Light Street was the signal that it was all over. Hennessey had written to Duhig in 1949 demanding £38,000. Duhig declared the amount a shock and asked for a detailed statement. Some months later Hennessey sent a long rambling reply which was not a statement.

Nothing further occurred till May 1950. The architect sued Duhig in the Queensland Supreme Court for the sum named above. The trial lasted a fortnight. It came on Duhig just as he was preparing to lead the Australian National Pilgrimage to Rome for the Holy Year. One of the most extraordinary facts in this extraordinary affair was that neither architect nor archbishop could produce adequate documentation for his case. The trial was dramatic and not at all edifying.

McGill KC was brutal in his examination of Hennessey, who handled the inquisition quite well despite his lack of clear proof. Mostyn Hanger for Hennessey was polite in his handling of the archbishop, but he nevertheless brought out the insufficiency of his documentation. Duhig's nephew, Frank Cullen, a cadet in the office of Leo Drinan, Hennessey's representative in Brisbane, and later in the Sydney office, worked on designs for the cathedral. He testified professionally that they were well drawn but inadequate. Mr Mullins for Concrete Constructions testified that his cost estimates for the plans came to £1,175,000.

Argument came down to two things, the agreement between Duhig and Hennessey and the architect's professional claims. Current practice was for 6% commission, made up of 1% of total on agreement, 3% on completion of drawings, 2% progressively on work as completed in stages. Ecclesiastical architects usually waived the first. Hennessey claimed to have sent Duhig a bill for 4% on £1,000,000, the 1% plus the 3%. There were difficulties about this.

Duhig claimed that no such agreement was signed, and there were never completed drawings. Mr Cullen's evidence made this clear. As well, Duhig's telegram within days of agreement repudiating the alleged cost and Hennessey's disclaimer ruled out the basis of the claim. By 1930 when it was evident there was no more work done, Duhig considered that the claim was for 6% on work completed. Duhig could unwillingly accept this. The sum would amount to £7,200.

Hennessey conceded that Duhig had paid £2,530. By 1950 he had reduced the debt considerably with a dribble of cheques for £500. Hennessey claimed to have sent an account for 4% on £500,000. The reduction was meant to be temporary in the difficult times. Duhig denied that he received it. McGill KC stated that Hennessey was entitled to £720.

Judge Matthews summed up the confusing affair. The jury should determine whether the drawings made were for the whole cathedral. In the confusion that was difficult to determine, the documentation being so inadequate. In the proceedings Duhig had the hide to claim that Hennessey was unbusinesslike. The judge suggested that it would be unlikely that plans would be drawn for the foundations alone, since the extent of the foundations depended on the area and weight of the building erected on them. They should then make up their minds whether Hennessey in 1930 claimed 4% on £500,000 or £1,000,000. Duhig would not admit to either sum. The jury was out for four hours and gave their verdict late at night. They tried to compromise. Duhig was ordered to pay Hennessey a commission of 3% on £1,000,000. Duhig was up for £25,720, plus costs of just under £4,000. Duhig appealed but he could not wait for the hearing. The pilgrimage had left without him and he had to chase it to Fremantle.

Here begins the last and most Duhig-like mystery of the Holy Name Cathedral. As he trundled up the gangplank in Fremantle, he announced to the Press nonchalantly that it was a great moral victory. How could he maintain that? Friends, clergy and Catholic Church Insurances quickly raised £30,000. But the story went around that the sum had been paid twice. It was rumoured that the secret admirer was Mrs Hennessey; but a letter in the Brisbane Archives makes that most unlikely. As Duhig set off for Rome he was certainly in an exalted mood. He knew something that took the sting out of defeat. The late Cardinal Freeman told me that he was secretary to Cardinal Gilroy at the time.

As Duhig came to Sydney on his way West, the staff were told not to be too cheerful, because their guest would be very upset. Freeman then was surprised when he heard the sufferer whistling in his room. He called jauntily for a taxi. He was going out on the town.

What is the conclusion to come from this affair? It made clear the casual approach to business that was characteristic of Duhig. It was a different age. The bishop was under fewer constraints from Canon Law, and the central figure, Cardinal Cerretti, freed Duhig from most of these. He could push to the limit the restraints of civil law. In this case it was disastrous, but the freedom from restraints allowed him to pursue a vision that only a free spirit could conceive. He was a man on a grand scale. His failures were on a grand scale, but he carried them off grandly and moved on to equally grand successes. At the same time there was a dark side to his glory. He was not the only one to suffer for his visions. Mr Brown was a casualty of Duhig's lack of providence; even Hennessey was.

It has been suggested that the case on all sides was not well managed. Certainly it was difficult to follow the financial trail. It may be that Duhig enjoyed his day in court and that affected the presentation of the case. It is a personal drama in the theatre of the absurd.