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Architectural Challenge The Churches of Mgr. J. C. Hawes

The pleasures of architecture cannot be had in new countries; antiquity is denied us, our own architectural greatness lies somewhere in the uncertain future, and we live among buildings which imitate other times or other places, or both. We must become connoisseurs of modern architecture if we can; or of pastiche and imitation. This second, Betjemanite, discipline affords its own kind of pleasure to its adepts. Australia has a little eighteenth-century or Regency architecture, a lot of nineteenth-century gothic revival, a great deal of anonymous building, and a few good pieces of contemporary architecture. The eighteenth century and the modern styles are self-authenticating, and so to a degree is the gothic revival: the rest stands or falls on its chance merits- if we can find any criteria by which to judge them.

Western Australia has a collection of buildings by Monsignor J. C. Hawes which present what may very well be a unique exercise in Colonial connoisseurship. To dismiss them as mere oddities would be pusillanimous. To extol them as great architecture would be absurd. To praise them simply because they are part of the little best we have would be to shirk the issue of judging their merits: and, even if this is to prejudge the matter, we think that these merits are considerable. In this article we are concerned to introduce the buildings, and the problem, to a wider public. The Collection comprises Geraldton Catholic Cathedral, the Catholic churches at Carnarvon and Northampton, Nanson, Bluff Point, Morawa: Perenjori and Carnamah, Utaskara Cemetery Chapel, and a miscellaneous collection of buildings, including two hermitages in the Geraldton diocese. These buildings range from the "antique" pastiche of Mullewa (see photograph) to the simplicity and essential functionalism of Perenjori, with its high nave, steeply roofed aisles and shallow clerestory lit by four circular windows on each side. It is clear from the buildings which he left us that Mgr. Hawes was unashamedly an eclectic. It is also clear that he had, besides his undoubted enthusiasm, religious and architectural, a spark of the originality, the flair, that separates out the artists from the mere practitioners of architecture. His cemetery chapel at Utaskara is conceived in a modernistic idiom, which fits its period (1936), and it is perhaps the most distinguished exercise in this style in the State. There also exists in the Geraldton Cathedral archives a scale model of a church by Hawes in what was, in the 'thirties, the fashionable and up-to-date mode. The church was to have been a great Rat-topped shoe-box (of brick and plaster?), buttressed between flat topped aisles which present rounded ends to the facade, itself austere pierced by plain, massive full-height 'lancets' of a modernistic shape, and surmounted with a Crucifixion group (with the B.V.M. and St. John) placed, eccentrically, on the right-hand side of the central mass. Considerable imagination would be needed for an architect to conceive this, and Mullewa, both. And Hawes must have been an extraordinary man to design these two buildings with equal sincerity. His sincerity is, we think, vindicated by Mullewa, a pastiche which ought, a priori, to be no better than an oddity-an ecclesiastical London Court 1- but which somehow justifies itself, with

its complex, unexpected shape, romantically sprawled like the Reluctant Dragon on a great flat slope of red clay, in a small, prosaic country town. In moments of enthusiasm one is tempted to compare Hawes with Gaudi: of course he cannot bear the weight of the comparison- who could ? But there is in Hawes at least something of the spirit which animated the great Catalan who asserted the Organic and Romantic principles in architecture in the face of Rectangular orthodoxy. The romanticism and the modernism of Hawes fuse in a remarkable way in his Cemetery Chapel. The box-like shape of the building was intended to suggest a coffin, and the four gargoyles at the comers to represent poles for the pall-bearers to carry it on. This romantic, emblematic conception resulted in a very successful formal design, and the decorative use of rainspouts predates by twenty years the famous spout of Ronchamp.

In the pictures of the Cat Island Hermitage which Hawes built in the Bahamas (1940-41), there is a little of the "feel" of Arthur Bailey's design for the Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool which secured third place in the recent competition. Such eminently respectable parallels tend to reassure one in one's conviction that this strange, rather lonely, rather eccentric priest/architect had in him more than mere wilfulness or oddity, and that he was indeed animated with the authentic fire of the creative artist.

And Geraldton Cathedral is a more moving building than almost any other 'imitative' cathedral we have seen: we can pray in it.

JOHN C. Hawes was born in 1876, at Richmond (near London) , to pious Evangelical Anglican parents, but seems early in life to have been attracted by ritual, Anglo- and Roman Catholic, and by the ideal of Franciscan poverty. He was educated at The King's School, Canterbury, and studied architecture at the R.I.B.A. Schools in London. In 1898 he submitted his first work to the Royal Academy, and in the same year became attached to the Anglo-Catholic persuasion in the Church of England. He entered Lincoln Theological College in 1901, and was later ordained; in 1906 he joined Abbot Aldred Carlyle's Community at Caldey, adopting the religious name of Brother Jerome. In 1908 he went to the Bahamas as assistant and architect to Bishop Hornby, but in 1911 he underwent a second religious Conversion, this time to the Roman Church, which forced him to relinquish his cure under Bishop Hornby, though the two remained on the most friendly terms. After a short period in Canada, as a labourer on the Canadian Pacific Railways, John Hawes went to the Beda College in Rome in 1912, to prepare for the Roman Catholic priesthood. In 1912 he became a member of the Third Order of Francis, and in 1915 was ordained priest, in the Lateran Basilica. In 1915, also, he met Bishop Kelly of Geraldton, and became a priest of his diocese. Although he came to Australia to be simple Parish priest, Hawes' talent and training soon added to his duties the job of diocesan architect. From 1915 till 1920 Fr. Hawes was a 'bush priest' (Mount Magnet parish) , visiting his widely dispersed flock on horseback and sleeping each night in a different settlement. In 1920 he went on a visit to England, returning to Geraldton later in the same year to resume his priestly and architectural labours in the diocese. He became a great breeder of horses, and once jockeyed his own mount to win the Geraldton Cup: his parishioners at Yalgoo used the cup for taking up the church collection on Sundays. Fr. Hawes

continued his strenuous parochial duties, going his rounds on horseback accompanied by his dog Dominie, and he attended to the architectural work of the diocese for a further nineteen years, with a break in 1933 for another trip to Europe.

For part of his Australian period Fr. Hawes was parish priest of Mullewa, and he built most of the Church and the Priests' House with his own hands. In 1937 Fr. Hawes was made a domestic prelate, and assumed the style of Monsignor.

By 1939 the certainty had grown upon Mgr. Hawes that God willed him to return to the Bahamas, to the work which he had begun in his Anglican days, and to the hermit life which he had always believed to be his vocation; his two hermitages in Western Australia, at Geraldton and at Morawa, bear ' testimony to the intensity of his conviction that his vocation was eremitical.

In 1939, October 16, Mgr. Hawes left 'Geraldton for the Bahamas, and ended his Australian sojourn. From 1939 until his death on June 26, 1953, Mgr. Hawes, who resumed the style Fra Jerome, lived mainly on Cat Island in the Bahamas, where he built his own hermitage and his own tomb, and evangelized and ministered to the local people. To this period belongs the friendship with the Duke of Windsor-with whom he appears to have had long conversations on the subject of dogs.

THE .whole of Fra Jerome's life was devoted to a practical service of God, to the arduous and unromantic duties of the priesthood, Anglican and Catholic, and to the building of churches. He was, as one can see from his biography, a man with , a share of the greatness of spirit which marks out some men for the special service of God, . and in his buildings one can see evidences of his' conviction and sincerity. Whether these are buildings of the first rank is another thing: the aesthetic and the spiritual categories are separate". But there is both in the man and in his works, something that demands our respect, and that shames mere curiosity and idle regard.

THE following is a descriptive list of the West Australian buildings of Mgr. Hawes. They have been arranged in order of importance, a dangerously subjective procedure; the sketch map shows. their geographical locations, and should enable. anyone who wishes to see these buildings for himself to plan an itinerary. Visitors to the State are advised to consult the R.A.C. or the Tourist" Bureau for information on the state of the roads:: The roads to Yalgoo and Tardun, for instance, are not easily negotiated by light cars. However the main churches can be visited quite easily in a three- or four-day visit-if one omits Carnarvon-and without leaving the bitumen road. There is at present, as far as we know, no hotel at Mullewa, the old one having been burnt down.

CHURCHES

Mullewa (1920-3) The church at Mullewa is mentioned first because it is the one most deeply imbued with the spirit of the architect, summing up his ideals, and bearing witness to his thorough eclecticism. He not only designed it but built it with his own hands (1920-3) and was its parish priest for over fifteen years. Little wonder that one feels that one breathes his spirit just as surely as in Assisi one does that of St. Francis. One of the only two books which Monsignor Hawes

wrote is a small descriptive guide to this church which concludes, "If a church carries an atmosphere of prayer and induces . . . an uplifting of the soul, so that merely to enter within its portals helps people to pray- if everything around seems to emphasise the fact of the Divine Presence . . . then, and then only, can the building be said to fulfil its purpose". And to this standard the Church of St. Mary, Mullewa, lives up. Secondly, this church is the one in which Hawes uses light and shade best (especially in the sanctuary and the baptistry) making it the most successful of all his interiors. Thirdly, it is the church which Monsigneur Hawes described as signifying "Antiquity", an effect achieved partly through his use of rough unplastered stone walls (and which the recent necessary introduction of a wooden ceiling has not been able to destroy) , and partly through the massive sweep of great "Romanesque" Arches, and partly through an overwhelming mixture . of styles and furnishings. Of the five altars, that of the Holy Rood, with its flamboyant gothic reredos, was the most beautiful until its effect was lessened by the introduction of a large mass-produced madonna. Note also the large paschal candlestick, a permanent crib, and a "squint" through the thick wall to enable the bell-ringer to see the Elevation of the Host at the high altar. Perhaps the greatest beauty of the exterior is the West Front with its seven massive pillars of wisdom, surmounted by eleven beautifully carved panels portraying the seven sacraments.

St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Geraldton (1916-35) This, the church which Monsignor Hawes designated as signifying "Solidity" is placed second because its exterior is the most striking of all his Australian buildings. Externally, its architecture is predominantly Californian Mission, its twin towers being practically a copy of those at Santa Barbara, though its dome is humbly reminiscent of Brunelleschi's one for the Cathedral of Florence. The great central doorway is French Romanesque, and the cone-roofed round tower at the N.E. corner could have come from an early Renaissance chateau: this whole N.E. complex presents a very curious but highly successful blend of traditional form and modernistic treatment. Inside there is almost as much a riot of styles as at Mullewa; but the general effect, though a little disappointing after the exterior, is nevertheless uplifting, with touches of grandeur; notice especially the great unfluted Norman columns of the nave, supporting round arches, and the four great arches beneath the octagonal dome. The zebra striping on walls and arches is reminiscent of Siena cathedral and the use of two tones of grey with pink-buff produces a most harmonious effect. Note the Canons' stalls in the apse, the altar of the Twelve Apostles in the north transept, the two cribs, one of them specially constructed to use both natural and artificial light, the crypt where the second crib is found, and the unobtrusive stations of faintly tinted bas-relief. The sanctuary and altar have the numinous feeling characteristic of the best of the Catalan churches: the fine timbered ceiling of the sanctuary is so designed that, in the morning light at least, the beams seem to form a crown of thorns over the altar. The polychrome wooden crucifix with the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John, and the splendid gilt-wooden candlesticks are characteristic of Hawes' designs. Notice the painted baptistry with its little fresco.

Utakarra Cemetery Chapel (1936) Situated about 11/2 miles from Geraldton on the right hand side of the road to Mullewa, the exterior of this Chapel with its plain whitewashed walls of plaster over brick, has partly the effect of Spanish Mission and partly that of a contemporary building. The interior, in which Monsignor Hawes' use of light is second only to Mullewa, has an arched brick ceiling, many Romanesque cement arches painted red and white (though the colour is peeling off. The overall effect is at once homely and majestic combining simplicity and awe. An apt emblem and reminder of death . Notice the fine flat, painted crucifix in the Eastern or Early Italian manner, painted by . Hawes himself. In front of the sanctuary grills, and covered by a mat, is a metal sheet bearing a self-executed brass of the architect-for this sacellum was designed to be his own tomb, and was one of the many renunciations which he had to make when he felt the call of St. Francis to return to the Bahamas and become (he hoped) a full-time hermit there.

Perenjori (1937) The Church of the Holy Cross at Perenjori is noteworthy for the severe simplicity of its high altar, surmounted by a gigantic stone baldachino supported on two massive columns, Christ and the Twelve Apostles being carved along its front. The general effect is best described as 'neoEgyptian'. Note also the massive paschal candlestick with a lectern hewn out of it. The exterior is unlike any other of Hawes' buildings. A corrugated iron or asbestos roof replaces his usual cordoba tiles. The clerestory is lit by portholelike windows. The west facade, which was completely plain except for a large round window and a Norman portal, has recently been given the dubious addition of a wooden cross in the intervening space.

Northampton (1936) St. Mary's Church, Northampton, lives up to its designation by the architect as signifying "Spirituality". This is largely due to its neo-Gothic style, and its situation, with the west end on the lower side of a slope. The entrance is above steps, and surmounted by a very long and narrow window. The severity is relieved by a conetopped round tower, a green tiled roof, and the architect's usual green shutters over the fulllength of the windows of the side aisles. The best points of the interior are the side "aisles" with their round arches, the clerestory of long windows, and the light shining down on the high altar's throne from two long very narrow windows.

Carnarvon The Church of St. Mary, Star of the Sea at Carnarvon, some 300 miles north of Geraldton, bears the architectural designation of "Simplicity", justified by its plain smoothed stone, its simple lines and its un-corrugated iron roof. The main beauty of the interior is the effect of indirect light from various windows (including two long ones similar to those of Northampton) shining on the altar with white candlesticks and no retables. One can be a little doubtful, however, about the value of a pale blue dado on the stone walls and the recent addition of flowers painted on the front of this simple altar.

Morawa (1933) The Holy Cross Church, Morawa, uses the local stone (yellow, chocolate, brown and pink), red cordoba tiles (so typical of Spanish mission architecture), green-painted shutters externally, with little wooden double-doors internally to all windows, and wooden doors with iron grills at the west end (for the purpose of allowing visitors at all hours without any danger of sacrilege) , all devices repeatedly used by Hawes. The sanctuary has a roof of zinc painted

white. The interior, with its walls of blue and white stripes, and stripes on the architraves of doors and the arch over the high altar, is, like Geraldton Cathedral, somewhat reminiscent of the churches of Siena and Pisa.

Bluff Point (1937) The Church of St. Lawrence, some two miles out of Geraldton on the right hand side of the road to Northampton, is cruciform (as Hawes' churches almost always are), built of the local stone, and dominated by a central octagonal tower with a flat dome. The interior, however, is most disappointing. On the left of the road the Anglican Church of St. George is by another architect, Eales, but seems to show a little of the influence of Hawes though it is fragile, sweet and light, while the latter's work tends to be sturdy, severe and heavy.

Nanson Convent Chapel Built of the local stone and recently extended without any jarring note, the exterior is worth a glance-especially for those who have not seen Morawa or Bluff Point. The interior is, however, unimpressive, being used mainly as a schoolroom.

Kojarena This church is also built of local stone; but it is unimpressive, the interior being poorly furnished and little used.

Yalgoo Convent Chapel This, which was reputedly beautiful once, is now a shambles, best seen, if at all, by twilight.

Carnamah The exterior is a second-rate Carnarvon; and the interior so remodelled that no relic of the original architecture is left.

OTHER BUILDINGS

Nazareth House, Geraldton (1940) It is the most impressive of Hawes' remaining buildings, its main beauty being the massive, controlled, severity of the design, with four corner towers and four facades of double arches broken by four central gateways. The central courtyard of fine proportions is worth a visit.

C.B.C. Geraldton (1936) Its west front is a very good example of a public school of the thirties.

St. John of God, Geraldton (1936) A well, if unexcitingly, designed hospital.

Priests House, Mullewa (1920-23) Designed and built, like the church, by Hawes himself; its chief external beauty the cloisters with their plain round arches.

The Hermitage, Morawa Built of local stone like the adjacent parish church, its main beauty is the interior which, with its simple domed ceiling, a fireplace surmounted by a crucifix moulded out of the concrete mantelpiece, small windows and cupboards, leaves just room for a table, chair and bed.

The Hermitage, Geraldton Though a trifle ersatz, being externally like an English country cottage, and internally boasting the musicians' gallery of an English baronial castle, it deserves restoration and would make an excellent Hawes museum. It was built by the Monsignor as a place to end his days as a chaplain to St. John of God Hospital, and the main post of the gallery stairs once bore an effigy of his fox terrier, Dominie. Alas, both Hermitage and dog were to be given up, like the tomb in Utakara, when he left for the Bahamas.

Melangata Homestead To the traditional Australian station homestead, Hawes has merely added a Norman tower, some dormers used for ventilation, a few archways, a little gem of a chapel, and the arrangement of two breeze-ways to give a cruciform effect.

The Convent, Tardun Another example of Hawes' adaptation of the Australian homestead, here a two-storied one, to his own ideas and objects.

The Farm School, Tardun The plans that Mgr. Hawes drew up for 'this were never quite followed, his great central tower being omitted, while the building of a chapel at right angles to his great south front in 1961 has definitely diminished its effect.