

UNK 2021 **A look into the past** with Sylvia Endacott

This month my article is not actually about Bognor Regis, although it starts here! The story starts with the White Tower, situated on the Aldwick Road, behind the Royal Norfolk Hotel. It was built at the end of the nineteenth century as a seaside home for J.C. Hawes and his two brothers. Hawes was only 21 years old at the time. It was here, in May 2018, that I met a group of Pilgrims from Australia, two of whom unveiled a blue Plaque to John Cyril Hawes, who in 1898 designed and built the tower.



*Wanting to obtain sea views blocked by houses on the seaward side of the Aldwick Street, John Hawes set upon the idea of "... instead of a long spread out cottage I would stand it up on end - as a tower".*

One of the people to unveil the plaque was Pat Mills, then aged 82, who had been baptised by John C. Hawes. Their trip started from Geraldton in Western Australia, their journey was to trace the creativity and design work of John Cyril Hawes, from Bognor to Cat Island in the Bahamas, where when he died at the age of 80, he was buried. I had been aware of J.C. Hawes for a number of years, but the visit of the pilgrims brought his story much more to the fore. His work within the UK was quite prolific from a church in Gunnerton, Northumberland, a Gatehouse at Alton Abbey in Hampshire, to St. Philomena's Guesthouse on Caldey Island, South Wales.

Well known in Western Australia, Hawes is basically unknown here in Bognor Regis where he started, one of his earliest major designs and construction was in

Australia. The Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier, was constructed between 1915 and 1939. In fact while the Pilgrims were in the UK, they were able to visit the foundry which was constructing a new set of bells for the Cathedral.

During the building of the cathedral Hawes travelled by horse back to the outskirts, where he designed and built many more impressive buildings in and around Geraldton. He was associated with the design and construction of over 40 religious premises, but worked principally on his own. His work included chapels, convents, cemeteries, church halls and schools. Hawes diaries were available for the Heritage Centre, and thus extracts are available such as one in 1919 written during the Spanish Flu epidemic where he said;

"Sunday I saddled my horse before daybreak so as to arrive for Mass at 8.30, but found the inhabitants prostrate with the flu." Hawes then undertook burying some of the residents as no one else was available to do so. In 2016 there was the opening of the Monsignor J.C. Hawes centre in Geraldton, which is now a very popular visitor attraction for Australians, and passengers from the cruise ships alike.



*Hawes (right) building the cathedral*

If you are interested in knowing more about this remarkable man, visit the website of Hawes Heritage on: [www.monsignorhawes.com](http://www.monsignorhawes.com) to learn more.