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TONY EVANS John C. Hawes: A Centenary Appraisal The previous reference to John C. Hawes in the pages of Westerly appeared in Volume 1 fourteen years ago.

That valuable article by Cyril Brown and Patrick Hutchings was then the only published essay about the life and work, in Australia, of the eccentric pioneer priest-architect-apart from the biography Hermit .0/ Cat Island.1 Both Westerly and the biography by Peter Anson are long since unobtainable. Anson's book dealt with Hawes' twenty-four years in Western Australia in as many pages, without the writer himself visiting the State. He relied almost entirely on Hawes' own correspondence for his information, and those who know something about Hawes, and value the work he has left us, feel that those twenty four pages are a poor recognition of the architect's place and importance in our history. It was that Westerly article which first inspired my interest in Hawes and sent me on a pilgrimage to his buildings, scattered as they are across the Lower Murchison and Northern Agricultural districts of the State. When I first saw them in their bright, earthy colours, seeming to grow naturally out of their harsh bush surroundings, I thought that a colour film would be an ideal medium to tell their story. The rough texture of the stone, the red clay of the tiles against the deep azure sky, and the exciting visual relationship between the building masses as one moves around to view from differing angles, would, I knew, be a cameraman's dream. The dream waited eleven years and then the opportunity came to make the documentary The Stones Cry Out. Now others are making the pilgrimage having seen the film, as I made mine after reading Westerly. But television documentary is an impermanent medium; seen today and forgotten tomorrow. Documentary film makers tend to dip into their subjects only sufficiently to complete their project, then it's off with the old and on with the new. However, Hawes and his architecture have been a continuing interest for me, far outlasting the needs of the film. As each new piece of information comes to hand and each new thread in the tapestry is revealed, I feel more and more impatient that Hawes' work is not better known and more carefully preserved. That his architecture cannot be considered 'great' alongside the best in other Continents has to be admitted, but it's pretty well all we've got in Western Australia, at any rate as an example of a homogeneous collection of historic buildings designed and built with the loving care of one man. Hawes was an artist, a romantic, and deeply religious. He was an admirer of Ruskin and was fond of quoting: When we build, let us think we build forever. Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for. WESTERLY, No.3, SEPTEMBER, 197<" 37 It is only when we search around our State for architecture that lives up to Ruskin's definition that we begin to appreciate how important Hawes' work has become. Admittedly, Hawes was an eclectic. He borrowed ideas: the twin towers of the Geraldton Cathedral from the Californian Spanish missionary style and the dome which has a fleeting resemblance to Brunellesci's cathedral in Florence, are good examples. It's this borrowing tendency that has probably weakened Hawes' reputation as an architect in some circles.2 But it can be argued that Hawes was master of the elements he borrowed. Although he wasn't a stylist,

he had a particular handwriting which is sincere and instantly recognisable in all his buildings, both here ancl in other parts of the world. Professor Hutchings provides a fitting answer to this criticism: I think it's very difficult to find an architect who doesn't borrow; borrowing is bad when all that is produced is pastiche. Now whatever anyone may want to say about Hawes architecture, it is never pastiche. You can recognise where every bit comes from, but he fuses them into a complete whole. Even Mullewa, which I think is one of his most extravagant conceptions, looks organic as it lies there on that great slope of red clay. The organic really comes alive when looking at that building; everything has been fused together and is beautifully articulated ... 3 Hawes deserves to be better known and appreciated, not only for the buildings he left us, but also because he was in his own life something of a phenomenon. His story reads like an incredible adventure of passion, danger, achievement and crippling disappointment. His life is as full of colour and controversy as, say, that of Francis Greenway and Burley Griffin, yet the two latter names take precedence in the history of Australian architecture. Like Burley Griffin, Hawes' work can be seen on three continents. Both Hawes and Burley Griffin migrated to Australia and built with enthusiasm in an environment that excited them; both suffered from antipathy and Australian philistinism and both left to continue their building in other countries where it was more appreciated. How this story of antipathy and rejection is repeated throughout Australian history, even to the present day! John Cyril Hawes was born on September 7th 1876 and for someone who devoted so much of his life in preparation for eternity, it is a gentle irony that his birthplace and early home was in Paradise Road, Richmond. John's father was a solicitor and a prominent member of the Evangelical branch of the Church of England; his religious views would be in complete contrast with those his son adopted in later years. He was probably a very dour self-righteous Victorian who seems to have been feared and even avoided by the younger members of the family.4 Both father and mother (with whom John had a very close relationship) were responsible for a strict religious training based on long daily devotions and religious observances which we might find stultifying today. Anson recounts that John Hawes decided to become an architect at an early age when he was given an especially elaborate box of building bricks for a birthday present.1 Like so much in Anson's book, this minutia is taken from Hawes' own reminiscences written with a memory sixty years old and muted by religious sensitivity. Hawes studied architecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Architectural Association schools in London and there came under the influence of the leading architects of the day. Among them were William Lathaby, a former pupil of Ruskin, and John D. Sedding whose crowning work is Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square-beloved of John Betjeman who is currently engaged in promoting its preservation. Hawes, like his teachers, rejected Victorian Gothic and Neo-Classicism, preferring instead simpler forms and natural building materials without rich decoration. Hawes described his approach to building in this way: 38 WESTERLY, No.3, SEPTEMBER, 1976 Slavish copying of bygone styles and periods is to be shunned; but the architecture should be reminiscent of the past, without pedantry and it should be varied without being fussy and freakish. Good proportions with dignity and repose are more important than ornament and decoration.5 Hawes completed his training in 1897, aged 21 years, and started work as a professional architect. One of his first buildings is

still a well known landmark in Bognor, Sussex. A private house, still in the possession of the Hawes family, it displays the architect's individualism and his charming talent for making the design fit a special set of requirements. In this case, three brothers with a passion for sailing and the sea wanted a holiday home with a view of the ocean; yet the house itself was several hundred yards from the beach behind shops and boarding houses. The result is a residence built in the form of a tower with the bedrooms one above the other and the windows high enough to look over the sea. When I was shown over 'The White Tower' in England last year, I instantly recognised the Hawes characteristics and that strong 'welcoming' quality which is common to all his work. Unhappily, 'The White Tower' is under some threat from the developers; lack of appreciation of Hawes' buildings is not peculiar to Australia. Hawes' early work was soon noticed by the leading architects of the period and he seemed likely to establish a prominent and successful niche in the professional establishment. He exhibited a scale model church in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1898 and this, in his own words, brought him 'recognition, publicity and praise' and pointed him firmly in the direction of ecclesiastical architecture. The very reason I threw myself as a young man so wholeheartedly into ecclesiastical architecture was the fact that in the London architect's office where I was an articled pupil we did little else but banks and pubs. In a spirit of revulsion and rank rebellion as soon as my time was up I deserted the temples of money and beer for the gothic temples of the true Jerusalem.s His first major work in this category was St Christopher's Church at Gunnerton, thirty miles west of Newcastle in Northumberland. He wrote in later life that he thought it the best thing he ever did. Alongside this successful professional development, there developed another passion-the church, and more specifically the ritual and ceremony of the Catholic revival in the Church of England. John Hawes was captivated by the monastic ideal, doubtless stemming from his study of, and admiration for, medieval church architecture. He became associated with several abortive attempts to re-establish Benedictine and Franciscan communities within the Church of England. John was usually cast in the role of architect and builder and there are examples of his work of this period to be seen on Caldey Island, South Wales, Alton Abbey, Hampshire and Painsthorpe in Yorkshire. But always there seemed an element of conflict between Hawes the builder, and Hawes the religious. His artistic temperament and his professional pride were then-and throughout his life-a problem to his religious superiors. Hawes was an individualist, a loner, and his somewhat naive and sadly amusing attempts to live in religious communities were failures. In 1909, when he was 33, the religious Hawes and the architect Hawes were given an opportunity to live in peace. He accepted an invitation to become a missionary in the Bahamas where a major part of his work was to be the rebuilding of churches which had been destroyed in a devastating hurricane. It was an uneasy peace and culminated two years later with a second religious conversion, to Roman Catholicism. There followed a short period of wandering in America and Canada mildly foreshadowing supertramp W. H. Davies-and scarcely less adventurous. John Hawes entered the Beda College, Rome, to study for the Catholic priesthood in January 1912. It was while Hawes was studying in Rome that he met Bishop William Bernard WESTERLY, No.3, SEPTEMBER, 1976 39 Kelly from Geraldton, Western Australia. Kelly was the foundation bishop of an arid bush

diocese, in an area over 300,000 square miles. There were few churches and only ten priests. The bishop was unashamedly on a recruiting mission and Hawes was an attractive proposition. He was an enthusiastic and experienced missioner, he was unattached to any bishop or diocese and had a small private income and above all was a trained architect. Part of the attraction for Hawes in coming to Western Australia was doubtless Bishop Kelly's commission to design a cathedral for the diocese. For Hawes as an architect, the triumph of Christianity was inextricably interwoven with the beauty and grandeur of Christianity's buildings. Hawes was a romantic who saw in the beauty and permanence of Christian architecture the truth and beauty of faith itself. Hawes' first designs for the cathedral were drawn in Rome before he had seen the location. From Kelly's enthusiastic description, Hawes visualised a country similar to California which he had visited, and modelled his drawings partly on the Californian Spanish missionary style and partly on Italian Renaissance which he'd grown familiar with during his five years in Rome. It is interesting to note that those designs drawn in Rome were the basis of the present building, with only slight modifications made after Hawes arrived. Without being influenced by the current Australian fashion, this highly individual and uncompromising architect had rejected traditional gothic, and designed a cathedral which he believed was most suited to the climate and environment. Elsewhere in Australia, the missionary church accepted gothic as almost obligatory; a recognisable link with a European faith. Hawes argued that the style which suited the hot dry West was Romanesque from southern Europe and this predominates in practically all his work. The outside appearance of St Francis Xavier's Cathedral is mellow and welcoming, and fuses organically with the surroundings. It has become a rewarding tourist attraction; a symbol of the town of Geraldton. The bright freshly re-painted interior, with recent alterations in line with contemporary liturgical changes, is a disappointment to some people. Perhaps a better idea of what Hawes wanted for the interior can be seen from his sketch which he made for the souvenir brochure at the official opening of the partially completed cathedral in 1918. It was another twenty years before the church was finished due partly to lack of money and partly to the hostility of the second Bishop of Geraldton, Dr Richard Ryan. Of the twenty-one buildings by Hawes in Western Australia, ranging in importance from the cathedral in Geraldton to the barely recognisable. ruin at Yalgoo, the most fascinating and original is at Mullewa; the church and interrelated Priest's house. Parts of it are clearly Romanesque and the whole has a feeling of antiquity; the kind of building one would expect to find on the hot dusty plains of northern Spain. Professor Hutchings has said that it looks like a great slumbering dragon,8 and from some points of view this is true. It seems to 'sprawl' over the red clay soil and at the same time to have grown out of that soil. The bright light catches the white domes and the red cordova tiles and the whole building has something of the secret of the great medieval cathedrals; it draws the visitor back again and again, welcoming him and inviting him to enter. I'm building into these stones at Mullewa, poor little feeble work that it is, my convictions and ideas as to what a church should be-ideas flatly antagonistic to the prevalent notions over here.6 There's a thinly veiled criticism in this quotation, directed at Hawes' colleagues and clients and uppermost in his mind must have been the lack of understanding and sympathy of his new bishop, Dr Ryan. Professionally, Hawes was proud and stubborn, but his religious training

and conviction would never allow public argument or recrimination. Hawes believed in absolute loyalty to his superiors, and only the briefest written hints about his 40

true feelings can sometimes be discovered.7 In addition to the buildings which we can still see, there are folios of plans in the archives relating to commissions which were rejected for one sad reason or another. The most tragic was his three years work on a new St Mary's Cathedral in Perth. There is evidence that Bishop Ryan played a significant part in opposing the Hawes' designs.8 Archbishop Clune had clearly indicated that he wanted Hawes as an architect and for a while supported him against the Irish gothic faction.9 It was Clune who encouraged Hawes to consult Sir Giles Scott the eminent British architect, then working on Liverpool Cathedral and sent him to Europe to order the stained glass and mosaics. It was while Hawes was away in England on this mission that the mysterious decision was taken to reject the Hawes designs and select the traditional gothic ones of Cavanagh. Hawes' diary contains a scathing comment about this volte-face; a clue to his bitter disappointment. Sir Giles Scott wrote commiserating with Hawes, saying that Perth had lost the opportunity of having the only distinguished nongothic cathedral in Australia. l The present half-finished structure is a sad reminder of the unhappy episode. John Cyril Hawes left Australia in 1939, primarily, he tells us later, for spiritual reasons. He had long believed that he was called to lead an eremitical life and that his secular priesthood in Western Australia was too busy and too public. Towards the end of his stay he'd been appointed Diocesan Architect and had received honours for his work mainly through the support and friendship of his third bishop, J. P. O'Collins. There is some evidence however that Hawes left Australia a frustrated and disappointed man.8 He settled back in the Bahamas where he'd started his missionary work twenty years previously. He attempted to live as a hermit on the top of a barren rocky hill on Cat Island overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, but his architectural skills were sought after by local church officials and he became as busy there as he had ever been in Western Australia. As 'Fra Jerome' he lived a further seventeen years in his hermitage, designing, writing, painting, and generally administering to the local people who regarded him as an awesome but saintly figure. He died aged 80 in 1956. The story of John Hawes and his work is an exceedingly complex one. He lived intensely and was a man of driving enthusiasms and deep convictions. Whether his religious life prevented his development as an architect of some importance, or whether (as he might have believed) his architecture frustrated his religious development, is only one of many puzzles for the biographer. His personality comes through as curiously muddled. He obviously enjoyed everything he did and was not above relishing notoriety and applause. Even on Cat Island towards the end of his life, he was a notably unsuccessful hermit; writing and receiving copious letters and contributing to architectural and spiritual journals; generally on the subject of himself. Inevitably he was discovered by the media and written about in popular magazines. One leading journalist visited him and eulogised: this modern St. Francis ... this internationally acclaimed architect ... a Christopher Wren with tourists coming to look at his buildings in a thousand years ... 12 Although he was said to be upset by this publicity, his very mode of life and contact with the outside world naturally lead to it. Hawes is buried in the tomb he carved out of the rock near his hermitage on Cat Island. His memorial in Western Australia is

another tomb which he had prepared for himself in his fine Cemetery Chapel at Utakarra just outside Geraldton. Under a dusty old mat, dark and forgotten, is an engraved brass effigy of Hawes himself, which in the event was never needed. It is another piece of the Hawes puzzle; and provides the only opportunity for the enthusiast to make his own brass rubbing in Australia. WESTERLY, No.3, SEPTEMBER, 1976 49

REFERENCES 1. Anson, P., The Hermit of Cat Island, Burns & Oates, London, 1958. 2. Cf. Freeland, J. M., Architecture in Australia, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1968. 3. Radio Documentary, Poems In Stone, Broadcast ABC, December 1975. 4. Correspondence from Hawes family, in possession of the writer. 5. Fra Jerome (J. C. Hawes), SeratchinKs of A Cat Islander, Liturgical Arts Magazine, Liturgical Arts Society, N.Y., 1950. 6. Cf. Letter quoted in The Hermit of Cat Island, p. 168. 7. Information supplied to writer by Bishop J. P. O'Collins, Ballarat, 1973. 8. Information supplied privately to the writer, Perth, 1973. 9. Correspondence: Archbishop Clune to Hawes, dated 20th October 1922, Geraldton Cathedral Archives, Geraldton. 10. Correspondence: Archbishop Clune to Hawes, dated 18th December 1922, Geraldton Cathedral Archives, Geraldton. II. Correspondence: Sir Giles Scott to Hawes, 17th January 1927, Geraldton Cathedral Archives, Geraldton. 12. Article, Colliers Magazine, N.Y., 20th July 1953. BUILDINGS IN W.A. St Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Geraldton (1915-1938). Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Mullewa (1920-1923). The Priest's House, Mullewa (1923-27). Used now for parsih meetings and mainly as a storehouse. St Lawrence's Church, Bluff Point, Geraldton (1937). Only the transept remains; a modern brick octagon has been added. Cemetery Chapel, U takarra, Geraldton (1936). Holy Cross Church, Perenjori (1937). Recently the exterior has been renovated. St Mary's Church, Northampton (1936). St Mary, Star of the Sea Church, Carnarvon. Holy Cross Church, Morawa (1933). Subsequent alterations have left this church very different from the original designs. Convent Chapel, Yalgoo (1920). A ruin, but still possible to appreciate the original concept. Carnamah. A church of inferior design and subsequently remodelled. Convent Chapel, Nanson. Used now mainly as a schoolroom. Chapel of Ease, Kojarena. Now little used. Nazareth House, Geraldton (1940). C.B.C., Geraldton. OTHER BUILDINGS St John of God Hospital, Geraldton. The Hermitage, Morawa. The Hermitage, Geraldton. Melangatta Homestead, North of Yalgoo. Convent, Tardun. The Farm School, Tardun.