

## BORROWED FROM AFAR, BUT WITH PERMISSION .....

The 'Annals' is a publication of the Australian Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. It can now claim to be the oldest continuously published magazine in Australia. Under its present editor, Fr Paul Stenhouse, MSC, Ph.D. it has gone ahead in leaps and bounds as a journal of Catholic Culture. A variety of articles on things Catholic, and its emphasis on history and heritage, has ensured 'Annals' a winning combination of interesting reading.

The editor readily gave his permission for the publication of an article written for 'Annals' earlier this year. It featured St Mary's Basilica, Sydney, and St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, both of which are the work of the same architect – William Wardell – a situation not unlike the Cathedrals and Basilicas of William Francis Petre in this country. Petre was, of course, the architect of our Cathedral as well as a number of basilicas in both the North and South Islands.

Herewith, a tale of two Cathedrals, written by Tony Evans, to whom we are much indebted.

The thirty or so Gothic cathedrals and minsters of England and Wales, and many more throughout Europe, are justly famous and of inexhaustible attraction to visitors. The more those visitors know about the Faith of those that built them, the history of the times, and the subtle styles of the architecture employed in them, the more value they will gain from their visits. For many, too the visit will prove a lasting spiritual experience.

Australian Catholics may be forgiven for feeling envious of those rich treasures which remain beyond the reach of us – except on rare and expensive occasions. But this envy should not blind us to the treasures we possess closer to home.

The two monumental Catholic, Gothic cathedrals here in Australia, St Mary's in Sydney, and St Patrick's in Melbourne, are every bit as important in the context of Australian history, and as awe-inspiring in size and structure, as many of the celebrated mediaeval cathedrals elsewhere.

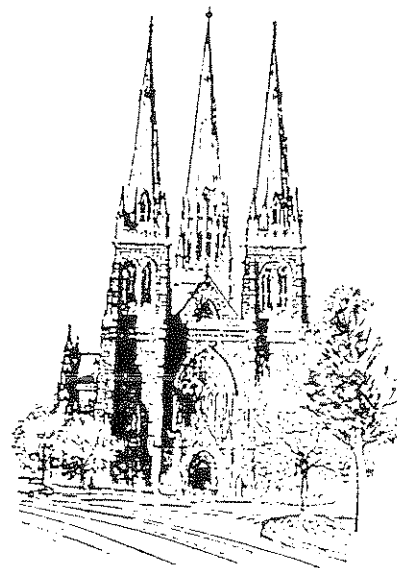
True, they cannot compete in age with their ancient forebears, being examples of Victorian Gothic, but they are superb examples of that style, much praised and treasured by architectural historians both in Australia and overseas.

All Australian Catholics interested in their history and church architecture should regard a visit to St Mary's and St Patrick's as an essential part of their travels in Australia. Those who know both cathedrals are doubly privileged.

It is given to few architects to design a cathedral, but here there are not one, but two cathedrals designed by one and the same man, William Wilkinson Wardell (1823 1899).

Wardell, a prominent Catholic convert architect and apostle of the Gothic Revival, left England in 1858 to settle first in Melbourne and later in Sydney. Although he designed many other churches and buildings throughout his professional life, his two cathedrals were his crowning works which claimed his constant attention over the forty years that he made Australia his home.

He concerned himself with every detail – not only of construction but also the furnishing of both churches.



*St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, consecrated in October 1897 by the then Archbishop, Thomas Joseph Carr, who would bless and open our Cathedral, 12th February '05.*

Since the building of both was carried out roughly in parallel, he engaged in an almost daily correspondence concerning points of detail, writing (by hand) simultaneously to Archbishops Carr in Melbourne, and to Vaughan and later Cardinal Moran in Sydney. He might have been like a juggler or some chess master playing two opponents at one and the same time. These, however, were not opponents but Wardell's clients.

In spite of occasional differences between the architect and the archbishops, mainly arising from Wardell's refusal to compromise standards and the archbishops' difficulties in finding the necessary money to avoid doing so, they remained on close, friendly terms.

On one occasion he countered a cost-cutting proposal by the Building Committee that the side-aisle vaults in St Mary's should be of wood, rather than stone. He wrote to Vaughan: 'the supreme consideration is not what is cheaper, but what is best, and if one method is better than another I venture to think that it should be adopted although it may take a longer time to complete'. He won the argument and we can see the result today.

Those who are fortunate enough to know both St Mary's and St Patrick's take some pleasure in comparing the two; and local loyalties are likely to intrude.

Generally, it seems, St Patrick's has received the greater praise. According to the celebrated architect and historian, the late Robin Boyd – a Melbourne man, it must be added – when 'Viewed in the golden light of amber glass windows, the Cathedral's interior presents a Gothic vision probably unsurpassed by any other building in the four hundred years since the great Gothic era.'

*A highlight of World Youth Day '08 was the consecration by the Pope of a new marble altar in St Mary's Basilica, Sydney.*

Externally, and on first inspection, St Patrick's may not appear particularly impressive. The undressed bluestone (Basalt) gives it a stern, unsmiling appearance when compared to St Mary's in Sydney. This is partly due to the transepts having externally buttressed aisles (unlike St Mary's) which adds to their width.

Another reason may be the extended height of the three spires, out of proportion to the rest of the building. These were only completed in 1939 and were clearly unintended by Wardell: they lead the eye ever upwards – the lateral line, in effect, minimised in favour of the vertical which again adds to the Cathedral's slight dumpy appearance.

It is significant that Wardell's architect-son declined to accept the commission to design the steeples and enlarge the central tower, because it was not true to his father's design.

The real beauty of St Patrick's is revealed when the visitor steps inside the west door. The vista, when viewed on entry is immediately breath taking. The great length extends three hundred and forty feet towards the east end where the unusual apse comprising seven small chapels in the French Gothic style seems far in the distance.

The great height of the nave, at ninety-five feet – higher than Durham and Gloucester Cathedrals – is crowned with a timber vault with angels on the hammer beams, and a barely visible carved frieze above the clerestory. The width of the nave is greater than that of Canterbury, Salisbury and Norwich Cathedrals. The simplicity of the nave contrasts with the rich decoration of the chancel and its elaborate vault.

There is no central, eastern window like St Mary's, but a circle of smaller stained glass windows and behind, in the ambulatory, a half circle of richly decorated chapels which project outside to give the building its distinctive lozenge shaped appearance.

In contrast the warm glow of the dressed sandstone exterior of St Mary's in Sydney, particularly when viewed from the west across Hyde Park, is reminiscent of an English abbey church. Like some crouching animal or

(continued overleaf)

sphinx, it lies in command, unassailable in its natural elevated domain. The external elevation and massing of St Mary's has something of the character of the mediaeval Benedictine foundations with their cloisters and cells for monks. When planning the original St Mary's Polding had wanted a similar arrangement for his Benedictine priests and Wardell is likely to have had this in mind.

The interior of St Mary's has an altogether different atmosphere from that of St Patrick's. In contrast it is darker, more massive in construction. It is without the lightness, the French delicacy, and the youthfulness of St Patrick's but gives instead an impression of solidity, greater massiveness, of awe and maturity befitting the mother-church of Australia.

The differences in the dimensions of the two Cathedrals are minimal.

The length of St Mary's is three hundred and fifty feet, while the length along the nave and chancery of St Patrick's, excluding the apsidal chapels, is three hundred and forty feet. The width across the nave and aisles of St Patrick's is just two feet greater than St Mary's.

Wardell chose 14<sup>th</sup> century English Decorated style with minimal internal decoration, achieving an impressive unity throughout. Here is an historically accurate model without being fussy or pedantic. No one part conflicts in style with another and yet the whole remains uniquely Wardell.

On a dull rainy morning the prospect in the unlit nave is sombre and dark. But more often when the sun catches the amber-glass clerestory windows and illuminates the bays, arches and triforium, and the aisle stained glass windows glow with rich colour, the scene is one of great splendour and visual delight.

Ultimately the claim of superiority of one cathedral over the other is misleading and unnecessary. St Mary's and St Patrick's Cathedrals are two magnificent examples of Gothic Revival architecture, two sides of the same Gothic coin. They are supporting sisters, not warring rivals.

According to one of Australia's foremost architectural historians, the late D. I. McDonald writing in the Australian Encyclopaedia, both St Mary's and St Patrick's are 'notable for their purity of expression and richness of symbolism; (they) rank among the greatest buildings constructed anywhere in that style.'

Without having known and visited these two Cathedrals, and getting to know something of their saintly architect, Catholics are missing out on an exciting and inspiring part of the Church in Australia.

'Friends of the Cathedral' Newsletter: Cathedral House, P.O. Box 4544, Christchurch.

# NEWSLETTER

## FRIENDS OF THE CATHEDRAL



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### CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE .....

This editorial comes by way of CBS MUSIC – the pride and joy of Don Whelan, who has now been Musical Director and Organist at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament for 40 years.

The story of those years is history – the building up of the CBS Choir and Orchestra, the 10.30am Choral Mass Sunday after Sunday, the restoration of the Halmshaw organ, numerous recitals and concerts, and more latterly the founding of the Junior Choir, to say nothing of a host of international tours.

They began in 1988 with a week-long tour of Masses and concerts in the Australian Catholic Cathedrals of Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. Then over a six week period from December 1990 into January 1991, a highly successful European tour involved a performing group of 70 singers and orchestral players accompanied by 65 supporters, as they presented Masses and concerts in San Francisco, Westminster, Dublin, Paris, Chartres, Aachen, Dusseldorf, Leipzig, Dresden, Krakow, Budapest, Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Venice, Florence and Rome .....

A second international tour, held during a five-week period from December 1994 into January 1995 involved 35 singers, 24 orchestral players, and 44 supporters. Concerts were given in the Cathedrals of St Petersburg, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Lucerne, Barcelona, and Toledo, and the tour concluded with a concert in Saint-Chapelle, Paris. A Mass was sung in Prague Cathedral on Christmas Day, in Milan Cathedral on New Year's Day, and in St Hedwig's Cathedral, Berlin, and Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris. A second Australian tour during June-July 1996 took 75 to Melbourne, Bendigo, Canberra, Goulburn and Sydney.

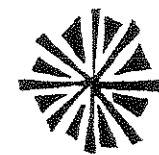
The arrival of the new millennium was celebrated with another world tour from 10 December 1999 till 16 January 2000, which included visits to historic sites with Handel's Messiah in Egypt, the Holy Land, Turkey and Italy --- And 80 members of the touring group were invited to lead the singing in St Peter's for the Papal Christmas Midnight Mass to inaugurate the Holy Year of Jubilee.

A third Australian tour during September 2001 took 55 to Adelaide, Ballarat, and Melbourne. A fourth international tour occurred in December 2005, when the choir and orchestra performed in cathedrals and major churches of Santiago, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Cuzco, Lima, Washington, Philadelphia, New York, Toronto, and Montreal. Christmas Mass was celebrated in St Patrick's Cathedral, New York and the tour concluded on New Year's Day with Mass in Montreal Notre Dame Basilica, a concert, and Vespers in Montreal Cathedral.

And would you believe it – they're off again on the 14 December this year – for two weeks in the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, 3 days in Frankfurt, 4 nights in Lisbon, Portugal, and a week in southern Spain, including 5 nights in Seville and travel to Granada, Cordoba and Malaga. We wish them a spirit filled and fruitful trip.



*"The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art." Vatican II*



Inside : Subscription Renewal 2009, and Invitation to the Gathering of the 'Friends'.

For the Cathedral Trustees

*John Harrington*  
Monsignor J.M. Harrington