

Churches of York Walk

Walk to the Wesleyan Chapel

The Rev John Smithies was the first Methodist minister in Western Australia. His mission was “the conversion and welfare of the Aborigines and the pastoral care of the colonists”. He established a mission at “Guliliup” or “Lake Goolelal” (or Alder Lake) in July 1840 near what is now Wanneroo with Francis Armstrong and his wife in charge.¹

Smithies had made pastoral visits to Avon Valley as early as October 1840. On one visit, he visited the home of Eliza Brown, wife of Thomas Brown, famous for her letters to her father home in England. She said of Smithies:

"S sat fast asleep in his chair nearly all the time of this polite visit."²

By 1847, Rev Smithies had decided that York would be a better site for a new Native Mission than Wanneroo. In 1851, an application was made to Governor Fitzgerald for 100 acres of good wheat land at York (a mile to the north on east side of the Avon River, being the land north of Cowan Street) “to be held for the improvement of the Natives for ever”. There was a proviso that if there were no aborigines present, the land was to revert back to the government.³

A convoy of adherents arrived in York in 1851.⁴ Smithies wrote on 26 September 1851 that eight natives and one white man had travelled to York from Wanneroo with a bullock team, a journey which had taken three days. The party set up tents and cleared ten acres of ground at the selected farm location ready for planting the next year. The mission was to be called Gerald Mission in honour of the Governor. The purpose of the mission was to train aboriginal children in farm work.⁵

In 1853, the Government granted the Mission land for the Mission, and a salary of £100 a year for Smithies.⁶ A further 8 acres were granted in the York townsite on which to build a schoolroom, a chapel and a Manse and provide Glebe lands, this land here.

This was Suburban Lot D, which was bounded by Avon Terrace, Pool Street, Grey Street and Macartney Street. The Mission was even given a right of commonage, a right to graze sheep, in the township, over an area of 2,000 acres on which to run “thirty horned cattle”. This was opposed by engineer Solomon Cook who was in the process of constructing his mill in the town. Cook opposed this because he had been given a contract to supply the convict depot with meat and had been running his herds on the same land.⁷

¹ Collins, Doris, *The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong*, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

² Peter Cowan editor, *A Faithful Picture, the letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1977, p.126.

³ Collins, Doris, *The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong*, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

⁴ A.M. Clack and Jenni McColl: *York Sketchbook*, p. 46.

⁵ Collins, Doris, *The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong*, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

⁶ *Inquirer* 8 June 1853, p.2.

⁷ Collins, Doris, *The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong*, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

Chapel

On 25 September 1852, Smithies wrote that "About a fortnight ago Brother Lowe laid the cornerstone of the chapel." Local residents subscribed £200 to fund the construction of a chapel and the government also assisted.⁸

Tenders were called for construction of the chapel on 29 March 1853, tenders being administered by John Henry Monger⁹, who lived on the property to the north, Faversham House. The call for tenders stated:

"Tenders for Building the Wesleyan Chapel in York

TENDERS will be received by Mr J H Monger, York, on the 18th April, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, either separately or jointly, from any person or persons who may be willing to perform the undermentioned work, viz: -

To have a good sound stone foundation 18 inches thick, level from the highest part of the ground, the remainder of the wall to be brick, 9 inch work, 40 feet long, 22 feet wide, 10 feet high, good arches over the windows and doors, also the windows and doors and frames for both the sashes to be hung with weights and pullies, the doors to be panelled. Also the Roof, to be boarded and shingled with three pair of principals and ring posts and one purline. All materials to be found on the ground. For the Roofing, the price to be stated in words and figures, per square, doors and windows ditto, per foot, the brickwork ditto, per yard.

York, March 29, 1853."

Monger, who was an engineer, became the contracting builder himself.¹⁰ Good progress on the chapel was reported in August 1853.¹¹ Funding for roofing was being solicited in November 1853.¹² George Wansbrough and his brother John (who were Wesleyans)¹³ worked on the roof¹⁴. One local complained that ticket-of-leave men were not available to be employed in construction of the chapel¹⁵, however it is likely that they were used.

The chapel was opened on 5 April 1854 by the Rev. William Lowe to a crowd of more than 120 people.^{16 17} The cost of the chapel was £317/12/4.¹⁸ This chapel was the second church in York.¹⁹

⁸ Infra.

⁹ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 1 April 1853, p.2.

¹⁰ Collins, Doris, and Morrell, Fred, Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief history, 1852-2018, Uniting Church York, 2018.

¹¹ Inquirer 17 August 1853, p.2.

¹² Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 4 November 1853, p.2.

¹³ Rica Erickson, Dictionary of Western Australians, re George and John Wansbrough.

¹⁴ George Wansbrough returned from his apprenticeship in Perth to assist his brother in cutting the roof of the Wesleyan chapel: Heritage Conservation Plan for Bridge House, p.9.

¹⁵ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 18 February 1853, p.2.

¹⁶ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 21 April 1854, p.2.

¹⁷ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 24 March 1854, p.2.

¹⁸ Collins, Doris, The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

Originally there was a gallery in the chapel but this was later removed.^{20 21}

Upkeep and running costs were covered by pew rents paid by the regular attendants at a rate of five shillings per quarter for a family or one shilling for a single seat. Much of the expense for the chapel was the cost of candles which were purchased in 25 pound batches at 1/6 a pound.²²

A harmonium was purchased for the chapel in 1859.²³

The chapel is very simple in design, and a rare example of Victorian Regency style in Western Australia.²⁴

What happened to the Mission? So much time and labour was spent on clearing 20 to 30 acres of land and the construction of buildings, and with Rev Smithies often unavoidably away and with few others helping him, the aboriginal children drifted away and the mission failed.²⁵ The Protector of Natives in York, Walkinshaw Cowan blamed the loss of students from the mission school to "yearning" or "strong particularity" to their own districts but also due to high death rates from influenza at the institution.²⁶

In her book, *An Australian Parsonage*, Janet Millet said:

“A friend of ours once met a native woman who said that she had been one of the runaways, and held up her fingers eagerly to count upon them the number of children who had died. ‘Black fellow die – black fellow die’ said she, as she touched one finger after another in the reckoning; me run away - fraid die too. Having finished her return of deaths, she went on to say “Black fellow sick – white lady fowl sendum – white lady kangaroo sendum – master all self eatum – “ but here she paused and made an exception in favour of the matron, expressed by the words ‘Missus not eatum – misses good fellow’.”²⁷

In all, the Wesleyan church spent £12,000 on the missions to aborigines.²⁸

New Wesleyan Church

After the arrival of the Reverend Thomas Bird in August 1878,²⁹ he saw that the chapel was too small and started plans for a new church and to use the old one for the Sunday School, and social and business meetings.^{30 31} In 1885, the trustees and the Rev William Lowe held a meeting to discuss

¹⁹ A.M. Clack and Jenni McColl: *York Sketchbook*, p. 24. The first was St John’s Anglican Church constructed by Peter Barrow in Blandstown in 1840.

²⁰ Collins, Doris, *The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong*, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

²¹ The gallery was still there in 1888: *Eastern Districts Chronicle*, 28 April 1888, p.4.

²² *Infra*.

²³ *The Inquirer and Commercial News* 29 June 1859, p.2.

²⁴ Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, 1989, pp.46-49.

²⁵ *Inquirer* 16 March 1853, p.3.

²⁶ CSR 230, Cowan to Colonial Secretary 3 March 1852.

²⁷ Janet Millett: *An Australian Parsonage, 1872*, Facsimile edition 1980 UWA, p.129.

²⁸ Ronald E Turner, *Foundations Not Made By Hands*, Perth, 1984.

²⁹ Rica Erickson, *Dictionary of Western Australians*, re Rev. Thomas Bird.

³⁰ *Eastern Districts Chronicle*, 17 March 1888, p.7.

³¹ *Eastern Districts Chronicle*, 28 April 1888, p.4.

plans for building a church. The “Wesleyan body generally responded to the demand upon their resources” and by March 1888 most of the money had reportedly been raised³².

Tenders were called and the successful tender was from Pringle and Moscrip of Perth and Adelaide for £945.³³

The foundation stone was laid by Mrs J H Monger on 25 April 1888.³⁴ The foundation stone “is a most beautiful specimen of Sydney free stone, and will be carved during the coming week by Mr Pringle, one of the contractors, by whom it is presented”.³⁵

“Every preparation was made by the obliging contractor for the ceremony on Wednesday. The scaffolding was adorned with bunting hours before the company assembled. Stones were removed and planks placed for the comfort of those taking part in the service.” A “hermetically sealed” bottle containing a list of parishioners and some silver and copper coins common in the colony was placed under the foundation stone by Joseph Pyke, and Mr Pringle presented Mrs Monger with a silver trowel.³⁶

On the evening of the laying of the foundation stone, there was a promenade concert in the Oddfellows’ Hall. “The best musical talent that the district affords has been secured” and “with one or two exceptions” this concert was declared a success and raised £17 for the building fund.^{37 38 39}

The cost of the Church was reputed to be £1,000 and in May 1888 there were concerns that only £400 had been raised.⁴⁰ In fact, only £236 had been raised, all of the donors to that time being listed in an advertisement the following month, the largest of them being John Henry Monger (£59) who was paying in instalments. Donations continued to be published and the total crept to £345.⁴¹

By June, it was reported that construction of the Church was fast reaching completion and would be finished by the first Sunday in August 1888.⁴²

Stone for the church was donated and carted to the site by adherents.⁴³

The opening of the new church

The last two services for the Chapel were held by the Rev Thomas Bird and the Rev William Lowe on 19 August. The Rev Thomas Bird held the opening service in the new Church on Wednesday 22 August 1888 at 3:45 pm.⁴⁴ The cost of the new church was £1,100.⁴⁵

³² Eastern Districts Chronicle, 17 March 1888, p.7.

³³ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 25 August 1888, p.4.

³⁴ York Chronicle, 4 September 1952; foundation stone: This would indicate that the cost was probably being mostly funded by the Monger family.

³⁵ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 14 April 1888, p.5.

³⁶ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 28 April 1888, p.4.

³⁷ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 21 April 1888, p.4.

³⁸ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 21 April 1888, p.5.

³⁹ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 28 April 1888, p.7.

⁴⁰ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 26 April 1888, p.2.

⁴¹ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 2 June 1888, p.6; 9 June 1888, p.5; 16 June 1888, p.6; 23 June 1888, p.5; 7 July 1888, p.5; 11 August 1888, p.5.

⁴² Eastern Districts Chronicle, 23 June 1888, p.5.

⁴³ Collins, Doris, The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

The local newspaper, the Eastern Districts Chronicle reported:

“The Church is a valuable addition to the many imposing edifices erected here, and the internal arrangements are finished in a workmanlike manner, redounding greatly to the credit of Messrs. Pringle and Moscrip, as contractors. Its acoustic properties are of the highest order as was plainly evidenced at the services on Wednesday last. A great many people attended from Perth. Northern, Newcastle, Beverley, and other towns, and the whole congregation numbered quite 300 souls.⁴⁶

By March 1889, the money raised for the building fund was still only £478, and by April, £500, still less than half the cost.⁴⁷ The Rev T Bird delivered a farewell sermon on 7 April 1889 and he was replaced by the Rev George of Adelaide.⁴⁸ Where did the balance come from to pay for the cost? Perhaps it was always available as part of the Glebe land between the Church and Avon Terrace had been resumed in 1886 for the railway line.⁴⁹ Also, the church was subsequently able to sell the land on Avon Terrace between Macartney Street and what was then called Pool Street (now Christie Retreat).

Architecture

The architect of the church was Alfred McBain Bonython who had come from Adelaide and Melbourne and was living in Perth designing buildings for the Shenton family. He was only 23 at the time. He also designed the Wesleyan Methodist churches in Fremantle and Albany.⁵⁰

The church is in Victorian Academic Gothic style.⁵¹ Gothic features include:

- Steeply pitched roof
- Parapeted gable
- Excellent stone masonry
- Wall buttresses
- Lancet windows
- Porch with Gothic arch
- Label moulds

Organ

A fund was raised by Mrs Florence Monger in 1895 for the purchase of an organ constructed by Alfred Monk of London.⁵² The organ is only one of two Alfred Monk organs in Australia and is

⁴⁴ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 18 August 1888, p.4.

⁴⁵ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 25 August 1888, p.5.

⁴⁶ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 25 August 1888, p.4.

⁴⁷ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 16 March 1889, p.4, 13 April 1889, p.4.

⁴⁸ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 6 April 1889, p.5, 13 April 1889, p.5.

⁴⁹ Collins, Doris, *The Establishment of Methodism in York, Balaardong, No 3*, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

⁵⁰ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 28 April 1888, p.4; and refer to *Architects of South Australia*.

⁵¹ Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, 1989, pp.46-49.

⁵² Minutes of Parish meeting June 1895; Collins, Doris, and Morrell, Fred, *Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief History, 1852-2018*, Uniting Church York, 2018.

considered the best 19th century organ in Western Australia "in both the warmth of its tone and brilliance of sound and in capability to fill the sanctuary with sound".⁵³

Originally, the organ had to be hand-pumped. An organ pumper recollected:

"The organ pumper was very important. If the musician and the person pumping the organ were on good terms, the pumper would use long even strokes of the pump lever to provide a nice even flow of music and when the musician was using FF which means full volume one would have to watch the level indicator and increase the speed of stroke but still keep it very even to compensate for the volume of air being used to produce the volume of sound."⁵⁴

The names of a number of the organ pumpers are scratched in the back of the organ case.

In 1925, an electric blower was installed.⁵⁵

The organ was restored in 1981-2 by FJ Larner & Co and was cleaned and maintained in June 2001.⁵⁶

The gallery in the church was originally intended to be used by the choir but the installation of the pipe organ meant that the choir assembled at the front of the church.⁵⁷

Bell

The bell of the church was cast at the London foundry of John Warner & Sons in 1905. The bell is 510mm in diameter and weighs approximately 91kg. The bell was donated by Mr Thomas Harkness with the condition that it be rung a half hour before the morning and evening services for a short time and then for a full five minutes before each service commenced. Half an hour was presumably enough time for Harkness to get dressed and drive to church by horse and buggy.

Originally the bell was mounted on a wooden tower at the back of the chapel. When that became unsafe it was replaced by a metal tower. In November 2010, the bell was erected in the present tower which was paid for by public subscription.⁵⁸

Objects inside

Objects inside the church include paintings or drawings of Rev Smithies and Rev William Lowe and his wife Mary Lowe.

Walk to Holy Trinity Church

The Anglican Church St John's, constructed in 1840, was proving too small. Additions were constructed by ticket of leave men.⁵⁹

⁵³ Russell, Duncan, in Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief history, 1852-2018, Uniting Church York, 2018.

⁵⁴ Collins, Doris, and Morrell, Fred, Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief history, 1852-2018, Uniting Church York, 2018.

⁵⁵ Collins, Doris, The Establishment of Methodism in York, Barladong, No 3, 2002, The York Society, pp.11-19.

⁵⁶ Collins, Doris, and Morrell, Fred, Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief history, 1852-2018, Uniting Church York, 2018

⁵⁷ Collins, Doris, and Morrell, Fred, Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief history, 1852-2018, Uniting Church York, 2018.

⁵⁸ Collins, Doris, and Morrell, Fred, Wesley Uniting Church York, A Brief history, 1852-2018, Uniting Church York, 2018.

“The addition made to our little church last week has afforded sittings for some 40 or more persons; the increase however of inhabitants in this district calls for more room than is afforded even with the present addition. We want another church.”⁶⁰

Plans were presented to a public meeting at the beginning of October 1854.⁶¹ The church was designed to have a “lofty spire” above the tower and to eventually accommodate 700 people. It would have “narrow lancet windows ... filled with colored glass from England”. “At present it is intended to erect only the nave, tower and porch, at an expense of about £800 affording accommodation for about 250 people”.⁶²

The Church “was built in the style of the latter part of the 11th century”⁶³, that is in Norman style, also called Romanesque. The architect was Richard Roach Jewell, Superintendent of Public Works.⁶⁴

The foundation stone for the “York New Church” was laid on 25 October 1854 by Mrs Fitzgerald, the wife of the Governor, Captain Charles Fitzgerald.^{65 66 67}

“It is with great satisfaction that I lay the foundation stone of this new church at York. Western Australia possesses a large portion of my regard as my bridal home and the birthplace of my children. About to leave its shores, both the Governor and myself will ever look back on the colony with grateful anticipation, trusting that its improving prosperity will become brighter still.”

An advertisement for tenders for lime was published on 27 October 1854 and again on 15 November 1854.^{68 69} Tenders were to be submitted to S A Barker of Guildford (a storekeeper)⁷⁰ or John Henry Monger Snr of York. This indicates that Monger may once again have been the builder or somehow involved in construction, at least in the early stages.

Tenders for brickwork were called on 19 February 1855^{71 72}, tenders for the “roofing, weather-boarding and shingling” were called on 12 March 1855^{73 74}, tenders for the doors and seats were called 20 March 1855^{75 76}. These tenders were not submitted to Monger but to James Brown the Anglican Chaplain at York.

⁵⁹ Inquirer 8 June 1853, p.2.

⁶⁰ Inquirer 25 May 1853, p.2.

⁶¹ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

⁶² Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

⁶³ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 November 1855, p.3.

⁶⁴ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

⁶⁵ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 6 October 1854, p.2.

⁶⁶ Inquirer 8 November 1854, p.3.

⁶⁷ Inquirer 15 November 1854, p.1.

⁶⁸ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 27 October 1854, p.2.

⁶⁹ Inquirer 15 November 1854, p.2.

⁷⁰ Rica Erickson, Dictionary of Western Australians, re S A Barker (the ad actually refers to S A Barter but there was no such person, it must be a reference to S A Barker).

⁷¹ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 2 March 1855, p.1.

⁷² Inquirer 7 March 1855, p.1.

⁷³ Inquirer 14 March 1855, p.3.

⁷⁴ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 16 March 1855, p.2.

⁷⁵ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 30 March 1855, p.2.

Convicts or ticket of leave workers were used⁷⁷, however progress was slow due to “drunkenness”.⁷⁸ This accusation was denied by a reader called “A Lover of Truth”.⁷⁹

The Church was opened on 26 October 1855, not quite finished.⁸⁰ The cost was £1,100 (the same cost as the Wesleyan Church 30 years later).⁸¹ The government paid £25 towards the cost.⁸²

The benches were made of local “mahogany” (as jarrah was then known) and the “narrow lancet windows will be filled with coloured glass from England”.^{83 84}

The work of overseeing the construction was undertaken by the Rev Pownall.⁸⁵

Refer to Janet Millet’s painting of the Church

Janet Millet, the wife of the parson, painted the Church in about 1863.

On the right bank, pensioners were setting up residence.⁸⁶

The Church is also pictured in Henderson’s drawing of York published in The London Illustrated News on the front cover of the 28 February 1857 edition. Where is the steeple, why did he include one on the drawing? The Church was intended to have a spire but was constructed only with a nave and porch, and without a spire.⁸⁷

Richard Roach Jewell, the designer of the church, worked for Henderson, and therefore Henderson was likely to have been aware of the drawings presented to the Anglican Church prior to October 1854. It does appear that, to give accuracy to his drawings sent to London, Henderson included in his drawing the church as it was conceived by Jewell, not knowing that a decision would be made not to construct the tower or spire, presumably for cost reasons.⁸⁸ This means the engraving was probably based on a drawing (or drawings) done around September 1854 when plans had been completed, but before a decision on what would be build had been made.

The Church was built in 1854 using convict labour. Note the Colonial Bond brickwork.

The architect was **Richard Roach Jewell** “under the superintendence of the Colonial Secretary”.⁸⁹ This was one of his first designs after his arrival in the Colony in 1852 and his appointment as Superintendent of Public Works in 1853.

⁷⁶ Inquirer 4 April 1855, p.1.

⁷⁷ This is implied from a statement in an article: “The workmen have displayed great interest in their work”: Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 November 1855, p.3.

⁷⁸ Inquirer, 23 May 1855, p.3.

⁷⁹ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News, 8 June 1855, p.3.

⁸⁰ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 November 1855, p.3.

⁸¹ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 November 1855, p.3.

⁸² Clack, AM (Tony)., Glorious Apostle, A history of the Catholic Church in York, St Patrick’s York, 2009, p.33.

⁸³ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 November 1855, p.3.

⁸⁴ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

⁸⁵ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 November 1855, p.3.

⁸⁶ Inquirer 8 June 1853, p.2.

⁸⁷ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

⁸⁸ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

⁸⁹ Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 3 November 1854, p.2.

This church is in Norman style, made of bricks rather than stone. Norman style was also called Romanesque. Romanesque architecture was the style current in Europe in the 11th century before Gothic.

Victorian Romanesque style was popular in Colonial Australia in the second half of the 19th century because it was “striking in effect, simple to build with the scarcely-trained labour available, and economical”. It also conveys a feeling of “sober simplicity, sturdiness, weighty robustness and restraint”.

Victorian Romanesque style was used in Victorian Australia mainly for church properties and commercial properties.

Features of Victorian Romanesque are:

- Simple massing (= general shape and form as well as the size of a building)
- Parapeted gable (a gable with a wall or parapet built up in front of it)
- Strongly modelled circular arches
- Tower with battlements
- Pyramid roof
- Arcade (covered line of arches)
- Wheel window (= large circular window on which the radiation of tracery from the centre is suggested)

Above the windows are “label moulds”, projecting mouldings which are intended to divert water running down the wall face from the window opening.

The church hall was formerly the Church of St John at the main Avon Tce crossing, built in 1860 and later moved here. The hall has an outer Norman door and an inner Gothic door.

The builder of St John was Henry Stevens, the blacksmith and builder who was paid 104 pounds in August 1860 to construct the church.⁹⁰

Henry Stevens was also a whitesmith and very likely the maker of the weathervane of Solomon Cook’s mill which is now above the post office.

Walk to St Patrick’s old church⁹¹

In 1858, seven years after the arrival of convicts in York, the numbers of Catholics in the community had increased and a Spanish monk, Francisco Salvado, no relation to Bishop Salvado (pronounced differently), was given the duty of looking after Beverley, Northam, York and Toodyay. He had to travel between all the towns. Once, when his horse “Tommy” broke its fetters, running off with other horses, he had to walk to Northam and back.

⁹⁰ The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News, 3 August 1860, p.2.

⁹¹ Unless otherwise footnoted, the source of all material in this section is from Clack, AM (Tony), Glorious Apostle, A history of the Catholic Church in York, St Patrick’s York, 2009.

At first he was given board in various houses when he visited but in 1858, he was allowed to live in the house of William Fowler who had resigned his position as government storekeeper. Divine worship was celebrated in houses or barns lent for the occasion.

He had a housekeeper, Mary Coffey, who received keep in lieu of wages. However, his support from parishioners was tenuous. One Sunday, Mary Coffey came to see Salvado to tell him they did not have food for dinner. Word got around that the priest was in need and shortly after 8 o'clock a boy came to the door with some bread, salted pork and two "wood pigeons" that he had killed that afternoon.

Throughout 1858, Salvado was raising funds to build a church. By the end of the year he had raised £25. A foundation stone was laid on St Patrick's Day, 17 March 1859 by Bishop Serra. About 100 people came for the ceremony. In October 1859, the government gave £25 towards the construction cost of the church, being the same amount that was given for Holy Trinity Church.

The building was originally made of fired brick, rendered with a lime and sand mortar and painted a light brown colour. The cost was £180. The church was built by Benedictine monks from new Norcia. They also constructed "several small mission huts" for use as school buildings.⁹²

The church was opened on 17 March 1860 and dedicated by Father Martin Griver. The organist from New Norcia made the journey for the opening with a small harmonium to accompany the singing.

"The church was a simple gothic design in the 'mission' style and could hold 80 people reasonably comfortably. A narrow room at the rear of the building was designed to be used as a sacristy, but this small narrow room also became Fr Salvado's living quarters."⁹³

At the time, there were about 200 Catholics in York, mostly convicts.

In September 1863, Resident Magistrate Walkinshaw Cowan accused Fr Salvado of having an involvement with a young woman who was his housekeeper. Salvado defended himself but was stood down and forced to return to Spain.

For a short period, the parish was served by Father Anselm Bourke but in 1868, he was replaced by Fr Patrick Joseph Gibney, who was to build a larger church.

Church of St Patrick, South St 1874-86

In July 1874, Gibney formed a committee for the purpose of building a new church.

"Our readers will learn with pleasure that the Rev P.J. Gibney proposes at an early date laying the foundation stone of a new church in the flourishing Town of York. Already, we understand that a large quantity of building material has been collected on the proposed site; and other preliminaries required before undertaking a work of such importance; are fast being brought to completion. The good people of York have already the evidence of the energy of their zealous Pastor in the shape of Handsome Convent and a pretty School House,

⁹² Heritage Conservation Plan for St Patricks, referring to Dom Eugene Perez, Subiaco, WA, c.1960, 4 page typed transcript, PR3422, Bourke, DF, The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia, Perth, 1979, p.108.

⁹³ Clack, p.35

and we make no doubt that a substantial and commodious Church will ere long have to be added to the list of works the rev. gentleman has begun and completed.”⁹⁴

The process was ratified at a meeting of the Catholics of York in the school on 5 September 1874:

“New Church – Proposed by R Gallop, seconded by E Cahill – That the Catholic community of York ... do set themselves to the task of erecting a Church worthy of the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, and that the foundation stone of the said Church be laid on the 28th of October next.”⁹⁵

The laying of the foundation stone was delayed until Bishop Griver was available to do the task.⁹⁶

This church was designed by the former Fenian convict, architect **Joseph Nunan**, and was his major work.

Nunan was convicted for his part in shooting and wounding a constable in Ireland in 1867. He was sentenced to seven years penal servitude and arrived in Fremantle in 1868, aboard the *Hougoumont*, the last convict ship to travel to Australia. This ship was famous for bringing 62 well educated and literate Fenians including John Boyle O’Reilly who later organised the escape of six of the Fenians on the *Catalpa*.

Nunan also designed Christian Brothers College in Fremantle. He built or designed the Greenough Police Station, the Edwards building for the Christian Brothers School, Fremantle, in 1882–83, and St Patrick’s Boys School in Perth. He also built a store and house for Walter Padbury in Guildford. He is also said to have been involved with the building of Jewell’s Perth Town Hall.

Stonemasons were Henry Davey and his son Thomas, who had already constructed a number of stone buildings around York and the Avon region. The stone came from a farm Daliak at the foot of Mt Bakewell, then owned by Joseph Cahill. The stone was carted to the site by the male members of the congregation. In August 1877 a list of those who had carted stone was published with a value of the work done. Fr Gibney was at the top of the list having spent 322 days carting stone and bricks. Others carted timber and lime. The total value of these contributions was £730.

As the building height increased, horse teams were brought in to haul buckets of stone via pulleys up to the masons on the timber scaffolding.

A German immigrant, Thomas Prunster was responsible for many of the timber fittings inside the church: the hammer beams supporting the roof, the high choir and organ gallery above the entrance and the stairway in the tower.

In 1878 a violent thunderstorm hit York and the church was to suffer severe damage to the stone and brickwork.

In December 1879, Fr Gibney collapsed and had to convalesce in Fremantle for two months. The walls were completed by 1880.

⁹⁴ WA Catholic Record, 6 July 1874, p.3c.

⁹⁵ WA Catholic Record, 6 October 1874, p.5c.

⁹⁶ Lane L and Wilkes F, *The New Church of St Patrick and Father Patrick Joseph Gibney (including) The Sisters of Mercy in York 1813-1915*, unpublished historical research, May 1999.

The roof was constructed in timber shingles by Thomas Tompkinson with thousands of sheoak shingles.

Ticket of leave men were employed in the construction of the church.⁹⁷

A bazaar and fete were held in the church at the same time as the annual York Fair, attracting visitors from all over the Avon Valley and Perth.

The stain glass windows were manufactured by Franz Mayer and Co of Munich and London and cost £330.

By January 1883, the church was complete enough to be opened and a divine service was held on 14 January 1883, celebrated by Fr Gibney.

Nunan's original design was for a 70 foot bell tower and a spire to 105 feet, but because of lack of funding, Fr Gibney kept the height of the tower to the ridgeline of the building. It would be another 23 years before the tower and spire were completed.

The total cost to that point was £5,000 and by October 1885, only half that had been collected.

The church is 104 feet long, 30 feet wide and 28 feet high, not including the roof. The ultimate cost of the church was £7,000, raised from only 800 parishioners.

Bishop Salvado came from New Norcia to make the dedication of the Church on Sunday 21 February 1886.⁹⁸ There was a Mass in the morning at which the collection was £200, and the dedication of the new church was at 4 pm, and started with a procession from the old church to the new church. The function was kept short as many people had to leave by train at 6:15 pm.

Victorian Gothic churches copied all the features of Gothic architecture which began in France in the 11th century with St Denis and Notre Dame in Paris. This Church is a wonderful example of Victorian Academic Gothic as it observes so many traditional Gothic features:

- Steeply pitched roof
- Quality stone masonry
- Landmark tower
- Battlements or parapets with crenellations
- Parapeted gable
- Pinnacles
- Porch
- Wall buttresses
- Pointed gothic arches
- Rose window
- Window with tracery
- Quatrefoils and trefoils, and even an octofoil window.

⁹⁷ Rica Erickson, Dictionary of Western Australians, re Patrick Gibney, who employed ticket of leave men from 1868 to 1875.

⁹⁸ Eastern Districts Chronicle, 20 February 1886, p.3.

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