

ST. IGNATIUS' CHURCH Church Street

History and Description

Designed in the Early French Gothic style of the 13th century, and constructed in stages between 1867 and 1894 in bluestone with Sydney freestone dressings. The architect was the talented William W. Wardell. The spire was added in 1927-28, the architect being G.W. Vanheems who was also the architect for the St. Patrick's spire in 1936-40, and who lived at 36 Lesney Street, Richmond.

The 1.5 acre site was purchased by the Jesuits in 1866. The Parish of Richmond at this time included not only Richmond but also Hawthorn, Kew, Camberwell, Nunawading and Mitcham. When completed in 1894, St. Ignatius was claimed to be the third largest Catholic church in Australia.

The stages for construction were:

1867	Foundation stone laid
1870	Opening of nave, aisles and part of tower
1885-88	Transept completed
1889-94	Chancel and apsidal chapels completed
1927-28	Spire completed.

Wardell (1823-99), at the peak of his career in London, emigrated in 1853 to Australia for reasons of health. He was one of the best qualified and most distinguished architects to come to Australia last century. He was appointed Inspecting Clerk of Works and Chief Architect in the Department of Works and Buildings in 1859, and promoted to Inspector-General for Public Works with the right of private practice in 1861. He was responsible for the construction of many major public buildings in Victoria, among them St. Patrick's cathedral and Government House. He was dismissed with other civil servants by the Victorian Government in 1878 and settled in Sydney. There he took W.L. Vernon as a partner in 1884 and practised with his son Herbert in the 1890's. He died in Sydney. Wardell's Gothic Revival works rank among the greatest buildings constructed anywhere in that style.

The builder of the transept was James Bonham who lived at 17 Elm Street, Richmond.

The interior of St. Ignatius has been insensitively adapted to the liturgical requirements of the second Vatican Council and many of the original fittings removed. The organ was built in 1874 and originally installed in the Melbourne Exhibition Buildings for the Colonial Exhibition of 1875. It was erected in St. Ignatius in 1876 and moved to its present location in 1897. It is one of the most significant early Fincham organs to survive in a relatively original state, notable features are the grained timber case incorporating diapered metal pipes and an elaborate English classical tonal scheme.

Statement of Significance

An outstanding example of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture by William Wardell, and an important Melbourne landmark.

References

Historic Environment, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1984, pp.20-33.
Trust News, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1984, pp.12-15.