



4-105 73 Somerville Road

St. Augustine's Catholic Church 73 Somerville Road

History

Replacing an earlier timber church-school (1894) in Gamon Street¹, this large brick church was opened and blessed, early in 1925, by Dr. Mannix, with the assistance of the local priest, Rev. T. English.² Able to seat 900, it was equipped with 'a spacious sanctuary with three altars...' and cost over £15000. The remaining debt of £10000 inspired Federal parliamentarian, a Mr. Brennan, to appeal for donations, whereby Dr. Mannix proffered £20, Fr. English £80; both outdone by St. Augustine's students, who gave £223.³ The following

April saw another bid for funds, Dr. Mannix again officiating but, on this occasion, at Footscray, where a carnival and 'coronation' had yielded £1800 for Yarraville's church.⁴

Associated with the church was the St. Joseph's school, opened in 1895, which was already crowded and in need of expansion within the next decade. It was augmented in 1908 by a new brick school to the design of Kempson & Conolly and built by R. Duckworth⁵. As part of this programme, a convent was built nearby in 1912 to house the St. Joseph's teaching sisters transferred from St. Monica's and one year later a new presbytery⁶.

- 1 Laffey, St. Augustine's School, Yarraville, (B.Ed. thesis)
- 2 *The Argus* 2/2/25; Lack, site notes; BEMJ 4-8-94/2
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 *The Argus* 7/4/25, p.12
- 5 Armstrong, *Solemn Centenary Mass...*, 1974, p.9
- 6 Armstrong, *loc.cit.*; Laffey, *loc.cit.*

Description

The focus of an extensive complex, the Church design pays its respects to the stripped red brick Gothic cum Byzantine cum Romanesque Revival practised by the prolific Catholic designer, A.A. Fritsch, since the 1890s. Of the three stylistic options, the design adopts the last two.

A typical compositional device of a gabled parapet, set between two dissimilarly sized towers, (one usually spired)) is used here but with the eastern tower being only slightly higher than the other and domed.

The towers both have four domed corner piers and the ox-bow parapet between, much in the manner of British Edwardian Freestyle architecture of J. Harrison Townsend. At the base of each is a cemented gablet supported on twin Tuscan column pairs. The focus of the facade, however, is the giant arched window with its tripartite tracery and leaded French-inspired cartouche-like designs. St. Augustine himself stands in the niche below the gable. Beyond the facade, the church is appointed with side chapels and entrance porches of various shapes, providing some visual diversity within the generally cohesive regime.

External Integrity

New ramped entry; fence gone (?).

Streetscape

Directly complementary to the adjoining presbytery (1906) and to the more distant contemporary red brick school and hall buildings, now separated by the addition of more recent cream brick Moderne styled structures and a multiplicity of fence types.

Significance

Architecturally, a late and unadventurous use of an established Catholic church style, but nevertheless the towers are unusual and the side chapels lend visual interest also part of a visually related complex. Historically, a gathering place over a long period.

House

222 Somerville Road

History

Contractor, William Murphy, of Fehon Street, Yarraville, was the first owner-occupier of this 9 room house in 1932. Murphy and family remained there until the 1960s, Emily Ryan being the new owner-occupier after 1970.¹

The Yarraville Murphys had been contracting in the area since Thomas Murphy (cabinet maker) had arrived at Port Phillip in 1842. Reputedly Murphy had purchased land in Adelaide Street by 1843 (?) and built a house. His son, Ned Murphy and family, established themselves in Sussex Street and, later, in Tarrengower Street.²

Murphy opened quarries where he operated one of Footscray's first stone crushers and, as a contractor, eventually won many municipal road construction contracts. His sons, including William as managing director, continued his business after his death, and gradually introduced cartage contracting into the firm. Continuing work for C.S.R. and Millers Rope Works was a major contributor towards the assembly of some 386 working horses by the 1920s. Eventually trucks replaced horses with the last horse team put to rest in 1957. With 76 trucks it was claimed that Murphy & Sons was 'one of the largest privately-owned transport firms in the State, by 1959'.³

'Bill' Murphy was the first Yarraville Football Club president after it joined the V.F.A. in 1927, where 'jobs at Murphy's' was a recognized inducement for full player participation. Murphy also served in the executive of the Footscray and, later, Melbourne Football Clubs.⁴ His son, Lindsay, grew up in Somerville Road and went on to become the next manager of the expanding firm. His sporting contribution to the area however was in cricket. Today the firm operates from 246 Whitehall Street, a site purchased by the family after the Tarrengower Street site had become too cramped and the stable accommodation outmoded.⁵

1 VFC 1930-22; RB1930-1,11827; MMBW CF.187757
 2 FFOY p.142f
 3 ibid.
 4 ibid.
 5 ibid.