

Area: Geraldton	Place Number: 39	Category: 1
Assessment Date: 29/10/1996	Last Revision Date: 29/09/2009	
HCWA Number: 1064	Asset ID: MCH127051	

PLACE DETAILS

Name:	St Francis Xavier Cathedral
Other Names:	56 Cathedral Avenue
Type of Place:	Cathedral
Address:	56 Cathedral Avenue
Suburb:	Geraldton

LOCATION

Map Reference:	15.15	GPS Northing:	6814358.00	GPS Easting:	266843.000
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Photo Description:

2/08/2008

Rod Milne

View of main entrance from Cathedral Avenue.

SITE DETAILS

Lot No.:	Lot 11	Assess No.:	11679
Reserv No.:		Vol/Fol:	1666/125
Dia/Plan:	55675		

USE OF PLACE

Original Use:	Cathedral		
Current Use:	Cathedral		
Ownership:		Occupied:	Occupied
Public Access:	Restricted		

DESCRIPTION

Walls:	Stone	Roof:	Asbestos
Condition:	Fair	Integrity:	
Original fabric:			
Modifications:			

St Francis Xavier Cathedral is located on a prominent, raised and open site in Cathedral Avenue which ensures that it can be seen from all sides. Hence, its many facets of walls and roofs enrich the townscape about it. The building is aligned along its east west axis, parallel to Cathedral Avenue, one of the main historic landward entries to the town centre [1]. The Cathedral is of the Inter War Romanesque period and style of architecture [2], although the HCWA Register Entry and assessment by Ian Molyneux, attributes it principally as Arts & Crafts whilst acknowledging Romanesque influences and elements [3]. "St Francis Xavier Cathedral, through manipulation of the site in the Arts & Crafts manner, generates a cultural environment in its own right. The aesthetic qualities include a deliberate synthesis of aesthetic experiences, Hawes, himself, attributed a Roman style to St Francis Xavier Cathedral, with features from the Norman-Romanesque (11th Century) and Renaissance (17th Century) and admitted to borrowing the towers from the Californian Franciscan missions of San Luis Rey and Santa Barbara (18th & 19th Centuries)." [4]

The Cathedral is built of local Geraldton stone, and confidently employs wide-span arches and skillfully laid rubble and ashlar. Rendered mouldings emphasise openings and decoration, providing contrast against the textured stonework. The main form of the building follows the east-west axis which is accentuated, at the western end, by twin, stepped towers either side of the Romanesque arched entry and recessed baroque styled, elevated gable end which terminates the nave. The

stepped, or tiered, dome capped towers are octagonal in plan at the upper levels over square, ground floor bases. At the lower level, the northern tower has louvered circular openings originally intended for clocks whilst the southern tower has vertical arched openings. Together with a large octagonal dome at the crossing with the minor north-south axis, the towers dominate the Cathedral. To the east a smaller, circular, 15th century chateaux style tower, identifies the sacristy externally and provides a visual contrast or incongruity to the overall Romanesque character of the Cathedral. Thought to be a later addition, this tower is more reminiscent of Hawes' Northampton, St Mary's in Ara Coeli Church (1936). The higher central nave is given expression externally by the lower roofed aisles with their rendered arched windows and decoration.

The internal spaces of the Cathedral are tall and voluminous. The quality of light is cool and dark, providing a retreat from the hot, glaring skies outside. The spaces are well proportioned, with the nave and aisles separated by large circular columns supporting arches which emphasise

the Romanesque character. The dome at the intersection of the nave and transept focuses the congregation's attention on the altar. Interior decoration is dominated by bold, yet simple, dichromatic, grey and orange, banded painting of walls (grey) and arches (orange).

1. HCWA; Documentation of Entry for Entry in the Register of Heritage Places.,pp10 - 13.2 Physical Evidence.
2. Apperly R et al., A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: (Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1989), pp 194-197.
3. HCWA., ibid. Pp 3, 5, & 10.
4. HCWA; ibid., pp 10 - 13.2 Physical Evidence.

HISTORY

Construction Date:	1916-1938	Source:	Foundation Stone
Architect:	J.C. Hawes		
Builder:	Unknown		

In 1914, after meeting the Bishop of Geraldton while studying in Rome, John Hawes commenced the designs for St Francis Xavier Cathedral - the Cathedral of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Geraldton. (Heritage Council of WA Register Documentation, p6) Hawes was responsible for the design of a number of buildings in Geraldton including the Chapel of San Spirito, the Hermitage, St Lawrence's Church and Nazareth House. Construction of the Cathedral was in two main campaigns twenty years apart. Work on the Cathedral commenced on 20 June, 1916, with Hawes and volunteer parishioners beginning the building under very constrained financial circumstances brought about by the First World War. The original corner stone of Father LeCaille's St Francis Xavier Church, the first catholic

church built in Geraldton in 1870 (since demolished), was relaid on 3 September, 1916 by the Bishop of Geraldton, William B. Kelly in the north west tower of the new cathedral. (Ibid.) Although unfinished, the first stage of the cathedral was officially blessed on 18 August, 1918, consisting of the west towers and the nave. The "Souvenir of the opening of St Francis Xavier Cathedral, 18 August, 1918" provides a full description of the place with photographs, and interior sketches. (GLLSCVF - Churches) By 1926 the Crypt was extended eastwards and the sanctuary above it was completed. In 1927 the Sisters' Chapel was built on the south side of the High Alter. (Ibid., Bain, M.A., "A Life of its Own", City of Geraldton, 1966, p232 & "Geraldton Guardian & Express", 30/8/1938)

The second building campaign was undertaken in August, 1937, after the Depression. The dome was constructed by the three Beringer brothers, the walls of the octagon having previously been temporarily covered by a roof of timber and corrugated iron. The Cathedral was consecrated and opened on 28 August, 1938. (Bain, p232, Register Documentation, p6, The Heritage of Western Australia: the illustrated Register of the National Estate, MacMillan, 1989, p117) The "Opening of the completed Cathedral of St Francis Xavier - Souvenir Programme" includes photographs, plans, sketches and a full description of the place as at 1938. (Geraldton Library Local Studies Collection Vertical Files - Churches) St Francis Xavier Cathedral has remained a place of worship since its construction. It is also a significant tourist attraction for Geraldton.

HISTORIC THEMES

HCWA:	406 Religion 605 Famous and infamous people 603 Local heroes and battlers
AHC:	8.6 Worshipping 8.6.4 Making places for worship

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cathedral of St Francis Xavier has very high cultural heritage significance for the State, the Geraldton community and mid-west region because of its aesthetic, historic, scientific and social values. Its aesthetic value derives from its inherent beauty and townscape importance together with its landmark qualities. It is aesthetically and historically important as one of the major works of Priest-Architect Monsignor John Hawes. Historically it contributes to an understanding of human endeavour in the region and the development of the Roman Catholic Church in the State. Scientifically it has the potential to yield information contributing to an understanding of the natural and cultural history of WA

together with archival and comparative studies of the works of Hawes, both here and overseas. Socially it has spiritual value for the Geraldton and mid-west region as a gathering place for the Roman Catholic community and to the wider community for invoking a sense of place. (This statement of significance is based largely on that of the HCWA "Entry in the Register of Heritage Places" and further reference should be made to this and the criteria for assessment.)

RECOMMENDATION:

Care must be taken to ensure the integrity of the place is maintained in accordance with current and future conservation plans. The Geraldton Town Planning Scheme also needs to ensure that the building and the environs of the site are protected so that future subdivision and development will never encroach on the open and prominent nature of the site.

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

Management Category:	1
Level of Significance:	EXCEPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE: Essential to the heritage of the locality.
Management Recommendation:	Conservation of the place is considered essential. Any proposed change should not unduly impact on the significance of the place and be in accordance with either a Conservation Plan or Heritage Impact Statement.

OTHER LISTINGS

Heritage Council of WA - Register, 25/11/1994
Australian Heritage Commission - Register, 21/03/1978
National Trust of WA - Classified, 11/06/1973

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Heritage Council of WA Register Documentation.
Bain, M.A., "A Life of its Own", City of Geraldton, 1996.
"Geraldton Guardian & Express".
GLLSCVF - Churches.
GLLSPC - Buildings (Churches), Festivals/Celebrations & Geraldton (General).
Feilman & Associates, "Survey of Place of Historic and Landscape

Significance in Geraldton", 1977.

Taylor, J., "Conservation Plan of Cathedral of St Francis Xavier", 1997.

OTHER PHOTOS



Photo Description:

29/10/1996

Suba, Callow & Grundy

Interior view of the Cathedral.



Photo Description:

29/10/1996

Suba, Callow & Grundy

View from Cathedral Avenue.