



Monsignor John Cyril Hawes with 'Dominie' 1933

(Courtesy Bishop of Geraldton)

Hawes, Monsignor John Cyril (1876-1956), was born at Richmond near London. He designed buildings, primarily ecclesiastical, constructed in Great Britain, the Bahamas, the USA, and Australia. Educated at the King's School, Canterbury, Hawes completed an artiled apprenticeship with the London firm of commercial architects, Edmeston and Gabriel. Whilst working, he studied both at the Architectural Association and the London County Council Arts and Crafts School, coming under the influence of prominent Arts and Crafts theorists, including William Lethaby and Edward Prior. Commencing his own practice with domestic work in 1897, his deep spirituality was confirmed with the design of a church at Gunnerton, Northumberland in 1899. Hawes was ordained an Anglican minister in 1903, and designed a number of other projects of religious inspiration before travelling to the Bahamas in 1909.

Personal conflict over his religious direction led him to join the Catholic Church, studying in Rome during 1912-1915, thence moving to Geraldton in Western Australia as a Catholic priest. At Geraldton he produced his greatest work, the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, which along with the nearby Utakarra Cemetery Chapel and his own

parish church at Mullewa, are pioneering examples of non-Gothic church design in Australia. Hawes' understanding of biblical, liturgical, artistic, and other matters so integral to the design of churches and religious orders' accommodation ensured that he produced remarkable works in this field.

In 1939, Hawes began an extraordinary final chapter of his life, in which he retired as a Franciscan hermit to a lonely hilltop in the Bahamas, before dying at Miami, Florida in 1956. He left a remarkable architectural legacy around the world. His passionate religious belief was realised in his architecture, and he was committed to developing an approach that was strongly responsive to location. Hawes' fascinating life was complicated by his incredible devotion to both his architectural work and religious calling. These two loves caused him great personal conflict, as he often felt that he neglected his more important spiritual calling to God for that of worldly works.

References:

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Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 11 June 2009 Last updated: 11 March 2013

Citation details:

Taylor, John J., 'Monsignor John Cyril Hawes (1876-1956)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=13453>, accessed DATE.



St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Geraldton built 1918-1938 (John Taylor, Nov 2004)