

Heritage Citation



St Agatha's Catholic Church

Key details

Addresses	At 52 Oriel Road, Clayfield, Queensland 4011
Type of place	Church
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Romanesque
Lot plan	L40_RP34357; L39_RP34357; L38_RP34357

Key dates Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2004
Date of Citation — November 2010

Construction Roof: Terracotta tile;
Walls: Face brick

People/associations Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing and Co. and J.P. Donoghue (Architect);
S.S. Carrick (Builder)

Criterion for listing (A) Historical; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social; (H) Historical
association; (H) Historical association

This Romanesque style polychromatic brick church was built in 1925 to the design of local architect J.P. Donoghue during his partnership with Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing and Co. A presbytery located in the grounds was also built around the time the church was constructed and housed Father Frank O'Connell who was parish priest of Clayfield from 1921-1940. The building has undergone a number of alterations and extensions throughout its lifetime including the addition of two side chapels and a sacristy which complement and contribute to the external and internal aesthetics of the building.

History

St Agatha's Church was opened on 5 April 1925 by Archbishop Duhig, who described the new church as "a notable link in the chain of ecclesiastical buildings, which within the last dozen years we have woven round the city of Brisbane". The church was designed in the Italian Romanesque style by Jack Donoghue, at that time in partnership with the Brisbane firm of Hennessy, Hennessy, Keesing and Co. This firm was responsible for the design of several Catholic churches in Queensland including St. Joseph's church at Dalby (1921), St Augustine's Church, Coolangatta (1926) and Corpus Christi at Nundah (1926). St Agatha's was almost an exact replica of the Catholic church at Dalby built four years earlier. Jack Donoghue also designed Holy Spirit Catholic Church at New Farm.

Prior to the amalgamation of the Greater Brisbane Council in 1925, Clayfield was part of the Town of Hamilton, described in one contemporary history as "the most picturesque suburb of Brisbane". Originally accessible from the city only by bus and horse tram, the opening of the Sandgate (1882) and Pinkenba (1897) railway lines and the construction of the tramlines to Ascot and Clayfield at the turn of the century were largely responsible for the rapid development of the area. By the 1920s, Clayfield was well established as one of Brisbane's more elite residential suburbs, and the district was well served by schools and churches.

Although Catholic churches were established in Wooloowin (1886), Nundah (1905), and Hamilton (1914), the Catholic residents of Clayfield expressed a desire to Archbishop Duhig for a church of their own during the years of World War I. In response, in 1917, Duhig purchased three acres of land on Widdop's Hill at Oriel Road, Clayfield, which "commanded a very beautiful view of the Brisbane River and surrounding districts, and also of Moreton Bay" and donated it to the parish. A timber church school designed by T.R. Hall was opened on the site by Duhig on 29 September 1918 and came under the care of Father Walsh, parish priest of Wooloowin. At the

opening, the Archbishop noted that despite the "strenuous efforts" of the church, he was "unable to keep pace with the increasing need for more accommodation" of Brisbane's Catholic population. At this time, St Stephen's Cathedral was overflowing during each of the six masses held on Sundays. The proximity of the site of St Agatha's to the tramline on Oriel Road made it easily accessible to its parishioners.

The first St Agatha's Church, named for the patron saint of the sixth century church attached to the Irish College in Rome, was one of many timber church-schools constructed by Duhig to meet the urgent need for more places of Catholic worship in Brisbane. These buildings were gradually replaced by more substantial structures, such as the present St Agatha's.

The foundation stone of the new church was laid by Duhig on 10 August 1924. A sum of £1,150 was collected at the ceremony towards the cost of the building. This amount had increased to £2,400 by the church's opening. Donations ranged from small amounts to £200, including £25 from Hennessy and Hennessy, and £25 from Mrs T.C. Beirne. The church was built by S.S. Carrick of South Brisbane at a cost of £10,000. At the time of the opening ceremony, the church was not fully completed. "Shipping trouble" and a shortage of skilled labour caused building delays.

A presbytery was also built around this time to accommodate Father Frank O'Connell who was appointed Parish Priest of Clayfield in 1921. He remained in this position until his death in 1940, and was responsible for guiding St Agatha's from its infancy to a thriving parish containing a convent, Christian Brothers' secondary and primary schools. The adjoining property of Stanley Hall, a private residence dating from the 1880s, was purchased in 1926 by the Presentation Sisters who established St Rita's College there.

Extensive additions, designed by parish priest, Right Rev Monsignor John English, were carried out on the church in 1959, including a large domed sanctuary with adjoining sacristy, altar boys' room, and two side chapels. The original timber church-school is no longer on the site.

Today, St Agatha's Church remains a centre of Catholic education and worship which serves both the local community of Clayfield and the wider community of Brisbane.

Description

CHURCH

This Romanesque style, brown brick building has a tiled gable roof and semi-conical sanctuary roof to its rear, clad in copper. It is situated on the lower side of a steeply sloping site shared with a school and presbytery, which overlooks Oriel Road.

The floor plan of the church is shaped like a cross consisting of a large nave, with two transept chapels, vestries and a semi-circular sanctuary to the north. To the nave's southern end is an entry vestibule, other smaller rooms and stairs leading to a gallery above. A portico that projects from the centre of the building's front facade frames the main entry doors of the building. These front doors are reached via several flights of steps. The building can also be entered via a door to each side of the nave, or through the chapels and vestries. Several protrusions occur along each side wall of the nave including an open porch to each entry door, a balcony on which another door opens and a small confessional room. No disabled access is provided. The sanctuary, crossing and transepts appear to have been added to the church at a later date.

Exterior

The tiled gable roof of the nave terminates to the front with a large parapeted gable wall. The roof extends back to the sanctuary where it is clad in copper sheeting and forms into a semi-conical shape. Lower tiled roofs extend over the nave's side doors and confessionals, whilst a verandah which flanks the rear of the sanctuary has a copper lean-to roof. This verandah connects the transept wings which have skillion roofs springing from the nave's side walls below clerestory windows. Clad in corrugated iron, these roofs are hidden from view by parapet walls.

The side walls of the nave are divided into bays by stepped buttresses. Each side wall bay contains either a round arch stained glass window, a blind arch or a circular clerestory window. The arched metal framed windows have fixed fanlights with three pivoted panes below, or one when located above doorways. Two of the wall bays above the transepts feature circular clerestory windows. The walls of the semi circular sanctuary have no buttressing and feature square and circular windows and two large circular vents. Smaller round arch windows are located in the chapels and vestries. These windows have a fixed fanlight and casement window, both comprising of opaque glass. Smaller rectangular windows light the confessionals and front rooms below the gallery.

The walls of the building rise from a rendered plinth and feature darker brick architectural elements. These include: corbelling to the top of each wall bay; horizontal bands; window sills and arched heads; plus copings and gablets to each stepped section of the buttresses. More complex decoration is employed in the front facade including rendered elements. The front facade is divided into three bays by large engaged piers and is crowned with a bulky rendered coping and an apex cross. Decorative brick corbelling and small raking arches line the underside of the coping; the later being accentuated by a rendered band behind. The wall features several darker brick horizontal bands, decorative arches, dentils and diamond patterning. The most prominent features of the church are a rendered portico and a large rose window which sits above a row of arched windows central to the wall.

Interior

The rendered interior walls of the nave rise to a vaulted ceiling, which has cover strips laid in a grid pattern creating a coffered effect. Engaged piers along each side wall are crowned with simple capitals before rising beyond the walls forming ceiling ribs. Arches span between each pier, framing each side wall bay. Two of these arched bays are left open accessing the chapels. They are further divided into two smaller arches featuring columns with Corinthian style capitals.

The buildings concrete floor is clad in vinyl to traffic areas and rises up to marble clad sanctuary and chapel platforms. The vaulted ceiling ribs continue into the sanctuary's semi-domical roof which spring from four piers. The gallery to the opposite end of the nave is supported on two timber posts to its front and has a timber panelled balustrade. The building is very intact. Evidence of later additions is detectable due to slight changes in external brick colour, although the building appears as a homogeneous whole.

PRESBYTERY

This two storey building has a central brick core, two storeys in height with a hipped terra cotta tile roof with gable to the front. The central gable wall is flanked on both sides by heavily massed parapets with rendered architectural elements such as crenellated cappings and window surrounds. A doorway located centrally within the gable consists of a single glass door with side windows crowned by a pointed arch stained glass fanlight. The doorway has a moulded surround and label mould. The door opens onto a small timber framed balcony which appears to be a later addition.

To each side of the brick core are timber framed sections, clad in weatherboards. To the church side of the building an enclosed verandah extends from the top floor. A verandah to the opposite end of the building has been left open with vertical joint timber lining boards and french windows. The building has timber framed leadlight windows to its upper floor. The undercroft/ground floor of the building appears to have undergone alterations including the addition of a double garage and aluminium windows.

BELL TOWER

To the rear of the Presbytery is a bell suspended from an open metal framed tower.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as evidence of the continued development of Clayfield as a popular suburb during the interwar period and the strong presence of the Catholic community in the area at this time.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as a substantially intact example of a large 1920s Catholic church that has been extended and altered according to changing practices in Catholic worship during the twentieth century and a large masonry presbytery from the same period.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

for its imposing design, striking use of contrasting materials and strong visual presence in Oriel Road.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as a place of worship and religious education for the local Catholic community since 1925.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as a fine example of the ecclesiastical work of prominent architect J. P. Donoghue.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as one of the churches Archbishop Duhig was instrumental in establishing during his expansion of the Catholic Church in Brisbane in the early 20th century.

References

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3. *Catholic Advocate*, 15 August 1918 & 9 April 1925.
4. *Catholic Leader*, 4 January 1940 & 16 July 1959
5. Ferrier, P. 1986, *The Golden Period of Catholic Progress: Archdiocese of Brisbane 1912-1927*, B.Arch. thesis, University of Queensland
6. Kerr, J 1988, *Brunswick Street, Bowen Hills and Beyond: the Railways of the Northern suburbs of Brisbane*, Australian Railway Historical Society, Brisbane
7. O'Leary, Rev J. 1919, *Catholic Progress: Archdiocese of Brisbane 1912-1919*, J. O'Leary, St James' Presbytery, Coorparoo
8. *Telegraph*, 8 March 1979
9. Watson, D. and J. McKay 1984, *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia.

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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



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