

NON-STATUTORY BACKGROUND INFORMATION
For
HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, LYNEHAM

As of 7 July 2008

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PLACE

- Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 22 Watson Street, Block 10 Section 38, Suburb of Turner, ACT
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HISTORY OF THE PLACE

The Holy Trinity Lutheran Church was designed in 1959 by Frederick Romberg of Grounds Romberg and Boyd with Fritz Suendermann as project architect, and construction was completed in Turner in August 1961.¹

The migration of Lutherans to Canberra, including Lutherans from Finland was stimulated by two important historic events. The first was the aftermath of WWII during which the eastern part of Finland was annexed by the USSR. Not wanting to remain under Soviet rule, up to half a million people left the eastern area of Finland, with many deciding emigrate in preference to resettling in Finland. The second was the large number of skilled tradesman required for the expansion of Canberra in the 1950s and 1960s following the government's decision (1948) to relocate all department headquarters to Canberra. As such, a large proportion of the Lutheran congregation and Finnish community in Canberra during the 1950s and 1960s were builders and building tradesman who came specifically to work on the major housing developments being undertaken in Canberra to stem housing shortages.

The Lutheran Church in Canberra

The Lutheran Church in Australia dates back to 1838 when missionaries first came to Australia. In 1841 the first Lutherans settled in South Australia, migrating from German speaking areas of Europe including Prussia.²

By the 1960s there were two Lutheran Churches in Canberra; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Turner and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of St Peter in Reid, both constructed in the same period.

After the amalgamation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia in 1976 the two Canberra based Lutheran congregations combined. This resulted in one congregation with two Lutheran churches. Since the Finnish speaking Lutherans wished to hold their services in their own language, it was agreed by the church administration that they would be allocated the smaller of the two churches - Turner.³

Modern Church Architecture

The Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Turner is acknowledged to exemplify Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style, characterised by a shift in architecture 'away from the heavily symbolic rituals of the past towards a focus on the preacher space and 'the minister of the word' (Freeland 1968; Apperley et al. 1989). Emphasis was placed on a church architecture that 'still aimed to be distinctive and at the same time (to be) an integral part of the community it served'.

The scale and materials utilised in the construction of the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church promoted its integration into the community, whilst the roof fleche gave the building architectural distinction. In order to maintain connections with the community Romberg utilised stylistic elements and everyday materials, with a square plan, wide overhanging eaves, blockwork walls, glazing at a domestic scale and clear finished Australian timbers. The open plan and folding rear wall enabled the church to double as a hall for a variety of parish functions.

Of particular interest is the use of full height timber framed glazing with regular spaced timber mullions. This was a particular feature developed by the firm and in particular Robin Boyd, and was incorporated into much of their domestic architecture. The system was developed further by Boyd and became the basis of the "Stegbar" timber framed glazing system. The firm used an aluminium framed glazing system of closely spaced mullions in their Academy of Science building; however, the church would appear to be a very early example of the system using timber framed glazing in a non-residential building and possibly the first example in Canberra.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

The Holy Trinity Lutheran Church was structured around important Lutheran beliefs. The architect, Frederick Romberg, was a logical choice for the design of the church given that he was a Lutheran and had designed a number of buildings for the church in Melbourne including the Lutheran Church Hall, South Melbourne (1953); alterations to Luther House, Melbourne (1957), and Luther College, Croydon (1958).

The plan for the Turner church demonstrated a new and innovative response to the need of Lutheran liturgy for a preaching space, with the congregation close to the pulpit and 'the minister of the word'. Its design also accommodated the Lutheran taste for limited decoration, with the natural light on natural materials used as decoration. This can be seen with the play of light in the relatively small internal spaces; the warm glow filtered through the skylight under the spire and the light shining through the grille blockwork. The combination of geometric planning and natural materials left unpainted such as blockwork walls, timber lined eaves, extensive glazing with regular spaced mullions, and timber panelling internally was an aesthetic originated by Grounds Romberg & Boyd in Australian architecture. However the innovative design incorporating a square plan was controversial within the church.

The aesthetic appeal of the building has been widely acknowledged, with compliments by Australian architect Osborne McCutcheon, acclaimed architecture critic and poet John Betjeman, photographer Wolfgang Sievers and eminent architectural photographer Max Dupain who photographed the church c1962 for an article in the magazine *Architecture in Australia*.

Professor Frederick Romberg (1910-1992).

Frederick Romberg (1910-1992) was born in Tsingtao, China, brought up in Germany, and studied architecture at the Federal Technical Institute, Zurich, (1933-38) under Friedrich Hess, Dr William Dunkel and Otto Salvisberg. Romberg arrived in Melbourne in 1939 on a travelling scholarship and worked briefly for Stephenson & Turner before setting up in private practice with Mary Turner Shaw.⁴

In 1954 Roy Grounds, Frederick Romberg and Robin Boyd formed the practice of Grounds Romberg and Boyd. This was a leading firm in Melbourne architecture where the three partners produced their own designs and sometimes shared their supervision work when one of them was travelling abroad. Romberg's architecture was formed in the context of 1920s to 1930s European modernism and put into practice in Australia. By the time of his design for the church his underlying concern was to produce architecture suitable to the local condition and environment. Like his partners he focused on the use of local materials within the formal framework of modernism.

In 1966 Romberg was appointed founding chair of the School of Architecture at the University of Newcastle. In 1968 he designed the architecture schools building and remained chair until 1975. In 1980 he changed his surname to Romney and in 1983 he was awarded the inaugural RAlA (Victorian Chapter) President's Prize in 1983 for his past, present and future service to architecture and the community in Victoria.⁵

The majority of Romberg's work was undertaken in Melbourne where he designed many residential and a few commercial and public buildings including his most important works Newburn Flats, 1939-42, Stanhill Flats, 1940-45 and the ETA Factory, Braybrook, 1958, but it would appear the church is his only design in Canberra for which he was the sole designer.⁶

The buildings in Canberra with which he was associated are: the Australian Academy of Science, 1958 (designed by Grounds); Town Houses in Forrest, 1960 (designed by Grounds); three houses in Vasey Crescent, Campbell, 1961 (designed by Grounds); W G Verge House, 1963, 204 Monaro Crescent, Red Hill (designed by Boyd); Zoology Building ANU, 1963-8, (designed by Boyd), and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Headquarters, 1968-72, Dickson (designed by Boyd).⁷ However it appears the Holy Trinity Lutheran National Memorial Church, 1961, Turner (designed by Romberg) is the only design in Canberra for which he was the sole designer.

The Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is believed to have been one of Romberg's favourite works.⁸

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE

The church, now known as the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church -Canberra Finnish, is located at 22 Watson Street, Turner, at the corner of Watson and Gould Streets. Turner is an inner north suburb of Canberra bordering the Australian National University to the south and along the western side of Northbourne Avenue, the main entry road into Canberra from the north. The church site is open to the west overlooking Sullivans Creek and the ANU North Oval sports field. To the east it is neighboured by the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The church is an early example of Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical Style (1960-) with its unbroken straight lines and vertically proportioned glazed panes emphasising verticality.

It also has the widely projecting eaves, verandah and glass wall with regular spaced timber mullions of the Post-War Melbourne Regional style (1940-60).⁹

The form of the church is deceptively simple. Its total area is approximately 345sqm and it is dominated by a single symmetrical broken-back roof that slopes upward in three distinct pitches increasing in pitch towards the 'fleche' (central spire). The articulated external walls are very well detailed. The south, west and east walls have a central masonry patterned screen section constructed in specially moulded concrete blocks in a "C" shape laid in stack bonding. Behind these screen walls is extensive glazing, providing good natural lighting to the perimeter service rooms and privacy. There is timber framed glazing to the southwest and southeast corners, with timber panelled double entry doors. The corner glazing is inset slightly along the line of the masonry screen walls while the roof structure is supported at the external corner by a single isolated metal post (possibly brass) expressed forward of the glazing line, directly under the roof hip line. The timber lined sloping ceiling continues through to the soffit without a head to the glazing frame, expressing the non-load-bearing glazed corners and continuity of the ceiling.

In contrast to these three walls the northern wall is constructed as an uninterrupted continuous stack bond plain concrete block wall, giving emphasis and privacy to the sanctuary. The northern wall is continuous to the ends of the perimeter of the church, adding to the contrast with the fully glazed southeast and southwest corners. Set between the northern blockwork wall and both side central masonry patterned screen walls is glazing with vertically proportioned panes and a single door.

The symmetrical, fibre shingle clad roof (originally a very light grey white colour¹⁰) extends from a wide low-pitched 'verandah' perimeter form to a medium pitched section over the nave and up to the steeply pitched 'fleche'. The base of the 20.7m high 'fleche' is glazed with orange tinted glass to the four sides and is topped with a minimalist aluminium cross. The eaves and angled fascia are timber lined. The eaves box gutter is hidden behind the timber fascia and two central sculptured overflow spitters shoot storm-water out towards the two street elevations into low set rectangular collecting ponds.

The church was designed as a dual-purpose space combining worship and social activity. The entry doors are slightly off-set from the southeast corner where a concrete porch extends in front of the corner glazing leading from the perimeter carpark. The lobby (narthex) is fully glazed on both external walls while the timber-panelled doors that open to the nave of the church are placed on the corner, at right angles to each other without a central jamb. These doors are carefully detailed so that when closed they form the right angled corner of the nave perimeter wall and when opened provide an unobstructed diagonal entry to the nave from the lobby.

Once the doors are open the eye is drawn up the timber lined ceiling to the central highlights at the base of the "fleche" and the structure of the church becomes apparent. The inner square of the plan that is the nave is constructed with off set square hollow section steel columns, two to each corner. Each column is set in approximately one metre from the 'intangible' corner. The columns support perimeter beams: to the south the beam is expressed and spans the width of the nave supporting a concertina folding wall below and frameless fixed glazing over; to the side's blockwork walls extend between the columns, and to the north the steel isolated columns provide a clear span over the sanctuary. At the northern end of the nave is a raised podium with railings to the front, housing the altar table. The blockwork wall behind has a simple timber cross. The nave has a central isle between rows of crafted timber pews.

The interior is a precisely proportioned sacred' space that is isolated from the 'profane' world outside. The soft light from glazing at the base of the fleche is the only contact with the exterior. This was partly the original design intent. The original choir and the baptistery which were located to the sides of the sanctuary each had a masonry screen to their rears, set about 600mm inside of the glazed external wall providing privacy and filtered natural light to the sanctuary.

Suspended within the square recess of the fleche glazing at the high point of the timber-lined ceiling is an aureole with seven lights.

The original church plan was in the form of a "T" within an overall square structure where the choir, sanctuary and baptistery extended across the top of the "T" and the nave extended down the centre or web with the committee room at the base separated from the nave by a folding wall and fixed glazing over. The overall square plan was completed with glazed entries or narthexes to each corner, side by side with the committee room, and services spaces to the east and west sides behind blockwork walls. The east side houses the toilets, kitchen and storage while the west side houses the vestry, organ and storage.

At present the church plan is a rectangle within a square, still entered from the corner. The choir and baptistery were partitioned off from the sanctuary in 1979 resulting in the outer square service spaces continuing the full extent on three sides of the inner rectangle that forms the nave and sanctuary. The partitioning is glazed with frameless glass above head height allowing an understanding of the original design intent.

The current perimeter service spaces include: (starting at the entrance in the east lobby and moving clockwise) a meeting room which can be opened to the nave when there is a large congregation; the library (in the west narthex, one of the two original entries); storage room; storage room (original vestry); parsons office (original choir); storage (original baptistery); toilets, and kitchen.

All the original external doors are still in place, however, the west narthex used as the library has a bookcase covering the door. A path leads from the west porch to the footpath on Watson Street.

The nave ceiling and joinery generally is Mountain Ash. The internal original face concrete block walls have been painted white. The nave has pew seating for about 145 built in Mountain Ash. The seating capacity can be increased to 200 by opening the concertina folding partition to the meeting room. The original heating under the timber benches has been removed and three electric heaters have been mounted on the walls around the nave.

A manse constructed well before the church, is located on a separate site to the north of the church.

Condition

The church is generally in very good condition. Externally the planting and gravel parking areas detract from the aesthetic quality of the church. Internally the division of the choir and baptistery from the nave has altered the character of the space, however, it has been constructed so that light can still enter the sanctuary. This change could easily be reversed if desired.

Design Comments

The specific architectural element of the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960-) displayed by the building that relates to the external forms is the element reminiscent of Gothic fleche or tower.

The specific architectural element of the Post-War Melbourne Regional style (1940-60) displayed by the building that relates to the external form is the unpainted horizontal boarding.¹¹

The following design features are of additional significance; the timber lined eaves, gutters with overflow into rectangular ponds, face concrete blockwork and blockwork screens, internal fixed glazing over the southern folding partition, clear timber finish and timber pews, open planning, aureole, steel frame; raked timber lined ceiling, and original detail and finishes.

The site planning including the open form of the street setting where the church is located on the corner equi-distant from the two streets and its setting that enables its scale and form to be appreciated from all sides.

The church can be contrasted with both the pre-WWII revivalist architecture churches and the post-WWII immigrants' nostalgic churches in Canberra. The pre-WWII revivalist architecture churches include the gothic revival St Andrews Presbyterian Church, the St Pauls Church of England, 1939 and the Romanesque revival St Christopher's Roman Catholic Cathedral, 1938,¹² all of which exemplify the view that "in the minds of many (there was) no real substitute for a medieval style".¹³ It is also in contrast with the post-WWII immigrants' nostalgic churches such as the Russian Orthodox of St John the Baptist, the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church, Turner, 1968, by Mervyn Willoughby-Thomas, and the Free Serbian Orthodox Church, Forrest,¹⁴ where the "architecture reflected the antecedents of the particular culture".¹⁵

The church can be compared with the later Holy Cross Anglican Church, Hackett, constructed in 1967 and designed by Luker Thompson and Goldsmith, which also has a spire and is located on a corner site. Comparisons can also be drawn with the Canberra National Seventh Day Adventist Church which was built on the adjacent site in Turner, 1971, designed by Ancher, Mortlock and Woolley. This church has a dramatic nave soaring to a highlight and an architectural aesthetic drawing on the work of Alvar Aalto at Saynatsalo, Finland, 1949. Both the Turner churches are distinctive yet use familiar materials such as brick and timber to integrate the church into the suburban setting.¹⁶

REFERENCES

- 1 Conversation with Gordon Temme, chairman of the congregation committee at the time of the design and construction of the church, and documents in his possession including slides, letters from Grounds, newspaper clippings, a postcard and the official fund raising brochure, and

- Embassy of Finland; and *Architecture in Australia*, March 1962 'Lutheran National Memorial Church', Conversation with Suendermann.
- 2 Lutheran Church in Australia website.
- 3 Temme, op cit.
- 4 Goad, Philip 1999 *A Guide To Melbourne Architecture*, The Watermark Press.
- 5 Ibid, and Edquist, H. ed. 2000 *Frederick Romberg: The Architecture of Migration 1938-1975*, RMIT University Press, Melbourne.
- 6 Ibid, and Edquist, op cit.
- 7 RSTCA
- 8 Edquist, op cit., and Conversation with Professor Harriet Edquist & Frits Suendermann. Suendermann states that Romberg referred to the church as a "jewel".
- 9 Apperly, Richard, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, 1989 *Identifying Australian Architecture Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson.
- 10 Apperly et al, op cit.
- 11 Temme, op cit.
- 12 RSTCA, and RAIA 1982 *Canberra An Architectural Guide To Australia's Capital*.
- 13 Apperly et al, op cit.
- 14 RSTCA, and RAIA, op cit.
- 15 Apperly et al, op cit.
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RAIA ACT Chapter RSTCA Citation on The Holy Trinity Lutheran Church