

THE POST-WAR TRADITION OF CROSS-PATTERNING WITHIN THE SUBURBAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The paper will, through the examination of selected examples, investigate a particular tradition of pattern within architectural Modernism, particularly as it has harboured within design for church-related projects. It will discuss the history of Melbourne firm Bogle & Banfield, and particularly their St James Anglican Church, Glen Iris, Melbourne (1959) and the Korowa Girls School (1964); and then present a more recent religious work of Melbourne based Philip Harmer - the Gatehouse Mausoleum, Melbourne Cemetery (2004). A system of repeating cross forms will be discussed as the particular device utilised in the both the post-war and recent work. The paper will examine the authorship of the Bogle & Banfield works, and locate them within precedents and trends in architecture in at the time in the late 1950's. This paper will investigate some post-war uses of the cross as a signifier of type, coupled with the modern expression of repetition.

This paper will record the history of two post-war projects by Melbourne based Architects Bogle & Banfield, and then present a recent project by Melbourne Architect Philip Harmer that enters into a similar tradition – one that within a Modern architectural language seeks to use the associative form of the cross as recourse to both religious tradition and architectural typology. This duality may suggest a contradiction within mainstream architectural modernism that provides fruitful ground for engaging local architecture. The paper will examine if this is evidence of a contested zone between the associative and the abstracted. Churches and places of worship in the period in the late 1950's and 60's were commonly designed by modern architects and widely published. These are typically medium size churches for the expanding Australian post-war city. Editions of *Architecture in Australia* in the late 1950's feature new churches extensively, and is one of the dominant building types featured. This trend is particularly noticeably in the late 1950's, and less so in the early and mid 50's – where typically the churches are generally less radical in their departure from traditional form.¹

The article 'Church Architecture for contemporary human needs' from *Architecture in Australia* of 1962² features new international places of worship, including Phillip Johnson's Kneses Tifereth Synagogue, Port Chester N.Y. of 1956. The Johnson building has some basic similarities to Bogle & Banfield's St. James Church which will be one of two buildings by this firm examined in this paper. In

both the Johnson synagogue and the St James Church, an expressed black vertical frame and pattern system is used to allow light into the main worship space. Johnson uses vertical slot windows with coloured glass to create a sense of spirituality, without direct references to Jewish symbols; and can also be seen to address the lack of 'specialness' in modern architectural language³.

Bogle & Banfield Associates was a partnership between the younger Gordon Banfield and Alan Bogle, who had practiced extensively before the Second World War with Arnold Bridge. Bogle & Bridge designed the Former Williamstown Beach Dressing Pavilion in 1935 in white Art Deco mode. Bogle worked for Melbourne Architect Harry Norris from 1945, where he met Banfield and later formed a practice with him in the early 1950s⁴ - the collaboration was not a long term one; Alan Bogle had left the practice by 1962⁵. Bernard Joyce was a key employee of the practice, who went into private practice with Bill Nankivell in 1961⁶. Joyce worked for Bogle & Banfield during the 1950's and is credited with the design of Total House Car Park, Melbourne in 1958⁷. St James Anglican Church is possibly the work of Joyce⁸, but the inclusion of decorative and symbolic elements is not consistent with Joyce's later work and mainstream post-war modernism.



Figure 1. St James Anglican Church, Bogle & Banfield

The cross is a widely understood symbol, particularly in the Anglo-Christian world as the symbol of the church. In this capacity the cross is typically an abstraction of the crucifix, commonly with an elongated bottom leg. It has informed both the plan form of the church as it evolved from the basilica type, and been a readable figure in elevation - typically as a cross atop steeples and in the formation of windows. It is the crosses' simple form and its abstracted nature that perhaps led its adoption by these modernist architects when designing church-related buildings.

Bogle & Banfield worked on only one recorded church project, and this paper will examine both St. James Anglican Church (completed in 1959) on the corner of Burke Road and High St, Glen Iris, Melbourne; and the nearby Korowa Anglican Girls School, designed and built after St James (1963/4 and 76). These two projects used precast concrete square panels as both decoration, and screen or windows. At St James, arrays of the three by three foot concrete panels with a square-cross openings are used as screen; in front of either glass or brick. These panels were removed approximately five years ago after it was believed some of the panels had contracted concrete cancer⁹. This has dramatically altered both the appearance of the building as can be seen by comparing recent and original post-completion photographs; but also has removed the ability of the building to communicate its primary role as a church. Indeed, this reading is now reliant on the large signage cross in the front lawn of the building¹⁰, the conventional signage and the cultural memory of the building as a church. It was the use of the distinctive precast concrete crosses that lead to the church's inclusion into the wide-ranging survey guide book *Melbourne Architecture* by Philip Goad in 1999. The building is likely to not be included in the upcoming new edition of the book due to the removal of the cross panels, and may be replaced with another church building¹¹.

The church sits in residual space of the original Parish Hall (1922), which serviced as the church assembly space for 37 years prior to the opening of the new building.¹² One original plan was to demolish the existing building and construct an entirely new church. After costing, it was decided to retain the existing Parish Hall and fit the new building onto the Burke Road side of the site.¹³ The effect of this was to push the eastern facade only one metre from the boundary, engaging directly with the street. The design of the church is recorded briefly in the pamphlet *The Story of the Church of St James, Glen Iris*,

...the original plans for a Gothic style church with a spire had to be abandoned, as the cost of such a building was quite prohibitive.....In February 1957, plans for a modern rather than contemporary building were accepted, to be built on the land on which a tennis court had stood for many years.¹⁴

After design issues were resolved, construction was expedient. One photograph from the *Story of the Church* shows the setting of the foundation stone on 7th March 1959 and the dedication ceremony in front of the completed building five months later on 8th August in the same year. The principal structural frame is black painted steel, with brick and glass infill.

The front façade to High Street is a simple brick wall with protruding glazed porch or pavilion (once concealed by a screen wall of the cross panels), containing entires and Baptistry. The subtle symmetry of this façade is established by this low black glazed porch and a small area of 'hit and miss' brickwork just below the parapet line. Small entries to the east and west sides of the glazed porch lead into small lobbies with separate door into the Baptistry which forms the back of the central nave. The side entries follow Christian tradition of side entry and establish a stronger link with the existing Parish Hall on the west and Burke Road on the east. Within this lower section of porch is the Baptistry, formed through a semi-circular seat and screen element - the focus of which was a baptismal font, since removed. The gold painted steel screen element is formed like a fence with vertical poles with alternating rings welded to them. This also forms a decorative treatment, but is more akin to staggered abstracted pattern typical of the 1950's. The semi-circular arrangement in plan forms a remnant niche at the back of the main worship space, rather than behind the altar as is traditional in church planning.

A clergy entry to the church linking the Bogle & Banfield building to the other Parish buildings on

the site is formed with two solid timber doors featuring four timber crosses on each, the dimensions of which matches the 'cut-out' cross in the concrete panels. These read like giant door handles and are the only remaining square crosses on the St James Church. With the concrete cross screen system removed, the church is similar to an abstracted Miesian modernist volume, with brick infill and expressed black steel frame. Mies van der Rohe's Chapel of Saint Savior at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) of 1952 is a clear precedent to St. James – but the local architects add the cross screen to address the strong abstraction of Mies' work – often commented on at IIT where the chapel and boiler house have a strong resemblance. Mies clearly sought this elimination of typology, but filtered through local concerns here it is not desirable – and a more interesting result is formed by the need to be both contemporary in this Miesian sense and to signify the church program. The latter is achieved in an abstracted symbolic form and by using the modern method of repetition.

The interior of the St James Church is a tall volume of aisle, choir and side chapel and features extensive use of timber battening that was typical of the period. Unfinished mixed red brick work is also used extensively inside, and this gives the church a quality of an early basilica. Atop the eastern brickwall are highlight windows which separate roof and wall plane and match the height of the expressed black steel roof beams. A series of white steel columns on the front western side separate the side chapel from choir. These columns are mirrored along the long axis of the church and sit immediately in front of an inset wall on the western side. Here they articulate this wall, maintain a central axis in a shallow 'L' shaped room and integrate the custom-made steel organ.

The St James Church was the first project in which Bogle & Banfield worked with the repeating cross array – following this they were to continue the development of the system for the Anglican Church. The nearby Korowa Anglican Girls School was founded in 1890 and has been on its present site in Ranfurly Crescent, Glen Iris since 1914; and is a 500m walk from St James Church. The School exhibits a more sophisticated use of the architectural language developed at St James – white painted precast cross panels surrounded by red brick – but in addition a white painted brickwork and black steel frame system is used extensively for large areas of walling with generous windows. The cross panels are used as windows rather than screens at Korowa, and also form some doorways. Typically, glass is inset into the reveal of the precast panel, and in some instances is coloured glass. The deep recess enables a clear shadowy reading of the inverted cross. The vertically composed series of cross arrays and entries and around circulation areas such as stairs

suggests them as gates, in the manner of cross-bearing gates to medieval castles of Europe.

The issue of symbolism and type is less clear at Korowa – as a school and not a church the association with the array of crosses is different, and they are used more sporadically, mainly in vertical tower-like moments to emphasise height and often entries in the buildings. In this way they perhaps form a role of religious gateways and reminders of the Anglican nature of the school. Ironically, as the cross panels remain at Korowa but have been removed from St James the role of them is inverted. The two buildings are linked programmatically, the Church functions as chapel for the school. In this way, the use of the crosses and red brick surrounds on both buildings is a common language that identifies the buildings as part of one Anglican complex.



Figure 2. Korowa Anglican Girls School, Bogle & Banfield

The 1963/64 buildings were built in two stages – the southern junior school block first, and after operational the remaining complex of assembly hall, senior school and senior blocks was completed. Between to the two stages a carefully scaled courtyard is formed featuring balcony walkways around its perimeter. The larger second stage joined onto the southern edge of the south of the oldest existing building – 'The House' formally known as 'Ranfurly', dating from 1874. This former

dwelling was demolished in the mid 1970's to make way for another stage also under the name of Bogle & Banfield, despite the practice have formal ended in 1972. It is likely Gordon Banfield continued to service Korowa as a client after the end of the office¹⁵. This new stage extended the north-south linearity of the 1963/64 works and was executed in the same architectural language. The 1963/64 design's retention of 'The House' was discussed in the opening line of a short article on the proposed works from *The Herald* in 1962, suggesting this was an important aspect of the project.¹⁶ Photographs of a model used to visualise the project do not show 'The House' or indeed any context, however an aerial photomontage from the *Korowa News* Third Edition of June 1963 shows this model cut into the surrounding area. The notation from this montage gives some insight into the authorship of the works, "An aerial impression of the envisaged development of Korowa, planned by Mr. G. D. Banfield, School Architect."¹⁷ 'The House' became the administrative centre for the school after 1964; the works from the mid 1970's re-housed the administration block and created a new Library. Finished in 1976, it brought two strips of white concrete square crosses to the main entry for the school, as visible from Ranfurly Crescent. It was subject to a recent renovation by the school, and in a new '2015 Master Plan' the ground floor of this building is to be opened extensively; in addition the 1964 assembly hall is to be demolished to create a new central school courtyard. This proposal by Architectus Melbourne retains the cross panels, as least as visible from the entry to the school.

St James' use of coloured glass (to simulate a large stain-glass window) is not original, and was added at some time in the last 20 years; previously the only coloured elements were the material colours of brick and timber. The ephemeral effect of patterned light is achieved by the cross panels editing light through the extensive textured glass. This effect blurred the definitive form of the crosses into a shimmering curtain like surface. In this way the interior experience was clearly different to the more rigid repetitive form readable from the exterior, where light is falling onto the screen rather than passing through it.

The interior of Korowa Girls School typically used clear flat glass inset into the cross panels, and as a result the interior experience is a sharper version of that at St James. Here the crosses are used in circulation spaces such as corridors rather than in the main space as at St James – elevating the experience of the school corridor. The teaching spaces at Korowa use more expansive simply framed walls, with openable windows and wide views to the outside. This system of grided wall is clearly readable as the black and white frame system from the outside, as more inline with mainstream Modernist language. In this way,

Korowa School is primarily a conventional modernist building, with intervals of repeating crosses occurring over the composition.

Philip Harmer is a Melbourne based architect who has been operating since 1985¹⁸. His work has been wide ranging but many of the projects are related to church or funerary functions. His Altona Uniting Church of 1993 was included in the third edition of *Aardvark: A Guide to Melbourne Contemporary Architecture*¹⁹, as was one of a few buildings to address the language of contemporary church since Edmond & Corrigan's work for the Catholic Church in the mid to late 1970's. Harmer's Altona project merged the form of the hanger (related to local aerospace buildings) with the modern church building. A sense of spirituality is attempted through a tall interior space; and generally the project makes an argument through form and context. More recently, at the Gatehouse Mausoleum project at Melbourne Cemetery, Harmer has used pattern to register concerns of significance and memory. The 2004 Gatehouse project provides a series of Mausoleum blocks under a single roof plane. The building sits next to the existing stone gatehouse building²⁰, and this is connected to the new work by a new glazed canopy. This glazed canopy, with a pattern sandblasted onto glass is of principal interest here. A staggered array of cruciform crosses is formed by sandblasting around the cross areas. Sunlight passing through the remaining clear glass then forms a shadow pattern on the walls of the laneway-like space under the canopy – onto the new granite mausolea wall and rendered brick wall on the old gatehouse of the opposite side.



Figure 3. Philip Harmer, Gatehouse Mausoleum

Further crosses are used as skylights in the three solid canopied areas at the Mausolea. Here irregular shaped clear glazed skylights feature cross strips of coloured glass. The most abstracted use of the cross however in the Gatehouse project is in the custom brickwork used for the end walls of the Mausolea blocks. The shaped red and purple bricks use two brick types to form a shallow pyramid profile on a uniform grid – overriding the conventional stretcher bond pattern of common brickwork. The space in-between the grided array of shallow pyramids suggests an array of crosses in a matter like that of St James.

Of the use of repeating crosses at the project, Harmer himself states this

came from the military cemeteries in USA and Europe where there is an expanse of lawn with a large number of white crosses all the same, a symbol of collective memorial to a large group of people (soldiers) which seemed relevant to mausolea where a large group of people are interred²¹

Harmer stated he was aware of the work at St James, but not as a direct reference. He has commented on churches of the period,

A lot of the source of my work comes out of the 60's and 70's, particularly with churches, when there was enormous experimentation with not only with houses with Boyd and Macintyre and so forth, but in that period there were some extraordinary churches²²

The technique of using the associative form of the cross for Christian spiritual work with a modern architectural context shows a strong desire for these buildings to demonstrate a certain typology; to be distinguishable from other building types. The cross used in repetition occupies a tension within modernism, its repetition uses aspects of mass production and modernisation, but is ultimately a form recognisable by the public generally as appropriate for religious use. At St James Anglican Church, Korowa Anglican Girls School and the Gatehouse Mausoleum, the repeating patterned cross form is used in conjunction with light to make ephemeral this conventional solid symbol of Christianity.

Bogle & Banfield's use of an associative device of the cross at St James Church as both repetitive modern device and symbolic Christian device is attributable to either the Anglican's church belief that the building otherwise would not look like a church; or that the architects were concerned with Modernism's departure from typology in the expanding post-war city where Modernism was not

the avant-garde but the default style. It is likely that a combination of these ideas is true, that in a time of architectural transition for the church, the need to be typologically specific was an important consideration; and that the Architects believed that truly abstracted Miesian modernism was unsuitable for all building types. In this way, a similarity can be drawn to Philip Johnson's 1954 Synagogue project, but Bogle & Banfield revert to recognisable symbols in the facade system. The Korowa Anglican Girls School provided an opportunity for the practice of Bogle & Banfield to continue to develop a system of architectural language initially developed for a simple church to an affiliated but different complex for the same client; where the direct associations of the cross are less evident. More recent architectural religious practice, here presented through Philip Harmer's work, shows a renewed interest in the use of repeated crosses to address an issue of type. This is influenced by the experimentation forged within the tension to be both modern and decoratively associative within post-war church design, but is without direct reference to the 1960's and 70's Anglican work of Bogle & Banfield in Glen Iris.

The inherent resistance to decoration within Modernism is departed from in cases where architects are forced deal with certain 'special' building types, which are distinguishable from other modernist buildings. The church project calls for this distinction, and within the discussed examples repetitive decorative pattern is employed, along with other more traditional aspects of church design; whilst maintaining a direction of the new and non-historical.

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- 1 Established through reviews of bound volumes of Architecture in Australia from the post-war period.
- 2 Father Michael Scott , 'Church Architecture for contemporary human needs', Architecture in Australia, September 1962, pp80-83
- 3 As reported by DOCOMOMO recently, the Synagogue is too big for its current congregation and faces an uncertain future. John Morris Dixon , 'Philip Johnson's Port Chester Synagogue Looks Good at 50, But Faces Functional Risks', DOCOMOMO US New York/Tri-State Newsletter Summer 2005, pp3
- 4 Fay Woodhouse,, 'Alan Bogle: A Brief Biography', Spirit of Progress, Vol 7 No.2 2006, Art Deco Society of Victoria.
- 5 Established through conversation with Michael Innes, former employee of Bogle Banfield. He worked for Alan Bogle in 1962, who was by then operating as a sole practitioner. Innes and Kirrill Kosloff left Bogle Banfield in 1971 to enter their own practice, and were joined in 1972 by Harry Pels and Neilson also from Bogle Banfield and formed PINK (Pels Innes Neilson Kosloff) Architects. This departure from Bogle Banfield effectively ended the practice in 1972.
- 6 Michael Markham , '1010' (Obituary of Bernard Joyce), Transition 46, RMIT Department of Architecture, 1994 pp70-77
- 7 Doug Evans , website - <http://users.tce.rmit.edu.au/e03159/ModMelb/mm2/modmelbprac2/bj/bjbio.htm>. The construction of the Total Carpark was in 1964-65 according Philip Goad.
- 8 There is no direct evidence of this, but Conrad Hamann has stated that the beam and red-brick infill patterning and a regular rhythm that had much in common with the Joyce-Nankivell Camberwell Flats in Burke Road.
- 9 Concrete Cancer is the corrosion of steel reinforcing within concrete.
- 10 The current cross is likely to be a replacement of the original to house mobile phone equipment. It also uses a circular section rather than a thinner square section used originally.
- 11 Following correspondence with Professor Goad, July 2006.
- 12 The Story of the Church of St James, Glen Iris, undated, but published either late 1972 or early 1973, printed by Capitol Press Pty Ltd, Carlton
- 13 Established from discussion with the Church warden on site, June 2006
- 14 *The Story of the Church of St James*, Glen Iris, undated, but published either late 1972 or early 1973, printed by Capitol Press Pty Ltd, Carlton. This booklet, various drawings, photographs and editions of the Korowa News were source from the Archive at Korowa Anglican Girls School. Thanks to Archivist Sandra Turner for her assistance in extracting the material, and her own recollections as a student at the school when the new junior school was opened in 1963.
- 15 A drawing with a Bogle & Banfield titleblock dated March 1976 shows the extended complex and is initialed 'CY'.
- 16 *The Herald*, 18th September 1962
- 17 *Korowa News*, Third Edition, June 1963.
- 18 Harmer Architecture started seriously in 1985, but Philip Harmer had been completing his own work since graduation in 1976, along with travelling and contract work for other architects. Established from a radio interview on The Architects Melbourne 3RRR, 7th June 2005 with Stuart Harrison, Simon Knott, Philip Harmer and associate of practice Andrew Bryant.
- 19 Doug Evans , *Aardvark: A Guide to Melbourne Contemporary Architecture*, RMIT Press, 1997
- 20 The original gatehouse was designed by John Gawler in 1934-35, from 'Gatehouse Mausoleum' by Scott Drake , *Architecture Australia*, March/April 2005.
- 21 From written correspondence with Phillip Harmer, July 2006
- 22 *The Architects* Melbourne RRR, 7th June 2005